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Metrosexual Manliness

Tocqueville's New Science of Energy

Ben Berger

Harvey C. Mansfield's *Manliness* generates conversation, controversy, and reflection—the first two among the reading public, the third among his recent students.¹ Although my cohort entered graduate school years before Mansfield began his manly project, his interests and emphases subtly influenced our own. However, many of us chose kindred subjects—honor, *thumos*, love of fame, moral courage, and, in my case, energy—without identifying them as specifically masculine.² In this essay I will illuminate the role of energy in Alexis de Tocqueville's political thought, energy that can be found in both sexes.³ Tocqueville's "new political science" cultivates citizens' energy, courage, and resolve, traits that Tocqueville sometimes (but not always) associates with men, yet it channels and limits them with humanity, judgment, and moral restraint, qualities that Tocqueville often associates with women. Part masculine and part feminine, Tocqueville's new political science embodies a "metrosexual manliness" for the modern era.

I use the term "metrosexual" with humor but sincerity as well, and for two reasons.⁴ First, it fits: as I have noted, Tocqueville's "new political science" combines elements that Tocqueville calls masculine and feminine, and that combination is exactly what metrosexuality addresses.⁵ Second, even faddish and silly terms can contain a grain of genuine insight if examined in the proper light. The insight in this case? Human traits and virtues can be less gender-specific than some traditionalists have supposed. Thus I employ "metrosexual" to tweak good-naturedly the exclusive identification of courage, *thumos*, and energy with manliness. Tocqueville himself makes those identifications, but in the end he cares less that democracy feature manly men than that it contain energetic citizens, regardless of who provides the juice.⁶ Energetic women can contribute to the supply without

being labeled “manly women,” a backhanded compliment if ever there was one.

For an example of energy’s gender-neutrality, consider Lady Macbeth’s infamous soliloquy:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman’s breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature’s mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry “Hold, hold!”⁷

At first glance, Shakespeare seems to imply that masculinity accomplishes difficult deeds but lacks the remorse and moral thoughtfulness that might stay one’s hand from evil. Femininity apparently shrinks from cruelty by nature and complicates immoral boldness through compunction. But closer examination reveals a different picture. Lady Macbeth asks not to be re-sexed but *unsexed*, not for more manliness but less womanliness. She already exceeds her mate in energy, resolve, and ambition; now she desires less womanly humanity and fewer scruples. Energy can be masculine or feminine, but energy without restraint is unsexed—neither manly nor womanly, suitable for only a beast or a god.

Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* contrasts Lady Macbeth’s energetic villainy with a more balanced heroine. Spenser’s maiden knight Britomart combines energy, courage, and physical prowess with judgment, temperance, and humanity. She exceeds other knights in strength and courage, unseating Sir Guyon in a joust and walking through fire while her male consort holds back. But Britomart also exemplifies the virtues of chastity and loyalty, and has the moderation to check her energies when appropriate. During a daring, attempted rescue she encounters and heeds a mysterious warning that prefigures Tocqueville’s counsel to democracy: “Be bold, be bold . . . be not too bold.”⁸ Indeed, the maiden Britomart embodies one of the most important ingredients in Tocqueville’s new political science, namely dynamic energy that is harnessed for worthy projects yet limited by moral perspective and propriety.

I do not intend to debate the masculinity or femininity of any particular trait, nor "to make man and woman into beings not only equal, but alike" (for which Tocqueville himself rebukes his fellow Europeans) (*DA*, 573). In other words I am not claiming that all citizens should possess both male and female traits and virtues. I am interested simply in identifying those traits that make democracy work, regardless of the sex that engenders them. Citizens' energies, for Tocqueville, comprise one of democracy's most vital resources. Energetic democracies might not always succeed, but enervated democracies—the citizenry completely dependent upon its government and "fear[ing] it will die if it makes an effort"—are sure to end badly. In stressing that point Tocqueville articulates a concern of long standing in the political theory tradition. Philosophers from Plato to William James have regretted democracy's potential to go soft, to sacrifice martial discipline for fur coats and the fatted calf. The worry is that toughness, discipline, and energy may bring about commercial success that undermines the very traits and virtues that made it possible. Warriors become merchants become sybarites, eventually falling prey to any disciplined, energetic enemies who raise their fists. Free regimes, in which citizens can enjoy the fruits of their energies, require active measures (and a new political science) to prevent their dissipation while tempering their excesses.

Public affairs will never attract citizens' energies enduringly if they do not first attract and hold citizens' attention, so Tocqueville focuses on both of those resources, namely energy and attention. A third resource fills out the Tocquevillean triumvirate: long-term perspective, or what the first President Bush once dismissed as "the vision thing." Citizens need but often lack clear perspective on their own long-term interests, which include a sustained investment of attention and energy in the occasionally unappealing business of self-government. Perspective, attention, and energy occupy a far greater portion of Tocqueville's "new political science" than most readers have supposed. Tocqueville's new political *engineering* might be an equally appropriate description, because he aims to pool, channel, and limit citizens' energies through the use of various tools: institutional design, civic education, moral suasion, and other appeals to citizens' attention, some of which he identifies with feminine virtues rather than masculine mastery.

Too often, contemporary scholars treat Tocqueville as if he were an unqualified enthusiast for democracy in America, overlooking his stern intimations that our success at self-government might be a passing phase.⁹ At the very outset of *Democracy in America* Tocqueville sets the tone for his project by worrying about French democracy's warped political perspective, inadequate political attention, and insufficient political energy. Each citizen "loses sight of the very object of his pursuits," gives "the least attention" to understanding democracy's needs, and lacks "the courage and energy" to preserve democratic freedom (*DA*, 10). In the rest of his magisterial work

Tocqueville elaborates on the connections between perspective, attention, energy, and sustainable freedom. When political attention disperses, when political energy wanes, and when political perspective gives way to short-sighted individualism, meaningful self-government faces an uncertain future. New England circa 1830 might have put France to shame vis-à-vis self-government, but American democracy too contained the seeds of disengagement.

Tocqueville identifies both the innate impulses and the environmental factors that impel people toward self-enclosure and the voluntary removal of their energies from collective projects, focusing on four primary factors: equality, materialism, individualism, and isolation.¹⁰ The latter two are intimately related and, when taken together, resemble what we now call social and political disengagement. Equality and materialism can promote that disengagement, so they join individualism and isolation in threatening to undermine political perspective, disperse political attention, and absorb political energy in private pursuits. As political engagement declines—as citizens withdraw their attention and energy from self-government in order to focus on materialistic projects—they may appoint a third party to oversee their common affairs. The results are governmental and administrative centralization that may undermine democratic liberty. Hence, Tocqueville's "principal goal in writing this book has been to combat" the forces impelling democracy toward the related perils of civilian atomization and governmental centralization.¹¹ To be clear, these perils do not stem from abusive government, predatory big business, or foreign adversaries; they arise from within the citizen body. Citizens' own judgments and actions are largely to blame because their perspective, attention, and energy are limited and sometimes poorly invested. Nonetheless, combating disengagement is not a matter of the government compelling citizens to participate in public life. Attention and energy cannot be coerced or they lose their spontaneity and power. Democratic government must try to elicit political energy and attention with a soft touch, through persuasion, education, and inducement, and then channel and limit those resources responsibly, rather than attempt the kind of excessively macho and self-defeating coercion that "without perceiving it, drives away the object of its covetousness."¹²

ENERGY

Throughout *Democracy in America* Tocqueville refers to energy (*énergie*) fifty times, giving astonishing prominence to a term more commonly found in physics texts than in political philosophy.¹³ Tocqueville's energy describes the motive force behind action, the fuel for achievement of any human ends. Energy undergirds individual and collective action, part psychological

and part physiological. Thus energy encompasses Aristotle's distinctions between *dunamis*, *kinesis*, and *energeia*—human potential, activity, and actualization—which are rooted in the human psyche as well as the biological world.¹⁴ Energy signifies much more than mere desire, which, lacking motive force behind it, cannot accomplish anything of value. Consider Tocqueville's complaint about his homeland:

Each [Frenchman] feels the ill, but no one has the courage and energy needed to seek something better; like the passions of old men that end only in impotence, desires, regrets, sorrows and joys produce nothing visible or lasting. (*DA*, 10)

Tocqueville repeatedly claims that desire alone, without the courage, energy, or power for actualization, leaves one's goals unfulfilled. When commenting on the scarcity of great learning in democracies, Tocqueville observes that "the will to engage in these works is lacking as much as is the power" (*DA*, 51). Effective work requires not only the will to choose an object but the energy or power to get the job done.

Is energy manly? Yes and no. By separating desire from energy Tocqueville invokes Plato's division between *eros*, which chooses an object for pursuit, and *thumos*, which can affirm or reject the choice.¹⁵ Indeed, Tocqueville's energy is akin to *thumos*, and Tocqueville occasionally associates it with manly virility and indomitability. Energy exists to be actualized, and energetic characters hate illegitimate constraint or arbitrary rule. Thus Tocqueville often places energy alongside *thumos*'s corollaries, courage and love of freedom.¹⁶ Tocqueville criticizes French aristocrats for their debauched cruelty but praises their energy, their "pride of heart," and the "manly mores" that make them "the most resistant part of the social body."¹⁷ Similarly, Tocqueville honors the early Native Americans as a quasi-aristocratic race possessing "the energy of barbarism," a "proud soul," "courage," and an "intractable love of independence."¹⁸ Energy without courage often falters, as Tocqueville observed among his European contemporaries. In France "society is tranquil . . . it fears it will die if it makes an effort" (*DA*, 10). And in Germany Tocqueville regrets the disappearance of "the activity, the energy, the communal patriotism, the fertile and manly virtues" that had once been inspired by medieval laws.¹⁹ But Tocqueville also praises American women, "who often display a manly reason and a wholly virile energy" while not being "manly" women. For all their energy they "generally preserve a very delicate appearance and always remain women in their manners. . . ." ²⁰ Energy might mark American men more vividly but characterizes American women as well.

Governments as well as individuals require energy to act swiftly and effectively, to execute their goals and defend their independence. As the people are democracy's ruling element, the institutions of government are essentially tools or mechanisms for achieving the people's collective ends and

the public good. Like all mechanisms they require inputs of energy in order to function. Indeed, throughout his political works Tocqueville draws upon mechanistic metaphors to hammer home the importance of institutions fueled by citizens' collective energy. In New England townships "everything moves around you and nowhere do you discover the motor. The hand that directs the social machine vanishes at each instant" (*DA*, 67). In the *Old Regime*, Tocqueville insists that the "greatness and power of a people" cannot be adduced to "the mechanism of its laws alone; for, in this matter, it is less the perfection of the instrument than the strength of the motors that determines the result" (*OR*, 221). Collective energy is the fuel that facilitates society's activity, supplies the "motive force" and tends the "strength of [its] motors."²¹

Motive force and activity, in turn, are closely associated with freedom itself. Consider the well-known passage in which Tocqueville inveighs against administrative centralization:

What does it matter to me, after all, that there should be an authority always on its feet, keeping watch that my pleasures are tranquil, flying ahead of my steps to turn away every danger without my even needing to think about it, if this authority, at the same that it removes the least thorns on my path, is absolute master of my freedom and my life, if it monopolizes movement and existence to such a point that everything around it must languish when it languishes, that everything must sleep when its sleeps, that everything must perish if it dies? (*DA*, 88)

"Freedom" and "life" should be read as a pair, alongside "movement" and "existence." When government is the master of the first pair, it monopolizes the second. Thus, life parallels existence—a rather obvious equation—but also, more provocatively, freedom parallels movement.

In his chapter on the ubiquity of energetic activity throughout the United States Tocqueville contrasts free and non-free countries in terms of their activity. In free countries, "all is activity and movement; here [in France], all seems calm and immobile" (*DA*, 231). In his eyes, "the greatest advantage of democratic government" may be the "agitation, constantly reborn," introduced by democratic government and carried into civil society (*DA*, 233). Because energy and activity are the engines of self-government's independence, political science—"that great science of government"—must teach "how to understand the general movement of society" (*OR*, 199).

While energy is a capacity residing in every individual, it functions best when utilized collectively. Energetic individuals face overwhelming odds when they act by themselves, as shown by the case of the failed reformer: "He exhausts himself in the wish to animate this indifferent and distracted crowd, and finally he sees himself reduced to powerlessness, not because he is defeated, but because he is alone" (*DA*, 610). To be enduringly success-

ful, collective energy must be voluntary as well, for "[o]ne will never encounter . . . genuine power among men except in the free concurrence of wills" (DA, 89). Tocqueville often contrasts the efficacy of freely combined energies with the futility of coercion. When a centralized, despotic government forces people to work toward imposed goals it courts disaster, because "it is not under such conditions that one obtains the concurrence of the human will" necessary to produce "genuine power." Slavery, the ultimate coercion of energy and effort, is not only unjust but inefficient: "masters make slaves work without being obliged to pay them, but they receive little fruit from their efforts, while the money that they would give to free workers would be recovered with interest from the value of their labors."²² Thus, while isolated or coerced individuals are immobile and ineffective, a society of energetic individuals working in overlapping projects generates an important store of power (even if it falls short of aristocratic greatness). That power makes possible impressive, collective efforts as well as a viable, common defense against the encroaching power of domestic governments and foreign threats.

Tocqueville's emphasis on collective energy prefigures Hannah Arendt's insistence on the cooperative nature of power.²³ For both Tocqueville and Arendt, energy and power must be used or risk atrophy. Should democratic citizens abandon their collective, energetic pursuits, they abandon their primary resource for resisting despotism's sway. While the relentless activity produced by widespread liberty may seem frightening or exhausting, citizens should not yield to the temptation to withdraw from public life. "I know that in our day there are many honest people . . . who, fatigued by freedom, would like to rest at last far from its storms," Tocqueville says, but "they know very poorly the port toward which they direct themselves" (DA, 298-99).

Energy must reside in any regime's ruling element. Thus, healthy aristocracies must have an energetic nobility; healthy democracies need an energetic citizenry. The nobility's tastes, loves, and habits decide the goals toward which aristocracies direct their collective energies; in democracies, popular tastes (and social conditions) dictate the same. Aristocracies, moved by what Tocqueville considers to be "great" loves, can "act strongly on all [other nations] . . . attempt great undertakings and . . . great actions. . . ." (DA, 234-35). The resulting rewards, however, are distributed inequitably: "The capital vice for which aristocracy is reproached is that of working only for itself, and not for the mass" (DA, 219). Conversely, one of the "true advantages" of democracy is that "it spreads a restive activity through the whole social body, a superabundant force, an energy that never exists without it, and which . . . can bring forth marvels" (DA, 234). The democratization of energy results in greater overall prosperity but also lower goals, because of democracy's prosaic tastes. Nonetheless, while democracy's goals and achievements may not be as impressive, Tocqueville praises

democracy less for its outcomes than for its processes—the continual motion evoked by democratic institutions and continued throughout civil society—that he believes essential to sustaining widespread freedom.

While the people are democracy's ruling element, Tocqueville realizes that in modern democracies citizens must delegate a share of their power to a centralized government.²⁴ To govern justly and well, central government requires energy and firmness. As Madison writes in *Federalist 37*, "Energy in government is essential to that security against external and internal danger, and to that prompt and salutary execution of the laws which enter into the very definition of good government."²⁵ Tocqueville cites the *Federalist* approvingly, never disagreeing on the importance of governmental energy, but he emphasizes a complementary point. Madison, writing during a period of unstable, ineffective government, tries to ensure sufficient energy for the Union. Tocqueville, with fifty years' hindsight, insists that energetic government must be balanced by equal energy in the citizenry. Thus, while all of the *Federalist's* (thirty-one) references to political energy concern the energy of government, all but one of *Democracy in America's* references to political energy concern the energy of the people.²⁶

Too often, political science scholarship focuses on policy proposals and government initiatives as if government itself were the regime's ruling element. Tocqueville's insights are a reminder that democracy's ruling element must always be the people, and if their energy departs, so does democracy. Even though he lacks the twentieth-century term "bureaucracy," Tocqueville recognizes that concept as the logical and regrettable outcome should centralized administration ever monopolize political energy. Tocqueville associates bureaucratic monopoly with the end of meaningful democracy and a likely step toward harsh or soft despotism.²⁷

Tocqueville frequently uses the metaphors of water and molecules to enhance his descriptions of human relations.²⁸ When molecules are too far apart, their energy can dissipate or evaporate; when they are too close together, they are frozen and immobile. In Tocqueville's words, "despotism . . . walls [citizens] up inside their private lives. They already tend to keep themselves apart from one another: despotism isolates them; it chills their relations; it freezes them" (*OR*, 87). Individuals and their political energy require proper proximity to one another—neither the "iron bands" of despotism nor the atomization of mass society.²⁹ Even with the proper distance between its sources, energy must also be channeled effectively. Otherwise, collected energy could flow in many directions and thus deplete its potential, or could flood all at once and cause great damage. Consider Tocqueville's choice of metaphors: "municipal bodies and the administrations of counties therefore form so many hidden shoals that delay or divide the flood of the popular will," and political associations are a "dike against tyranny" of the majority or of an oppressive faction (*DA*, 250, 192). The

same metaphor holds regarding governmental energy. In France, Tocqueville says, an inefficient system of public employment "was like an irregular and badly constructed dike which divided the central power's strength and dissipated its shock" (*OR*, 172). If the collective energies are limited and channeled toward representative institutions that allow them expression, they can be harnessed toward useful projects and sometimes even great ones.

If energy is such a vital component of political and economic success, why must we limit it? Just as freedom must be circumscribed to be enjoyed in the long term—if all people do exactly as they like, anarchy looms on the horizon—the people's collective energy must be limited and channeled. Otherwise, collected energy tends toward entropy. Energy that is not pooled and directed can stagnate or wither, just as energy that is pooled but not limited can rage out of control and end in anarchy. Tocqueville observes both these conditions in France before the Revolution:

. . . the progress of government often slowed and sometimes stopped: public life was as suspended. At other times, it was by excess of activity and self-confidence that the new governments sinned . . . wanting to make everything better, they ended up confusing everything. (*OR*, 237)

Thus collective energy must not only be channeled toward useful projects but kept within appropriate limits. The most important of these limiting influences include laws and political institutions, "habits of the heart" (customs and mores), and one of the most important influences, organized religion.³⁰ Tocqueville observed American men investing their energies in the business of commerce and politics, with women investing theirs in the maintenance of morality and order. He was so impressed with this complementary pairing that he ascribed "the chief cause of the extraordinary prosperity and growing power of this nation" to "the superiority of the women" over their European counterparts.

Religion can restrain people's actions within a bounded moral universe and, perhaps more importantly, "impose a salutary control on the intellect." Absolute freedom to invest energy and attention can be worrisome or even maddening. In both religion and politics, "men are soon frightened by the limitless independence with which they are faced." In Tocqueville's view (to which Durkheim would later assent), freely accepted limitations on thought and action make meaningful freedom a possibility in the first place.³¹ Faced with an endless riot of possibilities, energy would soon dissipate. As he puts it, "Such a state cannot fail to enervate souls; it slackens the springs of the will and prepares citizens for servitude" (*DA*, 418). But while Tocqueville credits religion for bolstering Americans' mores and hence confining their energies to responsible and relatively ethical pursuits, he knows that religion itself cannot do the job. Here Tocqueville once again gives

women and femininity pride of place, a necessary complement to, and restraint of, masculine energy and boldness:

Religion [in the U.S.] is often powerless to restrain man in the midst of the innumerable temptations that fortune presents to him. It cannot moderate the ardor in him for enriching himself, which everything comes to excite, but it reigns as a sovereign over the soul of women, and it is woman who makes mores. (DA, 278-79)

To Tocqueville, femininity involves neither obeisance nor subservience but a healthy acceptance of appropriate limitations. So far from being mere followers by nature, women can accept moral limitations and also lead their restless men to compliance.³² In this sense they embody Aristotle's conception of the citizen, being ruled (by religious mores) and ruling (over their constantly tempted husbands) in turn.³³ Thus America's moral and political landscapes are marked by restless and productive energies as well as salutary limitations and order:

. . . everything is certain and fixed in the moral world, although the political world seems to be abandoned to the discussion and attempts of men. So the human spirit never perceives an unlimited field before itself: however bold it may be, from time to time it feels that it ought to halt before insurmountable barriers. Before innovating, it is forced to accept certain primary givens and to submit its boldest conceptions to certain forms that delay and halt it. (DA, 279)

Tocqueville would have it no other way; if a democracy were not both energetic and limited in the American manner, its leaders would have to find other ways of making it so. Late in volume two Tocqueville reiterates, "One must try to pose the farthest boundaries for [ambition] in advance that it will never be permitted to cross; but one ought to guard against hindering its ascent too much within the permitted limits" (DA, 604). Combining masculine energy and feminine respect for limitations (as well as the feminine energy needed to enforce moral restraint), the America that Tocqueville commends indeed recalls Spenser's counsel to Britomart: "be bold, be bold . . . be not too bold."

Tempering boldness with judgment requires not only the respect for limitations that religious observance can reinforce, but also a long-term perspective on the well-being of the individual and the community, a trait that Tocqueville links more closely with women than with men.

PERSPECTIVE

Among its several roles, *Democracy in America* is a meditation on vision. Throughout that work (and also in the *Old Regime*) Tocqueville draws on

metaphors of clear and far-reaching vision, and contrasting imagery of blindness and obfuscation.³⁴ In *Democracy in America* he proposes "to see not differently but further," and in the *Old Regime* he desires "to see into the heart of the old regime, so close to us in years, but hidden from us by the Revolution" (*OR*, Preface, 84). Further, on more than a dozen occasions in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville distinguishes what is apparent "at first glance" ("*au premier coup d'oeil*") and what turns out to be true upon "more attentive examination" (*DA*, 70, 416). Those choices underscore Tocqueville's deep concern with democracy's long-term perspective and the factors that habitually cloud its sight.

Every legitimate regime requires a long-term perspective on the goals it can sustain and the means necessary to achieve them. Aristocracy, in spite of its many shortcomings, is well equipped for clear vision. At its best, aristocracy can set glorious, far-reaching goals, form the sound judgment necessary to pursue them, and achieve fruition by overcoming short-term desires. Government by nobility, "master of itself . . . is not subject to getting carried away in passing distractions; it has long designs that it knows how to ripen until a favorable occasion presents itself" (*DA*, 222).³⁵ For all democracy's advantages over aristocracy—most notably, its greater justice—long-term perspective frequently eludes its grasp. Tocqueville notes that "it is this clear perception of the future, founded on enlightenment and experience, that democracy will often lack" (*DA*, 214).³⁶ Why should this be the case? Citizens have a difficult time judging appropriate long-term goals for their society because their materialistic desires direct them toward present satisfactions, and because the immediacy of those desires undermines the deep reflection required of good judgment. As Tocqueville laments, "In centuries in which almost everyone acts, one is therefore generally brought to attach an excessive value to rapid sparks and superficial conceptions of the intellect and, on the contrary, to depreciate immoderately its profound, slow work" (*DA*, 435). Further, most people "see less clearly than the upper classes what they can hope or fear from the future," in part because democracies lack a class of life-long statesmen, imbued with a respect for past and future generations (*DA*, 214). Thus, most citizens lack the aristocratic elites' experience with public affairs. Not only that, but democracy's "natural instincts"—its love of equality and mistrust of superiority—"bring the people to keep distinguished men away from power" (*DA*, 189). For their part, these distinguished figures often shun public office, either to avoid its frequent tawdriness or to pursue greater fortunes in private life.

Despite these obstacles, democracy must develop and sustain some kind of clear perspective on its long-term interests, its achievable desires, and the appropriate relationship of citizens to one another.³⁷ Tocqueville calls this the "doctrine of self-interest well understood." Note: "well" understood, not "best" understood. Less rigorous than Aristotle's virtue of practical wisdom

(*phronēsis*), which evaluates virtuous ends and the means to achieve them, self-interest well understood—which I identify with democratic “perspective”—takes the people’s ends as given and evaluates the means to achieve them imperfectly but enduringly. Self-interest well understood is “general theory” that helps Americans “to combine their own well-being with that of their fellow citizens” (*DA*, 501). It dictates that individuals pay attention to and act in accordance with those norms “appropriate to the times,” which include toleration, reciprocity, cooperation, and interpersonal trust. It tells citizens that they must help each other in order to accomplish their own ends, even if they find cooperation temporarily unpleasant.

As Tocqueville describes it, “enlightened self-love continually leads them to help one another and disposes them freely to give part of their time and wealth for the good of the state.” Tocqueville endorses self-interest well understood as a flawed but undeniably useful asset that is the best moral doctrine available to most people.³⁸ The doctrine of self-interest well understood and its corollary norms are democratic virtues because, while they do not dictate phenomenal sacrifices or individual excellence, they are accessible and appealing to all. In their absence—should citizens no longer be touched or moved by “those great and powerful public emotions” that can motivate communal undertakings or the mingling of self-interest with the commonweal—self-government and democratic freedom would be jeopardized (*DA*, 616).

Tocqueville claims that among Americans the doctrine of self-interest well understood had “come to be universally accepted,” but acceptance does not equal active emulation; it may mean that people pay attention to social and moral norms without an energetic follow-through (*DA*, 526). Tocqueville’s observations imply that a citizenry steered by self-interest well understood is more of an ideal than an empirical observation.³⁹ In practice, long-term vision often falters:

Do not say to men that in giving themselves over so blindly to an exclusive passion, they compromise their dearest interests; they are deaf. Do not show them that freedom escapes from their hands while they are looking elsewhere; they are blind, or rather they perceive only one good in the whole universe worth longing for (*DA*, 481).⁴⁰

In other words, it must be hoped but cannot be guaranteed that the people will have a taste for what they truly need. We might hope that reason or calculation will inform or shape desire, but we cannot always depend on it.⁴¹ (The Constitution represents one institution by which the people decide, in advance, what they are not allowed to desire.⁴²) For all his attention to the doctrine of interest rightly understood, and his insistence that people must be educated to its tenets, Tocqueville does not expect reason alone to clar-

ify democracy's vision and forge its morals. Reason requires the additional influence of moderate habituation and the restraint provided by organized religion that can temper people's desires and help to enlarge their perspectives.⁴³ Together with these supporting influences, self-interest well understood may not put reason in the seat of power but may make passions and interests more reasonable.⁴⁴

Here women enter the picture again. If democracies tend toward myopia—constantly in need of moderation and religiously based restraint—democratic women can bring a corrective perspective. Tocqueville repeatedly highlights women's clear vision:

... before she has entirely left childhood she already thinks for herself, speaks freely, and acts alone; the great picture of the world is constantly exposed before her; far from seeking to conceal the view of it from her, they uncover more and more of it to her regard every day and teach her to consider it with a firm and tranquil eye. Thus the vices and perils that society presents are not slow to be revealed to her; she sees them clearly, judges them without illusion, and faces them without fear; for she is full of confidence in her strength. . . . (DA, 563)

Seeing clearly the risks, rewards, and requirements of life in a democracy, Tocqueville's young women are bold but not too bold. "[I]n the very midst of the independence of her first youth," he writes, "the American woman never entirely ceases to be mistress of herself; she enjoys all permitted pleasures without abandoning herself to any of them, and her reason does not drop the reins although it often seems to let them dangle" (DA, 564). These women are no shrinking violets, and they contribute their own energies to the democratic engine. Tocqueville's women shape democracy's mores—which limit the uses to which its energies can be put—and face reversals of fortune with "strength of will," "courage," and "tranquil and indomitable energy" (DA, 566–67).

This is not to say that Tocqueville envisions women holding public office and directing the commonwealth with their judgment and candor. Rather he sees them "cloistered" in the domestic circle, exerting a salutary influence behind the scenes. The point that I wish to stress is that for Tocqueville, long-term perspective, stable mores, and educated moderation are vital influences on democratic energy: "republicans in the United States . . . profess the opinion that a people ought to be moral, religious, and moderate to the degree it is free" (DA, 379). Tocqueville happens to associate the influences of morality, religion, and moderation with women, so in his "new political science" the feminine complements the masculine. But even if one were to contest his identification of those influences with women, his prescription for democratic health—his insistence that those influences be present—would remain just as cogent.

Moderation and restraint are seldom aligned with nobility and greatness, as Tocqueville occasionally laments. Nonetheless, democracy's special excellence resides in its potential for facilitating widespread freedom—the freedom to invest time, energy, and attention as individuals see fit. But to fulfill that potential, citizens must invest attention and energy not only freely but wisely, with an eye toward sustainability and long-term consequences. Otherwise, conditions of maximal freedom can produce conditions in which that freedom disappears for “by demanding too much freedom one gets too much slavery.”⁴⁵

ATTENTION

Every regime's ruling element must attend to political affairs. Without political attention; collective problems and public interests would go without redress. Encroachments against liberty would proceed unchecked. And yet in modern times, representative democracy has become virtually synonymous with delegated political attention. Citizens elect representatives to look after political affairs and turn their own attention to other pursuits. Tocqueville fears that energy will accompany attention in the headlong flight from political affairs and self-government. In his understanding—and this is *extremely* important if we are to grasp Tocqueville's “new political science”—energy generally follows attention. If a subject does not hold people's attention it will not enduringly attract their energy and activity. If the people's attention, and hence energy and activity, leave the political realm altogether, they are left with a government that “monopolizes movement and existence to such a point that everything around it must languish when it languishes . . .” (DA, 88).

Tocqueville considers whether attention might follow reason or rational self-interest—in other words, whether people tend to pay attention to issues and activities that affect their long-term interests as well as short-term desires. Unfortunately for democracy and political engagement, attention is largely a function of *tastes*—and while tastes can be educated by reason and shaped by moral values those educative influences have their limits.⁴⁶ In most instances attention follows tastes, and energy follows attention.⁴⁷ A taste for freedom might direct attention and energy to self-government, but a passion for material well-being, leisure, or for being left alone may divert democracy's resources (and influence its political health) in a different direction altogether.⁴⁸ Tocqueville implies that people can only be engaged with—that is, active in and attentive to—a limited number of issues or concerns. He finds Americans to be completely consumed by their activities, saying that “not only are [Americans] occupied, but they have a passion for their occupations. They are perpetually in action, and each of their actions

absorbs their soul; the fire they put into affairs prevents them from being inflamed by ideas" (DA, 614). Because of their many distractions they do not even pay much heed to respected leaders and officials: "when one has acquired the confidence of a democratic people, it is still a great affair to get its attention [*d'obtenir son attention*]" (DA, 614). Political affairs must compete with commerce, entertainment, and the pleasures of private life for the scarce resources of attention and energy. To attract attention and energy they must appeal to people's tastes. As early as 1832, then, Tocqueville warns that we should not be surprised to see politics-as-spectacle:

When he has been drawn out of himself, he therefore always expects that he is going to be offered some enormous object to look at, and it is only at this price that he consents to tear himself for a moment from the small, complicated cares that agitate and charm his life. (DA, 464)

Commerce gives politics stiff competition for citizens' limited attention and energy. Commerce appeals not only to Americans' taste for material goods but for the impassioned activity that is sometimes associated with politics. "In democracies there is nothing greater nor more brilliant than commerce," Tocqueville writes, "it is what attracts the regard of the public and fills the imagination of the crowd; all energetic passions are directed toward it."⁴⁹ The danger is apparent, namely that commerce or other "brilliant" involvements may charm popular attention away from involvement with self-government, even though the latter channels, pools, and mingles people's energies, upholds democratic freedom, and hence enables pursuit of commerce in the first place.

In special instances politics may outpace its competitors. Political crises, for instance, can focus citizens' attention on political affairs. But as soon as the trouble has passed, attention and energy wander after tastes once again. Further, the focusing effect of crises is not only impermanent but also indeterminate. Crisis can focus attention and energy on self-government and the common defense, but can just as easily disperse them.⁵⁰ Tocqueville writes of the American Revolution and aftermath:

It was this very prosperity that began to make people lose sight of the cause that had produced it; the danger having passed, Americans no longer found in themselves the energy and patriotism that had helped to ward it off. Delivered from the fears that had preoccupied them, they readily reverted to the ordinary tendency of their penchants. (DA, 371)

For all these reasons Tocqueville fears that democratic citizens will always struggle to focus their attention on political affairs, and hence will always be at risk of a political energy crisis.

When citizens withdraw their attention and energy from public and collective affairs they court a condition that Tocqueville calls isolation, a condition

that can encourage the warped perspective of individualism (and ultimately egoism). And in spite of his current fame as a civil society enthusiast, Tocqueville is much more concerned with avoiding radical isolation and individualism than with promoting unlimited associationism and community. Political associations and social togetherness have their downsides, the former potentially undermining political order and the latter potentially quashing free thought and expression. Political engagement is not *guaranteed* to teach the art of ruling well. Township government is inefficient and messy, and in pre-revolutionary France associations contributed to a thoroughly un-civic culture. But while political engagement brings uncertain rewards, widespread political *disengagement* almost certainly undermines political capacities and self-government. We need look no further than the eighteenth-century French intellectuals who lacked any exposure to active engagement, and who viewed politics from an "almost infinite distance from practice" (*OR*, 197). Their fellow citizens, had no "daily involve[ment] in regional administration," and hence were susceptible to the extraordinarily bad political advice, the "contempt for existing facts," that French intellectuals offered them (*OR*, 195–202). Tocqueville suggests that the French Revolution's excesses were due in no small measure to the debilitated political perspective resulting from widespread political disengagement.

Political energy suffers as well as political and moral perspective. By definition, isolated citizens withdraw their energy and attention from public affairs. Tocqueville worries that isolated energies may not only stagnate but diminish. As we saw earlier, Tocqueville suggests that in the absence of continual agitation and progress, energy tends toward disuse and atrophy. Energy responds with special ardor to circumstances that allow for personal distinction, but isolated individuals are out of the game. Energy unused becomes energy squandered, at both the individual and the collective level:

If citizens continue to confine themselves more and more narrowly in the circle of small domestic interests, there to become agitated without rest, one can apprehend that in the end they will become almost inaccessible to those great and powerful public emotions that trouble peoples, but develop and renew them. (*DA*, 616)

Tocqueville worries not simply that people will fail to *exercise* the "great and powerful public emotions" that stir them, but that, through this inactivity, the rousing force may become "practically out of reach" even if the people want or need them. "Ambition may lose both its spark and its greatness," base materialism may "loosen the springs of action," and an enervated people may lose the ability even to maintain its independence, let alone accomplish anything of lasting importance.⁵¹

The conditions of social equality promote political disengagement in the form of individualism and isolation. Equality "tends to isolate [men] from one another and to bring each of them to be occupied with himself alone."⁵² But equality also "lays open their souls excessively to the love of material enjoyments," and materialism is Tocqueville's fourth great concern for sustainable self-government (*DA*, 419). Under conditions of social equality most individuals could never hope to achieve fame or political power. But wealth and material pleasures are available to many, and thus conditions of social equality encourage pursuit of worldly goods: "The same causes that render citizens independent of one another push them every day toward new and restive desires and spur them constantly" (*DA*, 607).⁵³

Materialism, in turn, can increase citizens' isolation. We seek privacy in which to enjoy the fruits of our labor, and the experience of private enjoyment sharpens our desires. "[T]hese objects are small," Tocqueville says, "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" (*DA*, 509). In American and also French democracy he laments the increasing "desire to enrich oneself at any price, the preference for business, the love of profit, the search for material pleasure and comfort. . . ." These "most widespread desires" often "occupy men's minds and turn them away from public affairs . . ." (*OR*, 87).

Materialism damages all three of the qualities that Tocqueville's new political science seeks to promote—perspective, energy, and attention. The "blind passion" for wealth perverts political perspective and self-interest well understood:

Preoccupied with the sole care of making a fortune, they no longer perceive the tight bond that unites the particular fortune of each of them to the prosperity of all. There is no need to tear from such citizens the rights they possess; they themselves willingly allow them to escape. The exercise of their political duties appears to them a distressing contretemps that distracts them from their industry. . . . These people believe they are following the doctrine of interest, but they have only a coarse idea of it, and to watch better over what they call their affairs, they neglect the principal one, which is to remain masters of themselves (*DA*, 515).

Material desires focus on immediate or imminent satisfactions while democratic freedom requires long-term perspective on citizens' interests. Immediate satisfactions are also easy pickings, and, because they do not require well-invested energy, a life of short-term gratification lets energy stagnate. Early in *Democracy in America*, in an apparently unimportant account of South Sea islands, Tocqueville foreshadows his concern with democracy's

enervating materialism. In the tropical “enchanted places,” where everything “seemed prepared for the needs of man or calculated for his pleasures,” Tocqueville identifies “a certain enervating influence that attached man to the present and rendered him careless of the future” (DA, 22). He reiterates similar worries throughout the following political analyses. Individuals absorbed with material pleasures are “more prone to become enervated than debauched,” and one finds at the collective level a kind of “honest materialism that does not corrupt souls, but softens them and in the end quietly loosens all their tensions” (DA, 509).

For the time being, Tocqueville’s Americans maintain their springs’ tautness by investing their energies in cooperative projects and thus looking after their own affairs (as far as possible). Tocqueville addresses three different kinds of participation that modern scholarship often includes under the catch-all rubric of “civic engagement”: township administration, political associations, and civil associations. In Tocqueville’s eyes, they are particularly desirable because they all attract and embody citizens’ collective political attention and energy. This differentiates them from activities such as voting, which some political scientists regard as the quintessential measure of political participation. For Tocqueville, political participation is good insofar as it means that citizens’ attention and energy are focused on their common affairs and the business of self-government. Were political participation to consist primarily in periodic voting—even if most citizens participated—Tocqueville would lament the declining habits and spirits of independence, as when he remarks that “citizens quit their state of dependence just long enough to choose their masters and then fall back into it” (DA, 693). Tocqueville’s preference for political participation that directly involves citizens’ energies in cooperative activities and self-government speaks to the recent political science literature that highlights so-called voter ignorance. This literature questions whether citizens know enough about complex national politics to do more good than harm.⁵⁴ Yet even if today’s citizens truly are politically ignorant—and here I take no stance—it would not make Tocqueville’s vision of democracy less feasible. Citizens participating directly in self-government and local administration do not exhibit the kinds of ignorance that some political scientists fear. Not only does direct participation in local affairs involve citizens’ attention and energies in self-government to a far greater extent than periodic voting, but it puts those energies to a more efficacious use.

Tocqueville’s chapter on American townships is probably the most commonly consulted section of his most famous book, *Democracy in America*. Nonetheless, scholars seldom cite more than a line or two from that chapter, and even less commonly do they situate it within the context of Tocqueville’s larger project (which must also include the *Old Regime*). For those reasons it merits extensive consideration. Tocqueville lauds the

township system because it provides incentives for self-serving men to become public-serving citizens. Note: *men* and not *women*, because Tocqueville portrays the township's lures as specifically appealing to male ambitions and vanities.

The political engagement of township administration does not begin as public-spiritedness or virtue. Rather, Tocqueville describes nineteenth-century Americans as what rational choice theorists might call "utility-maximizing" individuals, who turn their attention and energy to cooperative ventures when the individual benefits are obvious and the costs of participating are low.⁵⁵ Desire and taste are the initial lures: "desire for esteem, the need of real interests, the taste for power and for attention" "excite men's interest" to the township's ample resources.⁵⁶ The township is "the principle of public administration" in New England because it is "the hearth around which the interests and affections of men come to gather" (*DA*, 76). While Tocqueville observes that township government "is to [citizens'] taste as well as of their choice," in truth it is "of their choice" *because* it is suited to their tastes (*DA*, 65).

The existence of local resources provides only part of citizens' motivation to participate. Even prodigious rewards, if inaccessible, rarely excite people's attention or energy. For example, since federal offices and their significant power are extremely difficult to attain, "ambition cannot make them the permanent goal of its efforts" (*DA*, 64). The township's resources, however, are not only ample but readily available. The citizen sees the township as "a free and strong corporation that he is a part of and that is worth his trouble to seek to direct," and so a great number of people "exploit the power of the township for their profit and take interest in it for themselves" (*DA*, 64). To use the language of modern scholarship, township administration attracts citizens' attention and energies by convincing them of their "political efficacy."⁵⁷

Once the township's "advantages" have "excited men's interest" and "attract[ed] the ambitious passions of the human heart," the average citizen "places his ambition and his future" in township administration—invests his attention and energy—sharing there in decision and office (*DA*, 63–65). Earlier I noted Tocqueville's insistence that individual energies must be pooled, limited, and channeled toward useful ends. The township serves those purposes admirably. By appealing to the tastes and hence attracting the attention and energy of self-interested individuals, it embodies "independence and power" and engenders "a continual, but at the same time peaceful, movement that agitates [society] without troubling it" (*DA*, 63–65).

The initially selfish engagement holds transformative potential, because tastes can be shaped and perspective can be educated.⁵⁸ The experience of cooperative engagement enlarges citizens' political perspective by drawing

them outside of themselves and their narrow concerns. Those pursuing short-term resources come to realize that their *long-term* self-interest requires continued political engagement: this is self-interest well understood. Even when people manage public affairs “very badly”—which is often the case, in Tocqueville’s view—“the people cannot meddle in public affairs without having the scope of their ideas extended and without having their minds be seen to go outside their ordinary routine” (DA, 233). The citizen engaged with local government “finally assembles clear and practical ideas on the nature of his duties as well as the extent of his rights” (DA, 65).

The political engagement of township administration can set in motion a beneficial, self-reinforcing cycle (or “virtuous circle”). As citizens experience self-government and the pleasures of local freedom they develop a stronger taste for the same, and grow better equipped to identify encroachments by hostile powers.⁵⁹ And as they treat “common problems in common,” their initially self-involved perspectives often widen to include notions of duty and reciprocal responsibility. The experience of self-government enlarges political competence as well as political perspective. Just as juries are schools for citizenship, “the institutions of a township are to freedom what primary schools are to science; they put it within reach of the people” because they “make them taste [freedom’s] peaceful employ and habituate them to making use of it” (DA, 57). For Tocqueville, hands-on experience can teach political responsibility and the necessity of self-government in a uniquely powerful way, and townships provide a much more accessible venue than state or national governments. Thus, “in this restricted sphere that is within his reach,” the locally engaged citizen “tries to govern society” (DA, 65).

Nonetheless, local self-government is frequently inefficient and messy, although in Tocqueville’s view its benefits more than outweigh the costs. He compares efficient, centralized administration in France to American townships “whose budgets are not drawn up on methodical and above all uniform plans,” and sides strongly with the latter, saying that

I see most of those French communes, whose accountancy is so perfect, plunged in a profound ignorance of their true interests and left in such an invincible apathy that society seems rather to vegetate than to live in them; on the other hand, I perceive in those same American townships . . . an enlightened, active, enterprising population; I contemplate a society always at work there. (DA, 87–88n)

France’s centralized efficiency, which monopolizes administration, lacks each of the essential political goods that I have associated with political engagement: political perspective (“ignorance of their true interests”), political attention (“invincible apathy”), and political energy or motion (“rather

to vegetate than to live"). America's messy townships, in which average citizens administer common affairs, produce the opposite results despite their inefficiencies.

But as Tocqueville realizes, inefficient engagement is a hard sell with commercially oriented citizens, even if it promotes long-term self-interest. Much more likely is a rapid loss of patience with local governments' untidiness and inefficiency for "the exercise of their political duties" may come to seem "a distressing contretemps that distracts them from their industry" (*DA*, 515). Impatience may lead citizens to delegate administration to an efficient, centralized power and precede a descent into soft despotism.

Tocqueville extends his analysis of associations beyond the "municipal freedoms" of township administration to include the attentive activity of political associations. While township administration constitutes formal government—an institution of the state—political associations are of private origin, and "owe their birth and development only to individual will" (*DA*, 180). Tocqueville's political associations are thoroughly instrumental:

An association consists solely in the public adherence that a certain number of individuals give to such and such a doctrine, and in the engagement in which they contract to cooperate in a certain fashion to make it prevail. (*DA*, 181)

The motivation to associate has nothing to do with citizens' expressing an intrinsically political human nature or fulfilling their highest capacities, as civic republican theorists sometimes portray it. Rather, stated in mechanistic terms, "the association gathers the efforts of divergent minds in a cluster and drives them vigorously toward a single goal clearly indicated by it" (*DA*, 181).

Individually, political associations have any number of ends; categorically, they serve one overarching purpose. Political associations are sites of resistance, those institutions "by which men seek to defend themselves against the despotic action of the majority or the encroachments of . . . power." While a citizen might join any particular political association to support a "specific doctrine," he or she learns there a more general "art of uniting with those like him to defend [his freedom]" at the very time when each has become "individually weaker" and "incapable in isolation of preserving his freedom" (*DA*, 489). Political associations form a "dike . . . against tyranny" of the centralized government or an oppressive democratic majority (*DA*, 184). They act analogously to powerful individuals in aristocratic nations:

A political, industrial, commercial, or even scientific and literary association is an enlightened and powerful citizen whom one can neither bend at will nor oppress in the dark and who, in defending its particular rights against the exigencies of power, saves common freedoms. (*DA*, 668)

Tocqueville differentiates between those political associations with a social element and those whose bond is "purely intellectual," the latter apparently resembling what present-day scholars call "mailing list associations."⁶⁰ Only in those political associations where members meet personally can ideas and opinions be "the force and heat that written thought can never attain" (*DA*, 181).

Tocqueville also implies that many political associations, being fundamentally insular and partisan, do not promote moral virtues such as generalized tolerance and mutual respect. Political associations can actually encourage moral *disengagement* because, as in France, sometimes members "profess the dogma of passive obedience" or make "the entire sacrifice of their judgment and their free will in a single stroke," and this "very much diminishes their moral force" (*DA*, 186). This is not to say that political associations are immoral or amoral, or that political associations cannot involve moral engagement. But in general they do not "enlarge the heart" in the manner of nonpolitical, and often nonpartisan, civil associations.

Indeed, Tocqueville only guardedly advocates freedom of political association. Political associations can promote democratic freedom, and forbidding them would harm associational life generally, but they bring problems along with benefits. Precisely because they are energetic and partisan sites of resistance, a bulwark against tyranny of the majority, they can also threaten stability and order. The degree of their utility depends on the larger societal context. Tocqueville finds political associations necessary and good in nineteenth-century America because Americans enjoy long-standing traditions of non-violent association and deliberation. Further, in America "opinions differ only by nuances" so violent struggles are (in general) uncommon (*DA*, 185). France, conversely, lacks America's stable mores and traditions; there, political associations are viewed as catalysts to action and often violence, real threats to the political order. The political engagement of political associations may or may not support healthy democracy, depending on a nation's prior resources and traditions. If nothing else, Tocqueville's observations should chasten those contemporary political scientists who look to the American system as a model for developing democracies worldwide.

Too often, contemporary political scientists and political theorists treat membership in political and social associations under the single rubric of "civic engagement," as if it were all the same thing.⁶¹ Tocqueville, conversely, takes pains to distinguish between political and civil associations, with the latter encompassing "the associations that are formed in civil life and which have an object that is in no way political" (*DA*, 489). Many contemporary civic engagement scholars insist that participation in nonpolitical organizations stimulates political involvement and interest.⁶² They seldom realize that Tocqueville made that point first. He shows how civil

associations can enlarge citizens' moral as well as political perspective by bringing people together, emphasizing their commonality, and demystifying their differences. Civil associations are essential because "[s]entiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another" (DA, 491). Once citizens learn the art of associating for civil purposes they may put it to political uses: "civil associations therefore facilitate political associations; but on the other hand, political association singularly develops and perfects civil association" (DA, 496). However, civil associations can just as easily *divert* people's attention and energy from political involvement.⁶³ At their best, civil associations can stabilize society by developing the art of association while balancing the agitation of political associations.

This much is clear: both political and civil associations are extremely important for democracies' health. Political associations develop the art of self-governance, the love of liberty, and the ability to resist encroachments against it. Civil associations further promote the art of associating even as they divert some of society's copious energy away from immediate investment in politics, thus "keep[ing] society on the move" without excessive political agitation or instability. If pressed to choose between the two, however, Tocqueville comes down firmly on the civil side. Political associations are key contributors in certain kinds of democratic environments, namely democracies with long traditions of stable, constitutional government and rule of law. Yet in newly democratizing countries political associations may undermine stability and promote civil chaos. Moreover, both stable and developing democracies could probably survive the loss of their political associations for quite a while, although they would likely suffer in the long run. But no democracy could endure the absence of civil associations' transmission of cooperative norms and social connectedness. Tocqueville fears for "the morality and intelligence of a democratic people" if government were to crowd out *private* associations, but not if *political* associations were imperiled (DA, 491).

At any rate, in Tocqueville's United States both the political participation of township administration and political associations, and the social engagement of civil associations (which reciprocally reinforces political participation), keep citizens' attention and energy focused on self-government. The perspective of self-interest well understood steers people toward that productive engagement and away from the corrosive individualism and isolation that can undermine democratic freedom. For these reasons American democracy resists, for the time being, the corrosive influences that Tocqueville glimpses more fully in his native France. Nonetheless, Tocqueville can only muster muted optimism about democracy in America, and even less than that about democracy in Europe. For all its merits, American democracy seems to represent an unstable equilibrium that might easily be tilted toward excessive inattention, enervation, and disengagement. Why?

First, the township system that earns Tocqueville's praise comprised only a fraction of American democracy. Tocqueville himself admits that "one must not extend indiscriminately to the whole Union what I say about New England" regarding public education and civic perspective (*DA*, 289). In Southern slaveholding states and in the sparsely populated Western territories he finds little of New England's established civic habits and tastes, focused political attention, and usefully channeled energies.⁶⁴ Indeed, in slaveholding Kentucky, the average citizen "has the *tastes* of idle men," and since attention and energy follow tastes "he pursues fortune less than agitation and pleasure, and he applies in this direction the energy that his neighbor [in free Ohio] deploys elsewhere . . ." (*DA*, 333). Further, America's West represents "democracy reaching its furthest limit," with few social networks and no civic traditions. "The new states of the West already have inhabitants" but "society does not yet exist there" (*DA*, 50). Thus while many present-day political scientists quote only a few enthusiastic passages from *Democracy in America* praising Americans' public-spiritedness and political engagement, they do not capture the entire picture.

Second, even the civic-minded regions such as New England are marked by intense dedication to commerce and material gain. Excessive love of those pursuits threatens to crowd out civic attention and absorb all available energy, regardless of the religious influences that can sometimes keep materialism in check. In spite of civic traditions and norms of cooperation, if people love their private pursuits sufficiently they always flirt with the temptation to delegate public business to a professional bureaucracy and withdraw into their individual worlds.

Finally, tastes change. Tocqueville's Americans exhibit a strong taste for public life and political engagement. They find it a pleasurable diversion:

To meddle in the government of society and to speak about it is the greatest business and, so to speak, the only pleasure that an American knows . . . women themselves often go to political assemblies and, by listening to political discourses, take a rest from household tedium. For them, clubs replace theater-going to a certain point. (*DA*, 232)⁶⁵

Elsewhere, Tocqueville tells us that "there are still only a few [Americans] who go [to the theater]" (*DA*, 468). We are left to wonder whether Americans' civic attention is likely to survive once theater-going catches up with clubs and political assemblies in popular esteem and entertainment value.⁶⁶ Do popular tastes comprise a sufficient hook on which to hang one's hopes for enduring, widespread civic attention and ensuing civic activity? The answer is discouraging. In great detail Tocqueville chronicles the fickleness of popular tastes,⁶⁷ and we can surmise that while at the time of his writing Americans comprised a remarkably engaged citizenry—both active in and attentive to treating "common problems in common"—he does not expect their tastes, attention, and hence energies to seek out public affairs forever:

Not only do they [democratic citizens] not naturally have the taste to occupy themselves with the public, but often they lack the time to do it. Private life is so active in democratic times, so agitated, so filled with desires and work, that hardly any energy or leisure remains to each man for political life. (DA, 643)

In American democracy Tocqueville observes a relentless activity ("men never stay still") encouraged by the relatively new, and sometimes overwhelming, impact of free choice and independence. Able to choose their occupations, business, and leisure pursuits Americans become jacks of many trades but masters of none.⁶⁸ While political power or lasting fame may be out of the question, myriad material goods are not. The American "therefore does all things in haste," and "he insists on knowing very quickly rather than on knowing well" (DA, 584).

Of course, these limitations apply to politics as well as business and leisure pursuits. While Tocqueville famously praises Americans' political participation, few scholars acknowledge this biting accompaniment: "their actions are often ill-considered because they give but little time and attention to each matter." In fact, with remarkable prescience Tocqueville describes something like what we now call "information overload," or the "sort of ignorance that is born of extreme publicity . . . in democratic nations [people] often act at random because one wanted to say everything to them." Because attention is limited but political information is vast, "the principal features of each picture disappear for the latter among the multitude of details" (DA, 583). Tocqueville depicts a manic pace and shallow depth of daily life that could just as easily apply to today's society, and he closes with the powerful but little-known pronouncement that "[t]he habit of inattention ought to be considered the greatest vice of the democratic mind" (DA, 584). Since Tocqueville strongly suggests that energy follows attention, political inattention threatens political lethargy.

Thus, Tocqueville views the United States not as a model polity that will show the world how to avoid democracy's perils but rather as an impressive but unstable balancing act. It stands in a tenuous equilibrium maintained (for the moment) by an interplay of culture, ideology, tastes, habits, and political institutions, all of which can change and hence upset the civic balance. Indeed, nine years after his initial visit to America Tocqueville ends volume II with the very same worries that had inaugurated volume I: lack of political attention, which he calls the "general apathy"; and a generalized enervation that could lead future democracies into despotism or anarchy. He writes,

Both [license or tyranny, anarchy or despotism] are equally to be feared, and can as easily issue from one and the same cause, which is general apathy, the fruit of individualism . . . What it is important to combat is therefore much less anarchy or despotism than the apathy that can create the one or the other almost indifferently. (DA, 704)⁶⁹

The soft despotism of a "schoolmaster" government "hinders, restrains, enervates, stifles, and stultifies" inattentive individualists. So in spite of American democracy's countervailing forces, the continual pull of individualism and isolation gives Tocqueville concern for its future prospects.⁷⁰

Almost two centuries later, a glance at present-day political science scholarship shows these same worries hard at work. We are told that political participation and "social capital" are declining and that democracy might suffer as a consequence, with the apparent presumption that we were once better off.⁷¹ But Tocqueville helps us to understand that democracy has long struggled—and perhaps always will struggle—with the amount of energy that citizens dedicate to self-government and cooperative endeavors. Indeed, Tocqueville's concept of "energy" (and his concern about its supply) lays the ground for Robert Putnam's influential writings on "social capital." At the individual level, energy is the most important ingredient of what economists and sociologists call "human capital."⁷² Collective energy comprises a significant component of "social capital," the accumulation of interpersonal connections that facilitate collective action. For Tocqueville, individual and collective energy can serve non-political functions, yet when necessary they can be channeled into political institutions and the processes of self-government. But the metaphor of "energy" has an added advantage over "capital" for helping us to think about democracy's health because we can apply it to governments as well as to individuals and groups. Democracy requires an energetic citizenry but also an energetic government. Without the latter, democracy would fall to internal crises or external enemies; without the former, citizens would be at their government's mercy. The same point is not so easily made using the "capital" metaphor.

Tocqueville's new political science also teaches us that energy and attention must be encouraged, limited, and channeled toward various cooperative projects, and sometimes toward self-government, but that a soft or feminine touch may elicit better results than forceful coercion. In our current mania to stem the tide of political apathy among the young, many middle schools and high schools are *requiring* so-called civic engagement from their students.⁷³ Tocqueville supplies reasons to doubt the programs' efficacy if not their sincerity, because they seek to attract energy and attention without "the free concurrence of [students'] wills." Because "man is so made that he prefers standing still to marching without independence toward a goal of which he is ignorant," such mandatory measures could, "without perceiving it, [drive] away the object of [their] covetousness . . ." (*DA*, 515, 87). If we take Tocqueville seriously we must take citizens' tastes seriously as well, because quite often attention follows tastes (and energy follows attention). Rather than coercing attention and energy we can attempt to attract them to cooperative pursuits, including self-government, by appealing to people's tastes. The trick, of course, is to make politics appealing but not tawdry or

shallow to the point of meaninglessness. We might also provide greater incentives for satisfying participation, delegating more power to localities and hence helping local politics appeal to the "ambitious passions of the human heart" (DA, 64). And aside from eliciting *additional* attention and energy to politics and self-government, we might revise our political institutions so that they utilize and channel *existing* political attention and energy more efficaciously. The energy need not be manly or womanly as long as it is potent, pooled, and convertible into cooperative political activism or resistance when the need arises.

Finally, if we take Tocqueville seriously we must take not only masculine but also feminine traits seriously as political virtues. Restraint, judgment, and respect for appropriate limitations, along with understated mastery that guides rather than dominates—all of which Tocqueville associates with women—might serve the home and hearth quite well, but we omit them from political life at our peril. Democracy without energy faces impotence and irrelevance at best, and submission to despotic masters at worst. But energetic democracy without restraint and judgment could end the world with a bang, not a whimper.⁷⁴ As noted earlier, I am not making the ambitious claim that all citizens must combine masculine and feminine virtues within themselves; that might be asking for the impossible or even the inadvisable. Metrosexual manliness characterizes the combinations that political science must effect within, and apply to, society as a whole. Tocqueville's democracy requires feminine as well as masculine virtues, and well-channeled energy from anyone who can provide it.

CONCLUSION

Earlier I offered two justifications for my titular term, "metrosexual manliness." Upon reflection I should add a third: its potentially controversial veneer might attract readers' attention to deeper points underneath. Harvey Mansfield has taught many of us about the value of getting attention, at least those of us who have cared to reflect on his words. Teachers must be able to reach a wide range of students, conveying knowledge and techniques that everyone should possess, and then, with students whose tastes, habits, and abilities prompt deeper reflection, giving those few what they deserve as well. Metrosexual manliness is a silly concept that contains serious ideas. Democracy needs more energy, toughness, and moral courage, as well as more humanity, moderation, and moral restraint from its men and women. Which situations require which traits? From whom should we expect them? How will we elicit them? Answering those questions is the business of political philosophy and political science—or, at least, it should be.

NOTES

1. Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
2. Cf. Sharon Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Andrew Sabl, *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Chad Noyes, "The Birth of Political Science" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2003); Berger, *Attention Deficit Democracy and the End of Civic Engagement* (forthcoming).
3. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Hereafter cited in text as "DA" followed by page number.
4. Of course, Mansfield's manliness describes an *individual's* virtues, whereas my "metrosexual manliness" characterizes Tocqueville's prescription for *democracy's* health.
5. Paul McFedries defines a metrosexual as a straight man "who is not afraid to embrace his feminine side." Paul McFedries, "Metrosexual," *The Word Spy*, <http://www.wordspy.com/words/metrosexual.asp> (September 4, 2002). I use this sense of "metrosexual" rather than in the pejorative sense of a narcissist who dotes excessively on his appearance and lifestyle (which McFedries also associates with the term).
6. For Tocqueville's energetic women see, for example, DA 566–67. He admires not only the "indomitable energy" of American women but the femininity with which they maintain and employ it (DA, 574).
7. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (New York: Pocket Books, 1959), I, v, 44–58.
8. Spenser, Edmund, *The Faerie Queene* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1979), book III, canto XI, 471–76.
9. See, for example, Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Benjamin Barber, *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); and Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
10. As one example of voluntary disengagement: Democratic citizens' "habits and sentiments predispose them to recognize" a great central power and even "to lend it a hand." Tocqueville continues, "[n]ot only do [democratic citizens] not naturally have the taste to occupy themselves with the public, but often they lack the time to do it. Private life is so active in democratic times, so agitated, so filled with desires and work, that hardly any energy or leisure remains to each man for political life" (DA, 643).
11. DA, 643. Tocqueville's analyses of citizen disengagement and its causes are far too complex for simple encapsulation. I aim only to draw out those elements of Tocqueville's analysis that connect citizen disengagement and atomization to difficulties with political attention, energy, and perspective. The limitations of those human capacities can explain sufficiently, albeit not exhaustively, why citizens might voluntarily disengage from politics and self-government at the risk of their own long-term interests
12. DA, 515. The context of this quote is Tocqueville's admonition against excessive greed that can undermine material prosperity itself.

13. Here I refer to the original French and include various forms of *énergie*, including *énergique* (energetic) and *énergiquement* (energetically).

14. Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1981), 412a22–8; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 1153a10.

15. For the struggle between *thumos* and *eros* consider, for example, the story of Leontius in Plato's *Republic*. Leontius "noticed corpses lying by the public executioner. He desired to look, but at the same time he was disgusted and made himself turn away; and for a while he struggled and covered his face." Even when he is "overpowered by the desire" he rebukes himself in shame. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 439e.

16. See Aristotle's *Politics* on the relationship of *thumos* (or "spiritedness") to politics and also freedom: "Both the element of ruling and the element of freedom stem from this capacity [*thumos*] for everyone: spiritedness is a thing expert at ruling and indomitable." Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1328a5.

17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 173. Hereafter cited in the text as "OR" followed by page number.

18. "The most famous ancient republics had never admired a firmer courage, prouder souls, a more intractable love of independence than was then hiding in the wild woods of the New World" (*DA*, 25). See also *DA*, 322.

19. *OR*, 104: ". . . mais l'activité, l'énergie, le patriotisme communal, les vertus mâles et fécondes qu'elles ont inspirées ont disparu."

20. *DA*, 574. To be fair, Tocqueville's sentence concludes, "although they sometimes show themselves to be men in mind and heart." But he intends this remark as a front-handed rather than backhanded compliment.

21. Joshua Mitchell also emphasizes the importance of motion in Tocqueville's thought, although for wholly different reasons relating to the psychological effects of boundaries and restraints on people's motion. Joshua Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29–33.

22. *DA*, 332. While energy, movement, and freedom are intimately connected, the same holds true for the obverse combination (enervation, immobility, and the absence of freedom): "Man is so made that he prefers standing still to marching without independence toward a goal of which he is ignorant" (*DA*, 87).

23. For Arendt in "On Violence," true power (as opposed to brute force) "corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert . . . it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together." Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the "Republic"* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 143.

24. ". . . I cannot conceive that a nation can live, or above all prosper, without strong government centralization" (*DA*, 87–89). Of course, centralized government differs from centralized administration. The former consists of concentrating "certain interests . . . common to all parts of the nation . . . in the same place or under the same directing power." The latter consists of concentrating "other interests special to certain parts of the nation, such as . . . the undertakings of the township." Administrative centralization—remote, bureaucratic oversight of local interests and

affairs—saps local energy, limits the experience of self-government, and dulls the taste for the experience of freedom.

25. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Mentor, 1961), no. 37, p. 226. Hereafter cited in the text as “*Federalist*.”

26. Tocqueville’s one exception: “. . . one will not make anyone believe that a liberal, energetic, and wise government can ever issue form the suffrage of a people of servants” (*DA*, 665).

27. Tocqueville’s writings on soft and harsh despotism strongly influenced Hannah Arendt, who writes that “the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruelest and most tyrannical versions.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 40.

28. “It seems as if the French people were like those supposedly elementary particles inside which, the more closely it looks, modern physics keeps finding new particles” (*OR*, 16♣).

29. “Iron band” is Arendt’s term for the overly close compression that totalitarianism enforces; “mass society” is her term for atomized individuals. Both apply well to the social and political extremes that Tocqueville fears.

30. Joshua Mitchell expertly analyzes Tocqueville’s reliance upon religion to restrain democratic energy while maintaining democratic freedom. See Mitchell, *Fragility*, especially chapter 4 (“Christianity and Democracy”).

31. Cf. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide* (New York: Free Press, 1951), 252: “It is not true, then, that human activity can be released from all restraint. Nothing in the world can enjoy such a privilege . . . Man’s characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral . . .” See also Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005). Note that Tocqueville does not endorse state censorship of thought and expression, and he protests against the “tyranny of the majority” over the same. Apparently he considers religious strictures to be “salutary” because individuals can more easily defy or leave a religion than they can defy or leave their state or society.

32. “When, on leaving the agitations of the political world, the American returns to the bosom of his family, he immediately meets the image of order and peace. There, all his pleasures are simple and natural, his joys innocent and tranquil; and as he arrives at happiness through regularity of life, he becomes habituated to regulating his opinions as well as his tastes without difficulty” (*DA*, 279).

33. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1259b35. Of course, Aristotle does not himself consider women as active citizens.

34. Tocqueville’s stated purpose in *Democracy in America* is “to see not differently but further” (*DA*, 15). In the *Old Regime* he desires “to see into the heart of the old regime, so close to us in years, but hidden from us by the Revolution” (*OR*, 84). Further, on more than a dozen occasions in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville distinguishes what is apparent “at first glance” (“*au premier coup d’œil*”) and what turns out to be true upon more attentive analysis.

35. Note that France and the other European aristocracies that Tocqueville takes as his historical subjects—being based on inherited wealth and privilege rather than virtue or wisdom—surely do not represent aristocracy at its best (and leave us to

wonder whether a "best" aristocracy is purely hypothetical). Tocqueville observes considerable corruption and pettiness in those societies, and with regard to the coming Revolution, he says that the French aristocrats suffered from a "strange blindness" because "their minds had frozen in their ancestors' point of view" (*OR*, 198). I do not claim, or care to verify, that aristocratic perspective was ever as clear and far-reaching as Tocqueville occasionally suggests. I claim only that Tocqueville's account of clear perspective enduringly describes the foresight and judgment that democracy needs but struggles to attain.

36. Tocqueville's insights echo Hamilton's: "the people always intend the public good, but they often mistake the means," *Federalist*, no. 71, 432. Tocqueville quotes this very passage at length, *DA*, 144*n*.

37. Providing such perspective is one function of the "new political science" that "is needed for a world altogether new" (*DA*, 7). Tocqueville can look upon America with fresh eyes, unlike some of the chauvinistic Americans whose perspective is warped by their patriotic attachment.

38. "The doctrine of self-interest well understood seems to me of all philosophic theories the most appropriate to the needs of men in our times . . . Even should [modern moralists] judge it imperfect, they would still have to adopt it as necessary" (*DA*, 503).

39. For Tocqueville's observations regarding the American West, see *DA*, 50; for the South, see *DA*, 331–48.

40. Against such habitual blindness, or at least myopia, Tocqueville plays the role of Kent to the people's King Lear: "See better, Lear, and let me still remain/ the true blank of thine eye." William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970), I.i, 169–70.

41. To recall Hamilton's phrase, such an occurrence is "more ardently to be wished than seriously to be expected" (*Federalist*, no. 1, 33).

42. "To choose to limit choice in this way might be called *constitutionalizing* or *formalizing behavior*." Harvey C. Mansfield, *America's Constitutional Soul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 143.

43. The limited scope of this project prevents a proper exposition of religion's role in Tocqueville's analysis. That job has been ably undertaken by many scholars, including Mitchell, *Fragility*, and Sanford Kessler, *Tocqueville's Civil Religion: American Christianity and the Prospects for Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

44. In other words, while "One must . . . expect that individual interest will become more than ever the principal if not the unique motive of men's actions," still "it remains to know how each man will understand his individual interest" (*DA*, 503).

45. Tocqueville cites this old French maxim in *OR*, 199. Its message closely echoes Socrates's observation of democratic excesses in the *Republic*: "too much freedom seems to change into nothing but too much slavery, both for private man and city" (Plato, *Republic*, 564a).

46. In this regard Tocqueville follows Aristotle, whose *Rhetoric* addresses the nature and manipulability of attention. Aristotle writes that "all men are accustomed to devote their attention to what they like and admire," and that, with regard to aural attention, "hearers pay most attention to things that are important, that concern

their own interests, that are astonishing, that are agreeable . . ." Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004), 5.15.

47. William James's psychological theories also strongly support Tocqueville's contentions: "No matter how scatterbrained the type of a man's successive fields of consciousness may be, if he really cares for a subject, he will return to it incessantly from his incessant wanderings, and first and last do more with it, and get more results from it, than another person whose attention may be more continuous during a given interval, but whose passion for the subject is of a more languid and less permanent sort." William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Life's Ideals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

48. Consider Tocqueville's comparison of Ohio and Kentucky, the former a free state and the latter a slave state where the ideal of labor has been devalued (*DA*, 333).

49. *DA*, 528. The public's "regard" (*les regards*) here carries the sense of "attention," as the Lawrence translation has it. In the *Old Regime* Tocqueville depicts the French royal court's public appeal in the same manner, as a "brilliant" force that attracts public regard: "they were, in short, that which most struck contemporaries' eyes and too often monopolizes posterity's attention" (*OR*, 121).

50. Crises are especially dangerous during periods when citizens' materialism has outstripped their civic education or perspective. At such times, "the exercise of [citizens'] political duties appears to them a distressing contretemps that distracts them from their industry . . . they cannot waste their precious time in useless work." Rather than focusing their attention on threats to their liberty, preoccupied citizens are prone to cede their liberty to a designing individual or faction (*DA*, 515).

51. ". . . 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" (*DA*, 604).

52. *DA*, 419. The French is "*elle tend à les isoler les uns des autres, pour porter chacun d'eux à ne s'occuper que de lui seul.*" Tocqueville generally uses the verb *s'occuper* in the sense of occupying one's own attention, so another way to render this passage is found in Henry Reeve's translation: equality brings each citizen "to focus his attention on himself." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

53. Elsewhere, analyzing the democratic danger of military coups, Tocqueville blames "the love of material enjoyments and taste for well-being that equality naturally suggests to men," which is naturally opposed to energy, to "virile mores," and is "antipathetic to the military spirit . . ." Were the nation to become thus softened, "the army would take up its arms without ardor and would use them without energy . . ." (*DA* 702, note XXIII).

54. Cf. Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ilya Somin, "Voter Ignorance and the Democratic Ideal," *Critical Review* 12 (4) (1998): 413–58.

55. Rational choice theory specifies that "in acting rationally, an actor is engaging in some kind of optimization," which may be construed as "maximizing utility." James S. Coleman and Thomas J. Fararo, *Rational Choice Theory: Advocacy and Critique*, ed. James S. Coleman and Thomas J. Fararo (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), xi.

56. When Tocqueville writes that "the New England township unites two advantages that, everywhere they are found, keenly excite men's interest; that is to say: independence and power," he uses the term "interest" (*l'intérêt*) in the sense of "attention" or "regard." The township's advantages appeal to people's desires and hence excite their attention (*DA*, 63–64).

57. Almond and Verba's classic study of citizen engagement employs the term "subjective competence" to describe citizens' self-confidence and perceptions of political efficacy: "a subjectively competent citizen . . . is more likely to be an active citizen." Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 182. See also Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 346–47.

58. "One is occupied with the general interest at first by necessity and then by choice; what was calculation becomes instinct; and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens, one finally picks up the habit and taste of serving them" (*DA*, 488). Note that "by necessity" does not mean "by coercion"; citizens serve the public interest because they need each other.

59. "In democracies the people, constantly occupied as they are with affairs and jealous of their rights, prevent their representatives from deviating from a general line indicated by their interests" (*DA*, 233). The experience of political engagement not only keeps political attention alerted to possible encroachments; additionally, the occasional disorders of public life, "the little shocks that freedom continually gives the most secure societies," keeps political attention focused and "keep[s] awake public prudence" against long-term threats to self-government (*OR*, 199).

60. See Theda Skocpol, "The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy," *Social Science History* 21 (4) (Winter 1997): 455–79.

61. Cf. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; and Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

62. Cf. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 79.

63. In some cases, civil associations "instead of directing the minds of citizens toward public affairs . . . serve to distract them and, engaging them more and more in projects that cannot be accomplished without public peace, turn them away from revolutions" (*DA*, 499).

64. Contrasting the effects of "freedom and servitude," Tocqueville finds that on the Kentucky banks of the Ohio River "one would say that society is asleep; man seems idle." But on the Kentucky side "rises a confused noise that proclaims from afar the presence of industry . . . man appears rich and content: he works" (*DA*, 331–32).

65. Similarly, regarding American associational life around the turn of the twentieth century, Robert Putnam and Gerald Gamm speculate that small and medium-sized cities were the sites of many civic associations because they lacked other entertainment options. Gamm and Putnam, "The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840–1940," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (4) (Spring 1999): 549.

66. Benjamin Franklin, recounting the success of his early lending library, stresses the absence of competing attractions for the people's attention: ". . . reading became fashionable; and our people, having no public amusements to divert their attention from study, became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observed

by strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people of the same rank generally are in other countries." Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and Other Works* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 13–15.

67. For example: "The Anglo-Americans . . . admit that what seems good to them today can be replaced tomorrow by the better that is still hidden" (DA, 359).

68. "As he cannot know them all well, he is easily satisfied with imperfect notions" (DA, 584).

69. When Tocqueville writes, in this footnote, of *l'apathie générale* he is referring to the condition of "an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others . . ." (DA, 663). Such a condition is exactly what I have been calling a lack of political attention and hence perspective.

70. "During my stay in the United States I had remarked that a democratic social state like that of the Americans could singularly facilitate the establishment of despotism . . ." (DA, 661).

71. Cf. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; and Stephen Macedo et. al., *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

72. James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology*, Supplement (1994): S95–S120. Putnam has attributed the term "social capital" to Coleman.

73. Echoing Williams James's 1908 manifesto on national service, Senator Christopher Dodd recently proposed that mandatory community service be instituted in high schools nationwide. Holly Ramer, "Dodd Urges Mandatory Community Service," June 23, 2007, Associated Press, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory?id=3309445>.

74. Cf. T. S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* ("This is the way the world ends/Not with a bang but a whimper") which I invert here. T. S. Eliot, *Poems*, 1909–1925 (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926).