Germaine de Staël, *The Influence of the Passions on the Happiness of Individuals and Nations*

Intimately experiencing the before and after of the French Revolution, Germaine de Staël (1766-1817)—as a novelist, historian, literary critic, political philosopher—helped pivot Enlightenment towards Romanticism (as did Rousseau and Kant). She grew up amid luminaries of Enlightenment Paris in the important salon her mother established before the Revolution. She popularized the term "Romanticism," though her resistance to Napoleon marks her as someone not fully belonging to the Romantics. She was, in fact, a political liberal, indeed having a long partnership, and affair, with the great political philosopher Benjamin Constant.

Germaine's father was the Swiss Jacques Necker, celebrated finance minister to Louis XVI. She became Madame de Staël marrying a man who would become the Swedish ambassador to France—a marriage of convenience. Her first lover was Bishop Talleyrand, the foremost diplomat in Europe for decades. Exiled from Paris by Napoleon, she traveled all over Europe (the poet and critic August Schlegel was a traveling companion), eventually repairing to Château Coppet on Lake Geneva, where she established a glittering salon, whose visitors included Byron. [Some comments on the 1802 epistolary novel *Delphine* are in order. The persona of Talleyrand is presented in the character of Mme. de Vernon (who addresses Delphine in our selection), whose scheming secures for her own daughter (Mathilde) the man Delphine loves (Léonce). With her broken heart, Delphine finds refuge in a convent, controlled by Léonce's spiritually warped aunt, Mme. de Ternan.]

Introduction

What a time I have picked to write a treatise on the happiness of individuals and nations! Have I really done this right in my middle of a disastrous crisis touching everyone's destiny, when lightning is striking the valleys and high places alike? at a time when being alive is enough to drag one into universal commotion? a time when peace is disturbed even in the grave's embrace, when the dead are judged anew, and the urns dedicated to them by the people are being thrown out of the temple in which political factions had thought to immortalize them?

Yes: I have done this now, when the human race has risen up out of hope or the need for happiness—in this century when we have been led to reflect more deeply than ever before on the nature of individual and political happiness, on the way to achieve it, on its limitations, on the rocks separating us from such a goal. I would have been ashamed if I had been capable of writing this work during the two terrible years of the Reign of Terror in France; if I had been able to imagine any plan, or foresee any result to that horrible melange of human atrocities! Perhaps the next generation will examine the cause and effect of those two years; but we, the contemporaries and compatriots of the victims sacrificed in those days of blood, how could we have been able to generalize ideas, meditate on abstractions, separate ourselves for a moment from our impressions so as to analyze them then? No—even today, the rational mind cannot come anywhere near that incommensurable time. To judge those events—whatever words one uses to designate them—is to make them reenter the order of existing ideas, ideas for which there already were words or expressions. At that horrible image, all the impulses of your soul are born anew: you shudder, you are on fire, you want to fight, you wish you were dead; but your thinking mind still cannot grasp any of these memories, because the sensations created by them absorb every other faculty. I will therefore try to assemble some impartial observations about government without referring to this monstrous time, using some of the other main events of the French Revolution and the history of all nations. If these reflections lead me to agree with the first principles of France's republican constitution, I ask that even now—even amid the furors of partisan spirit tearing apart France, and through France the rest of the world—the reader should be able to imagine that enthusiasm for certain ideas is not mutually exclusive with contempt for certain men, and that hope for the future may be reconcilable with hatred for the past. Then, even though the heart is forever torn by its wounds, the mind can still, after a while, rise to general meditations.

We must now consider the nature of the great questions determining man's destiny, not merely their relation to the misfortunes which have accompanied them. Or at least we must find out if these misfortunes are essential to the institutions people are trying to establish in France, or if the effects of the revolution are really different from the effects of the constitution. Finally, we must have enough confidence in the elevation of our own souls to have no fear of being suspected of indifference about crime because we are examining ideas. It is with the same independence of mind that I have tried to paint the effects of the passions of man on his personal happiness in part I of this work. I do not know why it should be more difficult to be impartial about politics than about morality; the passions certainly have as much influence on life's outcome as politics, but nevertheless in the quiet of retreat, people talk reasonably about the feelings they have experienced. I would think it should be no more painful to talk philosophically about the advantages and disadvantages of republics and monarchies than to analyze precisely ambition, love, or any other passion which has determined your existence. In both parts of this work, I have tried to use only my mind, and to disengage it from every momentary impression: we will see if I have succeeded.

The real obstacle to individual and political happiness is the impulsive force of the passions, sweeping man away quite independently of own will. Without the passions, government would be as simple a machine as any lever the force of which is proportional to the weight it has to lift, and man's destiny would be evenly balanced between his desires and the possibility of satisfying them. I will therefore only consider morality and politics from the point of view of the difficulties posed to them by the passions. Dispassionate characters spontaneously place themselves in the most suitable position, which is almost always the one chance has pointed out to them—or if they alter it in any way, they do so only with whatever offers itself. Let us leave them, then, in their happy calm; they do not need us; their happiness seems as varied as the different fates destiny has allotted them, but the base of this happiness is always the assurance of never being disturbed or dominated by any force stronger than the self. The existence of these impassible beings is no doubt subject to material accidents which overturn fortunes, destroy health, etc., like that of all men; but such sorrows are delayed or prevented by positive calculations rather than by emotional or moral thoughts. The happiness of passionate characters however is completely dependent on what is going on within them; they are therefore the only ones to whom the reflections one can awaken in their souls can offer any solace. Their natural tendency to be carried away makes them vulnerable to the cruelest misfortunes, so they are more in need

of a system whose only aim is the avoidance of pain. And passionate characters are the only ones who, through various points of resemblance, can all be the object of the same general consideration. Other people live one by one, without analogy and without variety; their existence is monotonous, though each of them may have a different goal; there are as many tints as individuals, without a single real color in sight. [. . .]

Before going any further, we may need a definition of happiness. Happiness, as people wish for it, is the union of all contrary things. For individuals it is hope without fear, activity without anxiety, glory without calumny, love without inconstancy, imagination to embellish our possessions in our own eyes and fade the memory of what we have lost; the intoxication of moral nature, the good side of all conditions, talents, and pleasures without their accompanying evils. For nations happiness would also be a reconciliation of republican liberty with monarchical calm, the emulation of talents with the silence of factions, a military spirit abroad and respect for laws at home. Happiness, as man imagines it, is the impossible in every genre. Happiness as one can get it, the happiness on which man's reflection and will can act, is obtained only through a study of the best ways to avoid the greatest sorrows. This book is intended to seek that goal. [. . .]

I believe it would be a good thing to discuss on a purely abstract level some issues which have been caught up by contrary passions. By looking at the truth away from individual men and these times, we come to a demonstration more readily applicable to current circumstances. No matter how general the point of view from which one has discussed these great questions, however, it seems impossible not to end by specifying their relationship to France and the rest of Europe. Everything invites France to remain a republic; everything commands Europe not to follow her example. One of the most intelligent books of our time, by Benjamin Constant, has discussed the question of the current situation in France. Two sentimental motives strike me with particular force: would anyone want to suffer a new revolution to over throw the one which established the republic? and should the courage of so many armies and the blood of so many heroes have been wasted in the name of a chimera, whose only memorial would be the crimes it has cost?

France must persist in her great experiment: its danger is past, its hope is still to come. But can we inspire enough horror of revolution in the rest of Europe? Foreign philosophers will never be persuaded by the vehement declarations of the intolerant fanatics who detest the principles of the French constitution, show themselves the enemies of

any liberal idea, and make it a crime to love even the idea of a republic as if the scoundrels who polluted France could dishonor the cult of a Cato, a Brutus, a Sidney. But let Europe listen to the friends of liberty, the friends of the French Republic who hastened to adopt it as soon as they could do so without crime, as soon as it did not have to be paid for in blood. There now exists no monarchical government so abusive that a single day of revolution would not without more tears than all the evils the revolution was trying to correct. To want a revolution is to abandon both innocent and guilty to death; to condemn our dearest beloved, perhaps! and it is impossible to get oneself whatever one wanted at such a horrible price. In this dreadful movement, no man finishes what he began; no one can flatter himself that he directs an impulse which has been taken over by the nature of things. The Englishman who wanted to go down the waterfall of the Rhine at Schaffouse in a rowboat was not so crazy as the ambitious man who thinks he can steer his way through a whole revolution. Let us in France fight, win, suffer, die, in our affections, in our dearest inclinations—and be born again, perhaps, for the surprise and admiration of the world. But let a century pass on our destinies. Then you will know if we have acquired the true science of human happiness; if the old man was right all along, or if the young man did better with his property, the future. Alas! aren't you glad that a whole nation has put itself in the avant-garde of the human race to confront prejudices, and try to keep our principles? You, the contemporary generation, wait—keep away from barred and death sentences for a while. No duty can require such sacrifices., on the contrary, every duty makes it a law to avoid them.

I hope I will be forgiven for having been carried away beyond my subject—but who can be alive at this time, who can write, without feeling and thinking about the French Revolution? [. . .]

Whatever people think of my plan for this book, my only goal is plainly to struggle against unhappiness in all its forms, to study the thoughts, feelings, and institutions which make men unhappy and to try to discover the reflection, the impulse, the combination, which could diminish something of the intensity of the soul's torments. The image of misfortune in any shape pursues and overwhelms me. Alas! I have so often experienced suffering that an inexpressible wave of tenderness and painful anxiety comes over me when I think about the unhappiness of everyone and anyone; about the inevitable afflictions and torments of the imagination; the downfall of the honest, and even the remorse of the guilty; the heart's wounds, the most touching of all, and the regrets one blushes for without feeling them any the less; about ev-

erything that makes tears flow, those tears the ancients collected in a sacred urn because of their great respect for human unhappiness. Oh! It is not enough to swear that within the limits of one's existence, no matter how one has been wronged, one will never voluntarily be the cause of pain or give up the chance of soothing it. Beyond that, one has to try and see if some shadow of talent, some ability to meditate could find the voice with which melancholy gently moves the heart, or help discover a philosophical height beyond the reach of wounding blows. Finally, if time and study could teach us how to give political principles enough evidence so that they would stop being the object of two religions and a most bloodthirsty frenzy, it seems as if we would have offered a thorough examination of the way man's destiny is abandoned to the power of unhappiness.

On the Love of Glory

Love of glory is the most commanding of all the passions to which the human heart is susceptible. Traces of its impulses can be found in the primitive nature of man, but this is a feeling that reaches its real strength only in the midst of society. An emotion must absorb all the soul's affections to deserve the name of passion; the soul's pains and pleasures must be all related to the full development of its powers.

Next to the sublime kind of virtue that makes us look in our own consciences to find motives and aims for our conduct, love of glory is the most beautiful of the principles capable of moving our souls. I am giving the world "glory" its rightful greatness by not separating it from the real value of the actions it designates. In fact, genuine glory can never be acquired through relative celebrity. We always appeal to the universe and posterity to confirm the award of so august a crown; nothing but genius or virtue can keep it for long. When I think about ambition I will discuss the ephemeral success which imitates or reminds us of glory, but now I want to think about glory itself, which is truly great and just; and in order to judge the influence it has on happiness I will not shrink from showing it in all its alluring brilliance.

An honest, worthy lover of glory proposes a remarkable bargain to the human race. He says: "I will devote my talents to serving you; my ruling passion will keep arousing me to make an ever-increasing number of men enjoy the fruits of my labors. Nations and peoples I have never heard of will be entitled to the rewards of my insomnia; every thinking creature will be my kin. Free from the confines of individual feelings, I will measure my happiness only by the extent of my good deeds. All I ask of you in return for such devotion is this: that you celebrate it. Make fame acquit your gratitude. Virtue is

capable of taking pleasure in herself—I admit that—but I am in need of you to give me the reward I need to fuse the glory of my name with the merit of my actions." This contract is so frank! So simple! How can it be that no nation has ever happened to live up to it, and that only genius ever fulfills its side of the bargain?

It is certainly an intoxicating pleasure to fill the universe with your name, existing so far above yourself that you can fool yourself about the extent and length of your life, and believe you possess some few of the metaphysical attributes of infinity. Your soul fills with pride and gratification as it grows accustomed to feeling that all the thoughts of a large number of men are concentrated on you—that you exist in the presence of their hope—that any meditation of your mind may influence the fate of many—that great events are happening within you, demanding, in the name of the populace counting on your brilliance, the keenest possible attention to your own ideas. The crowd's applause arouses the soul by inspiring reflections as well as arousing commotion; youth is swept away with hope and set afire with emulation by all the lively forms glory takes. The paths leading to this great end are filled with delights; the occupations imposed by the desire to succeed are pleasurable in themselves; and the happiest part of the career of success is often the sequence of interests which precede it, taking an active hold on life.

Literary glory is subject to very different conditions from the glory of action. Literary glory may borrow something from solitary pleasures and participate in their rewards, but it cannot embody all the signs of the great passion glory; it is not the same as the dominating genius that sows, reaps, and crowns itself in a single instant, instantly determining through its sweeping eloquence or victorious courage the fate of centuries and empires. Nor is literary glory the omnipotent emotion that commands others by inspiring identical wishes in them, taking for the present all the pleasures of the future. Active genius is excused from waiting for the belated justice time drags in its wake; it makes its glory march ahead like the pillar of fire that lighted the way for the Israelites. The celebrity gained from writing rarely comes in one's own lifetime—and even when one is fortunate enough to obtain that advantage, a literary career does not have the same instantaneous effects and blazing brilliance; it cannot give the same total feeling of physical and moral strength, guarantee the exercise of all one's abilities, or intoxicate one with the certainty of one's own strength. We have to concentrate on the highest peak of happiness attained by love of glory if we are to be accurate judges of the obstacles and misfortunes it brings with it. [. . .]

On Vanity

You may well ask if vanity is a passion; the inadequacy of its object would make anyone have his doubts. If you observe the violence of the impulses vanity inspires, however, you will see the characteristic signs of the passions, and you will recognize their concomitant miseries in the servile way this feeling makes you dependent on the circle of those around you. Love of glory is based on the noblest elements in man's nature; ambition comes from the most positive side of human relations; but vanity fastens onto things which have no real value to oneself or other people, to specious advantage and passing effects. It lives on the leftovers of the other two passions. Sometimes it reinforces their power; man can reach his utmost limits through its strength and its weakness. More usually, however, those who experience it find that it overwhelms everything else within them. The agonies of this passion are very little known, because those who feel then, keep it a secret. As this is a sentiment everyone has agreed to despise, no one ever admits to the memories or fears it involves. [. . .]

This passion, great only in the pain it causes, and worthy of being treated on a par with the others only for that reason, reaches its full development in the emotional fluctuation of women. In women everything is either love or vanity. Whenever women want to have wider or more brilliant relationships than the relationships arising from the gentle affections they may inspire in those around them, they are laying claim to the triumphs of vanity. The same efforts which can earn glory and power for men almost never get anything for women except ephemeral applause and a reputation for intrigue—a kind of triumph which springs from vanity, a sentiment in proportion to their strengths and their destiny. It is in women, then, that we should examine vanity.

Some women put their vanity into advantages that have nothing to do with them personally, such as birth, rank, and fortune. It would be hard to show less feeling for the dignity of one's sex. The origin of all women is divine, because they owe their power to the gifts of nature: by concentrating on pride and ambition, they make everything magical about their charms disappear. As the credit women gain by this is invariably limited and fleeting, it earns them none of the respect that comes with great power. The successes women do win are characteristic of the triumphs of vanity, presupposing neither esteem nor respect for whoever is granted them. Women thus arouse antagonistic feelings in people who only meant to love them. There is a genuine absurdity clinging to women's efforts, the kind of absurdity that comes from a contrast with the essence of things. Whenever women oppose the plans and ambitions of men, they excite the acute resentment inspired by

unforeseen obstacles. If they meddle in political affairs while they are young, modesty must be the loser; if they are old, the revulsion they inspire as women harms their claims as humans. The face of a woman is always a help or a hindrance in her life story, whatever the strength or range of her mind, however important the things which concern her. Men have wanted it to be this way. And the more determined men are to judge a woman according to the advantages or faults of her sex, the more they hate seeing her embrace a destiny contrary to her nature.

These reflections are in not intended to turn women away from any kind of serious occupation, obviously, but rather to lead them away from the misfortune of taking themselves as the object of their own efforts. If the role they play in public come from their attachment for the man in control—if sentiment alone opinions and prompts their actions—they are not leaving the path nature has laid out for them. They love, they are women. When they abandon themselves to an active personality, however, when they try to make everything that happens revolve around themselves, thinking about events in relation to their own influence and individual interests, they are hardly worth even the ephemeral applause which constitutes vanity's triumphs. Women are almost never honored by any sort of pretentions. Even intellectual distinctions, which might seem to offer them a wider career, often just earn them an existence on the level of vanity. The reason for this ruling, fair or unfair, is that men see no kind of general utility in encouraging the successes of women in this career, and praise that is not based on utility can never be deep, or lasting, or universal. Chance provides a few exceptions; if there are a few souls carried away by their talent or their character, they may escape the common law—a few laurels may someday crown them. Even so, these women cannot escape the inevitable unhappiness which invariably clings to their destiny.

With every kind of personal ambition, women's happiness is the loser. When women are trying to please simply in order to be loved, when this sweet hope is the only motive for their actions, they are concerned with perfecting themselves rather than showing themselves, with molding their minds for one man's happiness rather than for universal admiration. Once they aspire to celebrity, though, their attempts and successes both alienate the sentiment that necessarily determines their life's fate under one name or another. A woman cannot exist by herself alone. Even glory does not give her enough support. The insurmountable weakness of her nature and her situation in the social order have placed her in a daily dependency from which even immortal genius would not be enough to rescue her. In any case, nothing eradicates the distinguishing characteristics of women's nature. A woman who

devoted herself to the solution of Euclid's problems would still want the happiness connected with the feelings we inspire and experience. Whenever women follow a career which puts them at a distance from these feelings, their painful regrets or ridiculous pretentions prove that nothing can compensate them for the destiny for which their souls were created. A famous woman's brilliant triumphs might seem to offer her lover some pleasurable sensations of pride, but such enthusiasm will probably not outlast an attraction based on the most trivial advantages. The criticism that always follows praise destroys the illusion through which all women need to be seen. Imagination can create or beautify an unknown object with its fantasies, but it has no more to offer anyone who has been judged by the whole of society. Real worth still remains, but love is much more taken by what it gives than by what it receives. Man delights in the superiority of his own nature; like Pygmalion, he bows down only to his own work.

In the end, if the brilliance of a woman's reputation attracts any homage in her wake, it is thanks to a feeling quite foreign to love—a feeling that looks like love, but which is a kind of means of access to the rising power one wants to flatter. People approach a woman of distinction like a man in a position of power: the language is different, but the motive is the same. Her admirers may mutually excite each other, intoxicated by the coincidence of tributes surrounding the woman they are concentrating on; but they are dependent on one another for this emotion. The first to leave could detach the ones who are still there, and the woman who is apparently the object of all their thoughts soon realizes that she is only keeping each of these men by the example of them all.

What feelings of jealousy and hatred are focused on a woman's great success! Envy's innumerable ways of persecuting her cause so much grief! Most women are against her, whether out of competitiveness, stupidity, or principle. Whatever a woman's talents may be, they always arouse anxiety in other women. Women deprived of intellectual distinctions can find a thousand ways to attack them when it is a woman who possesses them. A pretty creature who manages to thwart such distinction flatters herself that she is setting off her own advantages. A woman who considers herself remarkable because of the prudence and moderation of her mind, and who wants to look as if she has rejected things she never understood in the first place, never having had two ideas in her head in her life, can step out of her usual sterility to point out a thousand absurdities in a woman whose mind is giving the conversation life and variety. Mothers of families, who believe with some justice that the triumphs of even genuine wit are not

in accordance with women's destiny, take pleasure in watching attacks on those women who have obtained any such success.

As for a woman who has achieved real superiority, and might therefore think herself beyond the reach of hatred, capable of using her mind to raise herself to the destiny of the most famous men: she could never achieve their characteristic cairn and determination. Imagination would always be her most important faculty: her talent might gain from this, but her soul would be too deeply disturbed. Fantasies would upset her feelings, illusions mislead her actions. Her mind may deserve some glory for giving her writings the accuracy of reason; but the combination of great talents and passionate imagination deceives us about personal relationships, however enlightening about general conclusions it may be. Sensitive, humble women are the perfect example of that bizarre union of truth and error which distributes oracles to the universe and neglects the simplest advice for oneself. If we examine the small number of women with any real claim to glory, we see that their nature has always made this effort at the expense of their happiness. After singing the sweetest teachings of morality and philosophy, Sappho flung herself from the rock of Leucadia; after conquering the enemies of England, Elizabeth died a victim to her passion for the Earl of Essex. Before women begin a glorious career, whether aimed at Caesar's throne or the crown of literary genius, they must realize that to gain this glory they have to renounce the happiness and peace of the destiny of their sex—and to renounce the happiness and peace of the destiny of their sex—and that in this career there are very few fates which are worth the most obscure life of a beloved wife and happy mother.

So far I have been evaluating the brilliance of great fame; what shall I say of all those pretensions to petty literary triumphs for which so many women's feelings and duties are neglected? Absorbed in this interest, these women renounce the distinguishing characteristic of their sex even more thoroughly than the female warriors of the age of chivalry: it is far better to share the dangers of those we love in combat than to drag ourselves through the battles of self-love, forcing sentiment to do homage to vanity and drawing from the eternal well to satisfy fleeting impulses and limited desires.

A more natural pretension, closer to the hope of being loved, is the disturbance that makes women experience a need to please through the charm of their faces; this offers a striking picture of the torments of vanity.

Look at a woman in the middle of a ballroom, wanting to be thought

the prettiest and terrified of failure. The pleasure which is the nominal occasion for the gathering simply does not exist for her. There is no moment when she can enjoy this pleasure, for there is no moment free from her obsession and the efforts she makes to hide it. She watches the glances, the slightest signs of other people's opinion, with the attention of a moralist and the anxiety of a social climber. She may be trying to hide the torment of her mind from everyone's eyes, but her travail is apparent in her affected gaiety at her rival's triumph, the turbulence of the conversation she insists on having while her rival is being applauded—in short, the superfluity of her efforts. Grace, the ultimate charm of beauty, develops only in the serenity of natural self-confidence; anxiety and constraint deprive us of whatever advantages we may have. One's face changes with the contractions of self-love. People are not slow to notice it, and the pain of this discovery only increases the evil one is trying to remedy. Pain multiplies pain, and one's goal recedes through the action of desire itself. This picture may look like a child's story, but presents an adult's sorrows, the impulses which lead to despair and make us hate life; it is so true that our interests increase according to the intensity of the attention we pay them! and the sensations we experience come from the character receiving the sensation rather than from the object transmitting it!

Well, after this ballroom tableau illuminating vanity with some very frivolous pretensions, we will observe the full development of vanity in the greatest event to disturb the human race: the French Revolution. This emotion, so petty in its goal and motives that we might well have hesitated to place it as a passion, was one of the causes of the greatest shock ever to shake the universe. I can scarcely call vanity an impulse which carried twenty-four million men to reject the privileges of two hundred thousand: that is the revolt of reason—that is nature seeking its own level. I will not even say that the resistance of the nobility to the revolution was caused by vanity: the Reign of Terror brought down persecutions and misfortunes which no longer permit us to recall the past. But within the internal process of the Revolution, we can indeed observe the rule of vanity in the craving for ephemeral applause—the need to create an effect-that native French passion, understood only very vaguely by foreigners. Many opinions were dictated by a craving to surpass the orator who had just spoken, and to ensure that one was applauded after him. The mere introduction of spectators to the room where debates were going on was enough to change the direction of public affairs in France. In the beginning, people conceded nothing to applause except a sentence here and there. Before long, however, they were giving up principles, proposing decrees, even approving of crimes, to get that applause. In a reciprocal and disastrous reaction,

everything done to please the crowd made its judgments even wilder, and this wilder judgment then demanded new sacrifices. The primary reason for the consecration of barbaric decrees was not to satisfy feelings of hatred and fury, but to make the tribunes clap their hands. This noise intoxicated the orators and threw them into the same condition as savages are thrown by alcohol. The spectators themselves, who were applauding, were eager to create an effect on their neighbors by such signs of approval, and delighted in influencing their representatives. There is no doubt that the rule of fear followed the emulation of vanity, but it is vanity that created this power which destroyed all the spontaneous pulses of men for some time. Very soon after the Reign of Terror ended, it was clear that vanity was born anew. The most unimportant people were boasting of having been listed among the banished. Most of the Frenchmen one meets nowadays either claim to have played a leading role or assure one that nothing would have happened in France at all if people had believed the advice they gave somewhere, sometime, somehow. We are now surrounded by men who all call themselves the center of that immense whirlwind—men who would each have saved France single-handed from its misfortunes if they had been named to the highest government positions, but who all, by the same token, refuse to have any trust in superiority or recognize the influence of genius or virtue.

Does vanity help or hinder the maintenance of liberty in a great nation? This important question should be asked of those who think about philosophy and public affairs. In the beginning it certainly presents a real obstacle to the establishment of any new government; it is enough for a constitution to have been made by certain men for other men to refuse to adopt it. As happened after the session of the Constitutive Assembly, the innovators have to be banished for the institutions to be adopted; all the same, institutions die if they are not defended by their authors. Envy, glorified by the name of mistrust, destroys emulation, banishes brilliance, detests the combination of power and virtue, tries to divide them to oppose them to each other, and creates the power of crime, as the only power which degrades its possessor.

However, it may be possible for vanity to be useful in the maintenance of free institutions if it is the general temper of a nation at a maintenance of free institutions if it is the general temper of a nation at a time when lengthy misfortunes have beaten the passions down, when we need laws so much that we think of people only as they relate to the legal power entrusted to them. Vanity makes the rule of any one man hated, so it supports the constitutional laws which make the most powerful men soon return to private life. It generally supports

what the laws want, because law is an abstract authority shared by everyone and giving glory to no one. Vanity is the enemy of ambition; it enjoys overthrowing what it cannot get for itself. Vanity gives rise to disseminated pretensions in all classes and in all individuals. This puts an end to the power of glory, as bits of straw keep back the sea from the coasts of Holland. In the end, the vanity of all throws such obstacles and annoyances into the public career of each that a time will come when there will no longer exist in France the main disadvantage of republics—the need they create to play a role. Hatred, envy, suspicion, every child of vanity will make people permanently sick of ambition for public office and public affairs. No one will go near them except through love of country and devotion to humanity, generous and philosophical feelings which make men as imperturbable as the laws they are charged to carry out. This hope may be only a chimera, but I truly believe that vanity is willing to submit to laws as a way of avoiding the personal brilliance of proper names, and that it may be able to preserve a free and populous nation with an established constitution from the danger of having any one man as its usurper.

On Philosophy

I believe that philosophy, most exalted in its nature, could be a useful and possible source of help for passionate souls. We must place ourselves above ourselves in order to control ourselves and above others in order to expect nothing of them. Weary of trying in vain to secure happiness, the last illusion, we must resolve ourselves to abandon it; it will take all learn to conceive of life passively, to suffer its uniform flow, to make up for everything by thinking, to find in our thoughts the only events which depend on neither fate nor men. As soon as we have told ourselves that happiness is unobtainable, we are a good deal closer to reaching something like it, just as men whose fortunes have toppled are comfortable only after they have admitted to themselves that they are ruined. Once we have sacrificed our hopes, everything coming in on their account is an unexpected asset, possessed without forebodings of anxiety.

There are a thousand fragmentary delights in existence, none coming from a single source but all offering different pleasures to anyone with a soul at peace and ready to savor them; while a grand passion absorbs them all, refusing even to let us be aware of their existence.

The lover can see nothing but her footsteps; there no longer are flowers in any garden through which she has strolled. At the sight of villages surrounded by every gift of nature, the ambitious man wants to know if the governor of this district has a good reputation, or if the peasants

living in it can elect a deputy. External objects represent only one idea in the eyes of the passionate man, because they are judged by only one feeling. The philosopher has, by a great act of courage, freed his thoughts from the yoke of passion: he now no longer focuses them on a single object, and enjoys the pleasant impressions each of his ideas can provide for him in turn and individually.

What would really lead us to think of life as a voyage is that there never seems to be any preordained place to rest. Just try to fix your life to the absolute power of one idea or one feeling—it all turns into obstacles or misfortunes at every step. But if you let your life drift at the trying to find pleasure in each day without making it contribute to the whole happiness of all destiny—then it all comes easily. When the events of our lives are not heralded by burning desires or followed by bitter regrets, we are able to find enough happiness in the isolated pleasures aimlessly distributed by chance.

Youth could perhaps be devoted to the long odds of the passions if it were the only stage of man's existence, but the moment when age demands a new way of life is a transition which can be suffered painlessly only by the philosopher. We could enjoy some happiness at any age if our faculties and the desires to which they give birth were always in tune with our fate; but our faculties and our desires do not die simultaneously. Time often degrades our destiny without weakening our faculties, or weakens our faculties without deadening our desire. The soul's activity outlives the means of exercising it; desires last longer than the goods they make us crave. The pain of destruction is experienced with all the 'force of existence—it is like being present at one's own funeral, violently attached to this sad and lengthy spectacle, renewing the torture of Mezentius, linking life and death together.

On seizing control over the soul, philosophy certainly makes it place much less value on everything it possesses and hopes for. The passions inflate all the values to a much higher level; once this moderate price scale has been fixed, however, it lasts throughout the ages of life. Each moment is sufficient unto itself; one stage does not anticipate the next; the storms of passion do not confuse or hurry them. The years and everything they bring with them follow along peacefully according to the intention of nature, and man takes part in the calm of the order of the universe.

As I have said, anyone can enter the career of the passions if he is willing to put suicide on his list of resolutions; he can devote his life to this career, if he feels capable of ending that life as soon as a bolt of lightning overthrows the object of his prayers and efforts. But we

have a sort of instinct of preservation, closer to physical nature than moral sentiment, even when every instant of life brings new pain with it. Can we run the almost certain risk of a misery which will make us hate living, and a spiritual disposition which will make us afraid to end it? Not that there is any charm left to life in such a situation—but one has to assemble all one's motives for misery together at one time to conquer the indivisible idea of death. Unhappiness is spread over the length and breadth of one's days, whereas the terror inspired by suicide concentrates itself entirely in a single instant; and in order to kill oneself one would have to embrace the tableau of one's misfortunes and the spectacle of one's end with the intensity of a single feeling and a single idea.

But nothing is so horrifying as the possibility of existing simply because we do not know how to die. Such is the fate that may be lying in wait for all grand passions, however—and this nightmare is quit enough to make us love the power of philosophy for maintaining man on the level of life, without making him any too attached to it but also without making him hate it.

Philosophy is not insensitivity. The kind of philosophy offering the help I recommend here may decrease the effect of acute pain, but it also demands great strength of soul and mind. Insensitivity is not the result of a victory, but an ingrained habit. Philosophy is affected by its origin: invariably born of profound reflection and frequently inspired by a need to resist the passions, it requires superior qualities and provides an enjoyment of one's own faculties unknown to the insensitive man. Such a man is more suited to the world than the philosopher; he has no fear of society's turmoil disturbing the peace he enjoys. The secluded philosopher, owing this peace to the work of his own mind, enjoys his own pleasure in himself.

The self-possession acquired through meditation offers a satisfaction which is completely different from the pleasures of the man interested in his own personal self. The selfish man needs other people; he is demanding; he suffers every wound impatiently; he is dominated by his egoism, and if that feeling were capable of energy it would bear all the characteristic marks of a great passion; but the happiness a philosopher finds in self-possession is the feeling that gives real independence.

In a kind of pleasurable abstraction, we rise some distance above ourselves, watching ourselves think and live. We have no desire to control any event, so we think of all events as modifications of our being, exercising its faculties and hastening the process of its perfectibility in one way or another. We are now placing ourselves in relation to our own

consciousness, instead of to fate. Renouncing any influence over men and destiny, we take more pleasure in the action of the power we have kept for ourselves, in our self-control; and every day we make some discovery or change in this, the only property over which we believe we have any rights or influence.

For this kind of occupation one needs solitude and if it is true that the philosopher finds a means of enjoyment in solitude, he must be the happy man. Not only is living alone the best of conditions, because the most independent, but it also provides a satisfaction which is the touchstone of happiness: its source is so intimate and so deep-seated that even when one really possesses it, reflection always brings one closer to the certainty of experiencing it.

Solitude is an extremely dangerous situation for people whose souls are disturbed by great passions. Nature invites us to this repose; it seems man's immediate destiny; its enjoyment would seem to come before the need of society, especially after we have been living in society for any length of time; but this repose is a torture for the man dominated by a great passion. The calm all around him contrasts with his inner agitation, and only increases the pain of it. The way to try to weaken a great passion is through distraction. There is no point in starting a war with man-to-man combat; one must already have acted upon oneself before taking the risk of living alone.

Passionate characters are not at all afraid of solitude-far from that, they crave it, which is the proof that it nourishes their passion instead of destroying it. Troubled by depressing feelings, the soul is convinced that it can soothe its pain by paying more attention to it. The first instants when the heart is abandoned to reverie are delightful; but this pleasure consumes it very quickly. One may have put some distance between one's imagination and the source of the blaze, but the imagination has remained the same, and it pushes every opportunity for anxiety to the limit. In its isolation the imagination surrounds itself with chimeras; in silence and retreat, never touched by the real world, it gives an equal importance to everything it invents. It wants to escape the present, and gives itself to the future, which is much better suited to it and much more likely to disturb it. Its ruling idea has been left behind by events, and diversifies in a thousand different ways through the workings of the mind; one's brain is on fire and one's reason becomes weaker than ever. In the end solitude frightens the unhappy man, who believes his pain to be eternal. The peace all around him becomes an insult to the turmoil in his soul; the sameness of the days does not even offer him any change of misery. The violence of such misfortune in the heart of retreat is one more proof of the dis-

astrous influence of the passions, which put a distance between us and everything simple and easy. Their origin may be in man's nature, but they constantly struggle against his real goal.

Solitude is the most important asset of the philosopher, however. His reflections and resolutions may abandon him in the middle of society, and his most deeply held general principles yield to particular impressions. This is when self-government demands the surest hand. In retirement, the philosopher relates only to the pastoral setting around him; his soul is in harmony with the peaceful sensations inspired by this setting, and uses them to think and live. People hardly ever come to philosophy without having first made some attempt at obtaining goods closer to youth's fantasies, and in renouncing them the soul creates its happiness out of a sort of unexpectedly pleasant melancholy, toward which everything seems to tend sooner or later. There is such an analogy between this moral disposition and the sights and happenings of the countryside that it is tempting to think Providence intended everyone to achieve it, and everything to coincide in inspiring it in us as soon as we reach the time of life when the soul is weary of working on behalf of its own fate, tired even of hope, with no ambition but the absence of pain. All nature seems to lend itself to the feelings men experience then. The sound of the wind, the burst of thunderstorms, a summer evening, winter's hoar-frost—these contradictory motions and tableaux produce similar impressions, and give rise to the soul's sweet melancholy, man's true feeling, the result of his destiny, and the only disposition of his heart which allows meditation its full action and all its power.

Conclusion

[. . .] In writing this work, where I pursue the passions as destructive to happiness and hope to provide resources for keeping life going without their help, it is myself too that I have been trying to persuade. I have written to find myself, through so many sorrows, to free my faculties from the slavery of feelings, to elevate myself to a kind of abstraction that will let me observe the pain of my own soul, to examine in my own impressions the movements of moral nature, and to generalize the experience provided by thought. Since complete abstraction is impossible, I tried to see if meditating on the very things that concern us would not lead to the same result—if the phantom did not vanish faster when we approach it than when we distance ourselves from it. I tried to discover whether the painful sharpness of personal experience was not blunted a little if we placed ourselves in the vast tableau of destinies, where everyone is lost in his century, the century lost in time, and time lost in the incomprehensible. I tried it, and I

am not sure I succeeded in this first attempt to try my doctrine out on myself. Am I the best person, then, to affirm its power? Alas! as reflection comes closer to everything that makes up the human character, we lose ourselves in vacant melancholy. Political institutions and social relationships offer almost certain ways to happiness or sadness, but the depths of the soul are so hard to sound! Sometimes superstition keeps us from thinking and feeling, upsets our ideas, moves all our impulses contrary to their natural direction, and somehow bonds us to our unhappiness itself, if it is caused by a sacrifice, or can become the object of one. At other times, blazing, frenzied passion cannot bear any obstacle or accept the most minor deprivation, but disdains the future, pursuing each instant as the only instant, and awakens only at the end or in the abyss. What an inexplicable phenomenon is man's spiritual existence! If we compare it to matter, all the attributes of which are complete and in accord, it still seems only on the eve of its own creation, in the chaos of the day before. [. . .]