doi:10.1017/S0003055415000258 © American Political Science Association 2015

Tocqueville on Religion, the Enlightenment, and the Democratic Soul

AARON L. HEROLD *Department of Political Science, College of the Holy Cross*

This article proposes a new interpretation of Tocqueville's thought, one that focuses on his account of religious psychology. From his observations of America, Tocqueville concludes that human beings have a natural hope for immortality—a hope that is driven by a paradoxical but ineradicable desire to affirm and forget oneself simultaneously. Tocqueville formulates this insight as a critique of the Enlightenment thinkers who laid the foundations for liberal democracy; I argue that he crafts his "new political science" to provide healthy outlets for the religious hopes whose existence these thinkers largely denied and whose anomalous presence in the United States has accordingly led to unforeseen dangers. Tocqueville's analysis not only helps us understand and begin to remedy those dissatisfactions that characterize democracy today but it also reveals his theoretical depth, political moderation, and sober assessment of our moral psychology in a way not seen before.

> "Only by a kind of aberration of the intellect and with the aid of a sort of moral violence exercised on their own nature do men stray from religious beliefs; an invincible inclination leads them back to them. Disbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity."
> Tocqueville (2000, 284)

> "Today religion is passing away."
> Tocqueville (2000, 89)

This article seeks to help us address the problems and challenges facing liberal democracy today by presenting a new interpretation of Tocqueville's thought, one that focuses on his account of religious psychology. In both volumes of *Democracy in America*,[1] Tocqueville describes the presence in human nature of a "taste for the infinite" and a "love of what is immortal" (2000, 510). Moreover, he tells us that his observations of American life led him to the view that this "natural" hope for immortality is driven by a paradoxical and ineradicable desire to affirm and forget oneself simultaneously or to seek a kind of happiness that is found, at least partially, in acts of self-sacrifice (283–84). Although the importance of these comments has been widely noted by scholars, they have generally not been analyzed in depth or brought to bear on Tocqueville's thought as a whole.[2] Yet doing so is of crucial importance for elucidating the guiding concerns, underlying methods, and practical solutions of his "new political science" (7). For that political science, I argue, is chiefly designed to rectify the shortcomings of Tocqueville's Enlightenment predecessors, who, in their belief that religion was rooted in poverty, ignorance, and oppression, had mistakenly predicted that the advent of a liberal and commercial republic would satisfy our deepest longings.

In this, Tocqueville's project addresses our contemporary concerns in a particularly distinct and compelling way. Although our political life in the West is in large part defined by an adherence to the liberal and democratic ideals of the Enlightenment, it also continues to be shaped by that movement's problematic legacy of bequeathing to us certain troubling self-doubts. In recent years, on both the left (Sandel 1996; Viroli 2002) and the right (Glendon 1993; Kraynak 2001, 169–71; Neuhaus 1984, 105), a growing chorus of voices has come to regard liberal democracy's rights-based egalitarian morality as too thin, too narrowly procedural and individualistic, and perhaps even insufficiently conducive to human flourishing—especially when that flourishing is seen to consist of acts of self-overcoming or of self-sacrifice (Pangle 2010a). Moreover, this dissatisfaction with a purely individualistic conception of liberalism, born of an admiration for devotion, has a long pedigree in America. In the past century, it can be seen at least as far back as John F. Kennedy's inaugural declaration that we ought to ask not what our country can do for us, but what we can do for our country—a statement that continues to be strikingly compelling because of its somewhat un-Jeffersonian spirit or for its attempt to conceive of the ideals of the Declaration of Independence not just as a set of self-regarding rights but also as a framework for other-regarding duties.

In what follows, I suggest that this same question of how to remedy this sense of dissatisfaction, or how to carve out avenues for self-sacrifice in a world shaped by the Enlightenment's emphasis on individual self-interest, was also Tocqueville's guiding problem—his "mother thought" (14)—and that he wrote *Democracy in America* to help us understand it and begin to resolve it. In so doing, I offer a more complicated explanation of Tocqueville's understanding of human psychology, and thereby of the character and goals of his political science, than what is found in the existing literature.

Aaron L. Herold is Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, College of the Holy Cross (aherold@holycross.edu).

For the comments they provided on earlier versions of the argument contained in this article, as well as for their help in thinking about Tocqueville more generally, I would like to thank Thomas Pangle, Russell Muirhead, J. Judd Owen, Lorraine Pangle, Devin Stauffer, and Jeffrey Tulis. I would also like to convey my gratitude to Carly Herold, as well as to the editors and anonymous reviewers at the *APSR*.

[1] References to *Democracy in America* come from the 2000 edition, in consultation with Tocqueville (2010).

[2] See, e.g., Goldstein (1975, 6, 23); Hinckley (1990, 40); Kessler (1977, 125); Zuckert (1981, 259–61); but cf. Maletz (2005, 8–10) and Manent (1996, 87–88). Lawler (1993, 145–46) goes furthest in this regard by placing a Pascalian psychology of restiveness at the core of Tocqueville's thought, but he does not stress the desire for self-sacrifice as an essential aspect of it.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although scholars have noted that Tocqueville saw modern democracy as in large part defined by the ascendancy of material self-interest,[3] they have in general tended to present him as seeking either to encourage or to roll back that development. Thus, those writers who regard Tocqueville as an admirer of the Enlightenment project have found in his work an attempt to continue the spread of liberal commercialism (Anastaplo 1991; Kessler 1994, 59; Zetterbaum 1967, 104–5, 132–37). Conversely, others who argue for a more communitarian Tocqueville have characterized his project as a wholehearted attempt to overcome material self-interest—whether from an attachment to Rousseauean collectivism (Koritansky 2009; cf. Bloom 1990, 312–13) or from an admiration for classical (Hebert 2008; 2012), Christian (Lawler 1993; 1999, 1–5, 106; Mitchell 1995), or aristocratic virtue (Banfield 1991; Boesche 2009; Kraynak 1987).

What I suggest here, by contrast, is that Tocqueville adopted a friendly yet critical attitude toward the political world that the Enlightenment created. Although he was sympathetic to the Jeffersonian idea that government exists to protect our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, he also noted that Americans were troubled by the recognition that a life devoted solely to the personal enjoyment of those rights cannot be a fully happy one. Rather, as I show in the first part of this article, Tocqueville's observations of religion in America convinced him that human nature is characterized by "a natural disgust for existence and an immense desire to exist" (284)—a paradoxical longing, leading to an enduring hope for another life—that the "philosophers of the eighteenth century" (282) who laid the basis for our regime either failed to recognize or thought derivative of certain underlying material conditions. Because of this neglect, these thinkers left this longing uncontrolled and undirected, and I argue in the second section that this oversight lies at the root of the dissatisfactions, anxieties, and troubling pathologies that Tocqueville discerned among us. In the third section, I describe the political dangers Tocqueville saw looming as a consequence, and I note some ways his political science seeks to prevent them by providing healthy outlets for this paradoxical longing. Finally, I conclude by making some broad suggestions for what his political science might counsel today and by assessing the merits and importance of Tocqueville's religious psychology. I contend that this teaching, especially as it leads him to a sobriety about what can be expected from political life, reveals Tocqueville's theoretical depth and the distinctive virtues of his political science in a way not seen before. In particular, Tocqueville's work lays the basis for a kind of moderation seldom found in today's debates, because he provides a way to address liberal democracy's shortcomings while also acknowledging the compelling, but by no means unblemished, character of its claim to justice.

RELIGION IN HUMAN NATURE AND IN AMERICA

That Tocqueville saw himself as a critic of the Enlightenment is not immediately obvious. In *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, he discovers part of the French Revolution's origins in the public role of Enlightenment-inspired intellectuals (Tessitore 2013, 225–28; Tocqueville 2004, 195–202), and in an 1852 speech to the French Academy he claims that this "political science" was fundamental in reshaping society from the top down. In that speech, he even draws from this conclusion the universal lesson that the political sciences everywhere produce "a sort of intellectual atmosphere where the spirit of the governed and the governments breathe" (Tocqueville 1951, 16:233; 2011). But in *Democracy in America* he uncovers the foundations of politics in the United States not in Enlightenment liberalism—he never mentions Locke or the Declaration of Independence, for example (cf. West 1991)—but in the Puritans' "democratic and republican" Christianity (32, 405). Tocqueville's main thesis in this work is that, unlike in post-revolutionary France, where partisans of Christianity and those of liberalism and democracy oppose one another (Ceaser 1985; Tessitore 2013), the American example shows that these things are naturally "in accord" (43; Manent 1996, 89). For its long-term survival, Tocqueville insists, democratic freedom requires religion to provide moral restraints (282), and in America a robust and even orthodox Christian piety does this. But he also suggests that this fact reveals a critical and characteristic error in Enlightenment thought: "The philosophers of the eighteenth century explained the gradual weakening of beliefs in an altogether simple fashion. Religious zeal, they said, will be extinguished as freedom and enlightenment increase." America, however, shows "that the facts do not accord with this theory," because it continues to be influenced in decisive ways by Puritanism, even in 1835 (cf. 267).

As Tocqueville makes clear in *The Old Regime* and his 1852 speech, it was the intellectual heirs of these eighteenth-century thinkers who endowed the French Revolution with its enduring hostility to Christianity. These philosophers considered religion an ally of monarchy because they placed its origins in poverty, ignorance, and despotism, and if they did not expect it to disappear completely under liberal democracy, they at least predicted that the diffusion of science, the increase of wealth, and the spread of political freedom would dampen zealotry—and this thought can also be found in their seventeenth-century forerunners, above all Spinoza (*Theologico-Political Treatise*, preface, Bruder nos. 5–6, 33 with xx.11; Herold 2013; Israel 2001, 709–20). When Tocqueville mentions these eighteenth-century thinkers in *Democracy in America* he does not single out any one of them as particularly influential in popularizing these ideas, but his

[3] Most recently, Stauffer provides a compelling account of the "sociological and aesthetic" causes of the decline of devotion in democracy. Stauffer presents Tocqueville as publicly resigned (even as he was privately resistant to) a permanent reorientation of our moral concerns toward self-interest (Stauffer 2014, 772, 779–82).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

characterization of their project clearly recalls Montesquieu's famous declaration that the surest way to attack religion is by favor or by the hope of wealth that characterizes life in a commercial republic (*Spirit of the Laws* xxv.12; cf. Bartlett 2001, 30–32). Indeed, as Pangle has recently shown (2010b, 99–130), Montesquieu's entire project in *The Spirit of the Laws* can be seen as an attempt to implement this essentially Spinozistic vision in which commerce and the spread of material comfort provide mundane satisfactions for the longing for immortality.

Although elements of this project were espoused by at least the most radical of the American founders,[4] Tocqueville's surface impression is that it should be regarded as an exclusively European phenomenon—where it has become dominant, so much so that the continent's elite holds that human happiness lacks nothing "except to believe with Spinoza in the eternity of the world" (281; cf. also 425). But although Tocqueville indicates that the American mindset has not been explicitly or self-consciously influenced by the Enlightenment, he also describes it as identical to the outlook elaborated by Descartes (403)—and this, together with his other scattered descriptions of Americans' religiosity, seems designed to encourage us to question his repeated declarations of its continuing Puritan influence. The Puritans, after all, saw the biblical God's miracles all around them, and they braved the hazards of colonial settlement because they believed they were reenacting the Exodus (32–44). Tocqueville's Americans, by contrast, do read the Bible weekly (517), but in general they display a Cartesian distrust of authority, which gives them "little faith in the extraordinary and an almost invincible distaste for the supernatural" (404). Because "it seems to be reason much more than heart that leads them to the foot of the altar" (505), Americans tend to view Christianity primarily—if not exclusively—as a (liberal democratic) moral teaching, and they often attend church because they regard that moral teaching as necessary for the maintenance of their republic (280–81, 419–22). Because "the entire nation" holds this view (280), religion reigns in America "less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion" (409), and its content has adjusted to accommodate democratic tastes. Thus, American priests endorse toleration and the separation of church and state on theological grounds (283, cf. 37–39), and they give their imprimatur to commercialism not only by advertising religion's social utility but also by frequently placing the rewards for piety "in this world" (505).

Although Tocqueville does not draw this connection, the outlook of America's Christians as he describes it bears a striking resemblance to the theology of John Locke (cf. Locke 1965, 154 [para. 222]; 1982, 20 [sec. 31]; 1983, 26–27). Having been influenced by the moderate rather than the radical Enlightenment, they differ from Europe's Spinozists only in their belief that the survival of a morality of individual freedom, economic acquisition, and popular sovereignty—and thus their long term self-interest—requires the moral restrictions that religion provides (cf., e.g., 280 with Locke 1965, para. 172, 243–45; 1983, 51; see Herold 2014).[5] But how stable or long lasting is such a religious consciousness likely to be? One of the most common criticisms of Tocqueville among scholars concerns his apparent support for Americans' "religious functionalism" (Kessler 1977; 1994, 52–54; Lively 1965, 196–99; Zetterbaum 1967, 119–22). According to this view, to the extent that religion becomes prized for its political utility rather than its truth, it erodes the foundation of that utility (Manent 1996, 91). Moreover, because Americans' religion is rooted in the opinion of the majority, how can it be expected simultaneously to restrain that majority's impulses, especially when those impulses have been shaped to a great extent by an attachment to commercial self-interest (cf. Zuckert 1981, 272–23)? With the benefit of hindsight, can we not view the compromises with materialism that American religion was already making in the nineteenth century as the initial stages of a more complete secularization?

To these criticisms we could add that, in praising the effectiveness of civil religion, Tocqueville actually seems quite close to his Enlightenment predecessors, even the most radical of whom spoke of a need to preserve religion for its social benefits (cf. Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, ch. 14). But Tocqueville's break from those predecessors, as well as his response to his scholarly critics, can be seen from several indications he provides that he is well aware of the problems inherent in Americans' piety. One of his most prominent themes is that religion can never die because human beings have a natural desire for immortality. But that does not necessarily mean one will find manifestations of that desire in the churches; as Tocqueville closes his discussion of religion in Volume I, he indicates that Americans' punctilious attention to its "external duties" (282) may contain the seed of a more "European" outlook. He writes that, when faith has been attacked by "negative" doctrines that deny one religion without asserting the truth of another (286), private doubt and public observance advance together. At such times, men "let the object of their dearest hopes escape them almost by forgetting." He continues,

> In ceasing to believe religion true, the unbeliever continues to judge it useful. Considering religious beliefs under a human aspect, he recognizes their empire over mores, their

[4] E.g. by Thomas Paine, as well as by Jefferson, who (despite his hostility to urban commercialism) predicted that toleration would weaken religious passions and that all Americans would eventually become Unitarians (Jefferson to Waterhouse, June 26, 1822 [Jefferson 1984, 1459)]; see Berns 1986, 222–23).

[5] Most representative of American sentiment in this regard may be Washington's declaration in his Farewell Address of the polity's need of religion to inculcate moral habits leading to "political prosperity" and "the security of property." Washington thus notes that religion should gain the support of the "mere politician, equally with the pious man," and he closes this famous statement by indirectly addressing the potential objections of those influenced by Enlightenment science: "Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle" (Washington 1997, 971).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> influence on laws. He understands how they can make men live in peace and prepare them gently for death. He therefore regrets his faith after he has lost it, and deprived of a good of which he knows the entire value, he fears to take it away from those who still possess it. (286)

Because Tocqueville has already attributed precisely these opinions to Americans, he here encourages his reader to question whether the faith he describes as apparently so vibrant in the United States might not in fact have a hollow core. Indeed, in a very candid letter to Kergorlay, he notes that the great "practical exactitude that accompanies the practice of religion" in America only hides the fact that "religion does not move people deeply." Although the Sabbath is observed rigorously, "there is a great store of doubt and indifference hidden underneath these external forms. Political passion is not mixed, as it is in our country, with irreligion, but even so religion does not have any more power. It is a very strong impulse that was given in days gone by and which is now expiring day by day" (Tocqueville 1985, 48–49).

So even though practically all nineteenth-century Americans went to church, because a large number of them went for the wrong reasons, this situation was unlikely to endure. As Tocqueville presents it, American Christianity is a cultural phenomenon whose presence and continued influence are attributable mainly to historical inertia.[6] Given this observation, it is tempting to suspect that Tocqueville's praise of American religion is meant not to describe it but to encourage it. But to see why he wants to do this and why, the preceding notwithstanding, he believes such a thing possible, it is necessary to examine his enigmatic discussion of "THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES THAT MAKE RELIGION POWERFUL IN AMERICA" (282). This titled subsection occurs after Tocqueville's analysis of America's civil religion, and it begins with the critique, mentioned earlier, of the "philosophers of the eighteenth century" (282). It thus seems to promise to show why religion remains strong in the United States despite the Enlightenment's prediction that faith or at least religious zeal would weaken in a country like the United States. But if American Christianity has actually been considerably weakened, what message is he trying to convey here?

To answer this question, it is helpful to begin by recognizing that this section also contains one of Tocqueville's most explicit descriptions of his own activity as a political scientist. "On my arrival in the United States," he writes, "it was the religious aspect of the country that first struck my eye" (282). After noticing that, in contrast to the predictions of the eighteenth-century philosophers, religion and freedom apparently march hand in hand in America, Tocqueville felt his "desire to know the cause of this phenomenon growing daily" (282). "To learn it," he "interrogated the faithful of all communions." To priests and laymen alike, he says, "I expressed my astonishment and exposed my doubts," and what he found as a result of these conversations was that Americans universally attributed the power of religion in their country to the separation of church and state (282–83). But Tocqueville refuses to stop there—one could characterize this as the agreed-on opinion of the parties, and as he states in the introduction to his work, his task in writing it was to come "to see, not differently, but further than the parties" (15). And so he continues: "I wanted to bring the facts back to causes: I wondered how it could happen that in diminishing the apparent force of a religion one came to increase its real power, and I believed it was not impossible to discover this." The answer Tocqueville came to provides his fullest articulation of his understanding of human religious psychology:

> The short space of sixty years will never confine the whole imagination of man; the incomplete joys of this world will never suffice for his heart. Alone among all the beings, man shows a natural disgust for existence and an immense desire to exist; he scorns life and fears nothingness. These different instincts constantly drive his soul toward contemplation of another world, and it is religion that guides it there. Religion is therefore only a particular form of hope, and it is as natural to the human heart as hope itself. Only by a kind of aberration of the intellect and with the aid of a sort of moral violence exercised on their own nature do men stray from religious beliefs; an invincible inclination leads them back to them. Disbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity. (283–84)

Scholars have pointed to statements like this one, in which Tocqueville describes an innate human need for the infinite, as evidence of his own religious faith (e.g., Goldstein 1975, 6). But Tocqueville repeatedly notes that his examination of religion is conducted "from a purely human point of view" (284, 419), and in the present passage at least, by describing religion as "only a particular form of hope," he provides an undoubtedly naturalistic explanation of its character and origins. But that naturalistic explanation nonetheless makes clear the difference between his humanistic portrait of our religious psychology and that of his Enlightenment predecessors. As previously mentioned, those predecessors stressed the primary role played by fear, ignorance, and the desire for well-being in giving rise to so-called superstition (cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 12; Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, preface). Tocqueville, by contrast, not only gives priority to hope over fear but he also indicates that such hope is characterized by a scorn for life or a desire to overcome oneself.

Put somewhat differently, Tocqueville suggests that what characterizes a truly human soul is a paradoxical and perhaps tension-ridden desire to affirm oneself—to lay claim to an unending, immortal existence—by engaging in acts of willful self-sacrifice. Human beings are the only animals that can never simply be happy with life in this world, no matter how comfortable and long lasting it may be. Rather, the anxieties and frustrations they feel can be traced to a desire to transcend this life, both because they hope for something

[6] Thus, Tocqueville describes Puritan influence in America as akin to "those fragments of broken chains that one sometimes still sees dangling from the vaults of an old building, no longer supporting anything" (28; cf. Mitchell 1995, 213).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

better and because they think a life devoted to the goods of this world alone is simply not worth living. As he states elsewhere, our conception of virtue is such that, whatever efforts one makes to prove its utility, "it will always be hard to make a man who does not wish to die live well" (504). But although we believe that to live only to stay alive is hardly human, we are also deeply conscious of the brevity of life and terrified by the prospect of nonexistence after death. In a human soul, these "different" and perhaps contradictory instincts always accompany one another, and when fused together they drive us to contemplate the idea of an eternal and perfect existence—one free not only of the pains and defects of this life but also of the spiritual dissatisfactions and anxieties that always accompany an existence devoted exclusively to temporal needs and pleasures. In Tocqueville's understanding, it is religion—one particular form of hope—that in most cases serves as an intellectual guide that directs and shapes this desire for immortality. It fixes this longing on certain objects; it indicates the value, necessity, and character of self-sacrifice; and it articulates a vision of another world in which that sacrifice is rewarded.

When religion is not present, however—as, for example, when it has been attacked by "negative" doctrines—this dual longing for self-affirmation and self-sacrifice remains, though without an influence to guide and shape it. It is here, in Tocqueville's comments about the "moral violence" such negative doctrines do to human nature, that we can see his implied critique of his Enlightenment predecessors. Because the early modern thinkers located the natural origins of religion in strictly self-interested and temporal concerns, they failed to recognize that human beings have an innate desire that will always cause them to scorn life for the sake of eternity. Moreover, because they overlooked this longing, the Enlightenment thinkers' political science, which was integral in the creation of the American regime and way of life, necessarily left that longing uncontrolled and undirected.[7] In other words, Tocqueville's discussion of religion in Volume I, which is ostensibly meant to show the strength of American religiosity, actually reveals the ways in which what "ought to be, in our day, *the natural state* of men in the matter of religion" (286, emphasis in original) is actually *not* present. In America, the link between religious hopes and religion itself has been broken. These hopes remain in a society where the churches are emptying, but because they lack a healthy outlet, they are beginning to manifest themselves in other, perhaps potentially dangerous forms.

AMERICA'S ANXIETY AND DISCONTENT

Tocqueville's analysis of American religious sentiment provides an illustrative example of the methods of his political science. By undertaking a series of conversations with Americans of all political and religious persuasions, he assesses the political results of the Enlightenment in a way alien to its spirit. In contrast to the major early modern thinkers, who began from the "state of nature"—a thought experiment whose fundamental presupposition was that all actual politics is a convention that must be stripped away to arrive at a correct understanding of human existence—Tocqueville engages political life directly and on its own terms.[8] By thus attempting "to see, not differently, but further than the parties" (15), he gives to ordinary moral and political opinions a dignity that the Enlightenment perhaps refused to bestow on them—and while doing so, he uncovers certain dissatisfactions and anxieties that appear to be evidence of the Enlightenment's failure to carve out a place for certain innate religious hopes whose existence it largely denied.

Foremost among these anxieties is a peculiar and unexpected restiveness that Americans display in the midst of their prosperity. In the United States, Tocqueville tells us, where laws designed to consolidate wealth have been abolished, and where the opportunity of each to rise in the world thus appears unlimited, the love "of well-being has become the national and dominant taste; the great current of human passions bears from this direction; it carries everything along in its course" (507–8; cf. 47–52). That the "mother passion" (422) of democratic times should be not political or religious but commercial would certainly have pleased Spinoza, Montesquieu, and those other early modern thinkers who sought to turn human hopes toward "commodious living" in this world (Hobbes, *Leviathan* xiii.14; Locke, *Second Treatise*, ch. 5). To Tocqueville as well, this development is neither surprising nor a source of unqualified opposition. He writes that the desire for prosperity is "natural to men who are excited and limited by the obscurity of their origin and the mediocrity of their fortune," and it can be expected to color the sentiments of any society where the middle class predominates (507). Moreover, it has a potentially noble side, because there "is in fact a manly and legitimate passion for equality that incites men to want all to be strong and esteemed" (52). If it does not transform itself into resentment of the rich, the American dream of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps has the potential to express something admirable about democratic life.

Unlike under aristocracy, where the "official" moral doctrine held "that it is glorious to forget oneself and to do good without self interest like God himself" (500–1), democratic minds are universally preoccupied with the idea of well-being and so rarely contemplate such "sublime" visions of self-transcendence (500, 506;

[7] One might consider in this regard the way that the American vision of a commercial republic—as found, for example, in *The Federalist*—continues or presupposes the Enlightenment's achievement in quelling religious fanaticism through toleration and the redirection of human efforts toward economic activity (see Berns 1986, 224ff. together with Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1961, 73–74, 79, 321).

[8] For this reason Tocqueville's scientific method has been occasionally associated with that of Aristotle and the classical tradition (Ceaser 1990; Eden 1990; Kraynak 1987; Manent 2006; Pangle 2006, 96; Salkever 1987).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Stauffer 2014, 776). But Tocqueville also indicates that, although the virtues founded on the idea of sacrifice are rarely spoken of in democracy (501), Americans continue to pursue them. Thus, even in their cupidity they display a singular courage, an admirable desire to risk life and limb, which guides them in their quest to conquer nature and transform the wilderness on the frontier (cf. 270–72, 594–95). Indeed, Tocqueville says that what guarantees the future "commercial greatness" of the Americans is the "heroism" they put into their commercial activity (387). They show themselves willing to endure every hardship and to take every risk to enrich themselves by the smallest amounts (384–87). The typical American sailor, he writes, will endure storms, illness, malnutrition, and boredom for years at a time, and all to sell his pound of tea for a penny less than his English competitor (387).

But it is precisely here that Tocqueville points to a problem in America's commercial way of life: Because the goal sought by this sailor is out of proportion to his means of pursuing it, it is thus reasonable to ask whether what really motivates him is an attraction to risk-taking or to sacrifice. The same question can be posed about the American pioneers Tocqueville observes facing similar dangers so they can conquer nature and settle the West. He says these men and women are driven by "a passion stronger than a love of life." Their activity may have well-being as its ostensible end, but that end is hardly satisfying, and the result is that for them "the desire for well-being has become a restive and ardent passion that increases while it is being satisfied." They have attained "fortune, but not happiness" (270). Among more ordinary Americans, Tocqueville observes an identical phenomenon that bodes ill for a mature commercial society in which the frontier can no longer provide an outlet for these self-transcending passions (cf. 298). Despite attaining unprecedented levels of freedom, enlightenment, and prosperity, Tocqueville's Americans are nonetheless "grave and almost sad even in their pleasures." They display a "feverish ardor" (511) and a tormenting anxiety that cause them to change jobs, move between cities, and flit back and forth between every conceivable activity, and all to distract themselves from their apparent happiness for another day. According to Tocqueville, this "singular agitation" is easily explainable, for the Americans have confined their hearts "solely to the search for the goods of this world." At every moment, their "remembrance of the brevity of life" reveals the fleeting character of the enjoyments they are pursuing. Because they are unable to conceive of happiness in other ways, they delude themselves into thinking that alternative avenues to material prosperity will somehow provide them with the "complete felicity that always flees from them" (512).

But there are limits to this self-deception: "The soul has needs that must be satisfied; and whatever care one takes to distract it from itself, it soon becomes bored, restive, and agitated amid enjoyments of the senses" (510). According to Tocqueville, this fact explains why the Americans' preoccupation with materialism is on occasion matched by an equally "fierce spiritualism" (510). While mainstream Christianity, having made its peace with commercialism, is weakening in the United States, the void it is leaving in its wake is being filled by "bizarre sects"—raw outbreaks of religious zealotry that periodically burst forth in spite or because of their seeming incongruity with the "mother passion" of democratic life. As Tocqueville relates, Americans from time to time forget "the care of their affairs and even the most pressing needs of the body," and they plunge themselves into the wilderness in a manner reminiscent of the early Christian hermits who populated the Egyptian desert (510–11). In both these cases, Tocqueville suggests, religious zealotry can be understood as a reaction not to persecution, as is often supposed, but to epicureanism. And although the "[r]eligious follies" of nineteenth-century America are relatively harmless, they are a warning of future dangers that may arise from the lack of a healthy outlet for the longing for immortality in a regime where souls are turned exclusively toward temporal and material conceptions of happiness. By imprisoning this desire "within limits from which it is seemingly not allowed to leave," American commercialism has ensured that it will eventually seek to escape from these fetters, bursting forth with pent-up energy in ways that transgress "the bounds of common sense" (511). Indeed, in a rather chilling declaration, Tocqueville predicts that if "the minds of the great majority of the human race were ever concentrated on the search for material goods alone," one could expect "an enormous reaction" to occur (510).

More commonly, however, according to Tocqueville, the potential dangers resulting from the Americans' preoccupation with material concerns can be seen in the general lowering of ambitions in the United States. As Tocqueville presents them, although the Americans are universally ambitious, even their materialistic desires are rather petty; at first glance this seems surprising, because they often appear proud to the point of being bombastic (227, 585). Indeed, Tocqueville too initially claims to have been puzzled by this phenomenon, because one finds nothing in the United States that would prevent ambitions "from soaring in all directions," as they certainly did in France after the Revolution (599–600). As Tocqueville concludes, however, in the latter case the desires of ordinary people reached spectacular heights largely because, having previously absorbed the aristocracy's sentiments, they now found themselves with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to seek out a long-envied greatness. When an aristocracy is overturned, Tocqueville thus concludes, "nothing seems impossible to anyone," but once the dust settles and the memory of the old order fades, people's desires can be expected to become proportionate to their means (600). A democratic revolution, in other words, is akin to a war to end all wars: something that, for a lover of battles and a seeker after glory, presents both the greatest opportunity and the greatest disappointment. For once a democracy reaches its "permanent and normal state" (601), according to Tocqueville, hopes are both stimulated and lowered at the same time. This process directs ambition toward the "petty" and usually

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

material "objects that one sees within one's reach" (601), but it also does something more. As democrats begin to recognize that they are focusing their spiritual longings on unworthy ends, those longings threaten to dry up. "What above all turns men of democracies away from great ambition is not the smallness of their fortune, but the violent effort they make every day to better it. They compel the soul to employ all its strength in doing mediocre things—which cannot fail soon to limit its view and circumscribe its power" (601).

In other words, because ordinary citizens in the United States are more clear-sighted than the American sailor, there is a danger that their ambitions will turn in on themselves and destroy themselves, and thus that their paradoxical desire for self-affirmation and self-overcoming will weaken dramatically. Therefore the "permanent and normal" state of democracy is not heroic but bureaucratic, one in which, as in China ("where equality of conditions is very great and very old"), the rule of equality permits one to rise through the ranks only slowly and after passing a series of tests during which time "youth is lost and . . . imagination is extinguished" (602). The result of this rule of equality, Tocqueville fears, may be the ascendancy of a kind of person as dispassionate as the unchivalrous hero of a Chinese novel who "touches the heart of his mistress by passing an examination well." Great ambitions necessarily "breathe uneasily in such an atmosphere" (602) because our pride can never be founded merely on the calculating pursuit of interest. Indeed, as he closes this chapter, Tocqueville now suggests that the Americans' pride, which on the surface seems so robust, in fact covers over a sense of inferiority and even self-contempt: The same democratic man who refuses to admit the superiority of his neighbor "nonetheless despises himself to the point that he believes himself made only to taste vulgar pleasures" (604). Human nature is such that it cannot be confined to purely selfish concerns; it will continue to seek avenues for self-overcoming, and if it finds itself boxed in such that it cannot do so outwardly, it will seek them inwardly, by turning against itself.

PROBABLE DANGERS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Of course, this turning against oneself is also a kind of pride, if a perverse one. The American who despises himself remains, in a crucial respect, above himself, but the particular pride he retains in the midst of his despair threatens to lay the groundwork for that pride's own eventual diminution. In this, the psychology of the American provides the framework for those other democratic intellectual trends that Tocqueville fears will diminish the individual's sense of his own importance and his own freedom, thereby encouraging his subjection to the state. Tocqueville cautions, for example, against the work of democratic historians and scientific materialists, both of whom take a perverse pride (and acquire much popular appeal) by diminishing and even brutalizing humanity (472, 519, cf. 676). Similarly, he warns that Pantheism, a theology popularized by Spinoza, could "seduce" the human mind by nourishing its pride "although it destroys individuality, or rather because it destroys it" (426; cf. *Theologico-Political Treatise* xvi. 10).

But perhaps most alarming, because most pervasive, is the love of equality that Tocqueville goes so far as to label the "principal passion" of democratic times (480). As previously noted, this passion has the salutary potential to confer a newfound dignity on the vast majority. Yet, taken to an extreme, it risks eradicating human distinctiveness or attacking "the pride of man in its last asylum" by teaching the equality of intellects (236). According to Tocqueville, although democrats have an "instinctive taste" for freedom, they "love equality with an eternal love," and they "would sooner consent to perish than to lose it" (52). Indeed, he claims that already in the nineteenth century there is a widespread "disgust for life" arising from the recognition that, because human beings have different natural talents and abilities, this desire can never be completely fulfilled (514).

Politically, this tendency of democrats to despise themselves, or to channel their natural instinct for self-overcoming in a way that convinces them of their own insignificance, appears linked to the threat of soft despotism—a regime and way of life in which humans have been apparently stripped of those prideful but also self-sacrificial desires separating them from the other beings. Tocqueville's suggestion seems to be that, were human pride or ambition ever to destroy itself completely, we could find ourselves under an "administrative despotism" (664) in which the state could satisfy all our now-tepid desires. By rendering obsolete even that odd and disproportionate commercial heroism that Tocqueville discerned among the American sailors and pioneers, such a regime would transform human beings into purely desiring or selfish brutes—"a herd of timid and industrious animals of which government is the shepherd" (663; cf. 521–22).

But although Tocqueville's warning that we could eventually fall "below the level of humanity" (665) is sobering, there is reason to suspect that it cannot be his final word. Tocqueville also claims that the peculiar passions giving man his humanity "have their immovable foundation in his nature. . . . He can hinder and deform them, but not destroy them" (510). Thus, far from exhibiting the sub-humanity of Nietzsche's "Last Men," those living under soft despotism would most likely continue to display that perverse version of the distinctly human mixture of self-assertion and self-sacrifice that Tocqueville saw among those Americans from whom he discerned the possibility of such a regime. But this also means that more outwardly directed versions of this desire could always reawaken, and not necessarily in a healthy way. At the close of his chapter on ambition, Tocqueville warns of what he sees as the less likely but perhaps more dangerous possibility that "badly regulated great desires" could "burst out from time to time" even in a firmly established democracy. When truly grand ambitions emerge in democracy—where there are no political barriers to stop them and aristocratic sentiments can no longer

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lead them in a sublime or noble direction—they take on "a violent and revolutionary character" that leads those holding them to believe "they can dare all" (603). Putting this claim together with Tocqueville's earlier statement that confining the human mind to material goods could eventually produce an "enormous reaction" (510), it seems that Tocqueville's warnings about soft despotism do not exclude harsher alternatives. After all, his chapter on America's "religious follies" has shown how savage outbreaks of fundamentalism or of other versions of religious or quasi-religious hope could grow out of the prosperity and tolerance of liberal democracy.[9] His analysis thus suggests that our societies remain vulnerable to these twin dangers of soft despotism and hard despotism because the political science that helped found them did not properly comprehend the causes that drive human beings to scorn life for the sake of eternity.

To correct this oversight is the central practical task of Tocqueville's "new political science." Having discerned the presence of anomalous but enduring desires for self-transcendence in democratic life, Tocqueville proposes a series of remedies for recovering a sense of greatness in devotion to something greater than oneself. At the end of his chapter on ambition, he recommends combating the sense of isolation and self-despair among democratic citizens by giving them "difficult and perilous affairs" that can elevate their ambition and "open a theater for it" (604). In Volume I, he writes that, in an age when religious beliefs are weakening, only patriotism remains "to interest men in the destiny of their country" (89), and so large national projects—including, it would seem, war (if one happens to be fighting one [cf. 620–21])—are key elements of Tocqueville's plan for reanimating self-sacrificial devotion.

But Tocqueville also predicts that democratic peoples will be pacific (cf. 617ff.), and he is under no illusions about preserving the kind of self-sacrifice that was present under aristocracy. Instead, in an age when atomistic "individualism" has come to characterize social life (482–84), grand national projects may have to give way, at least on a day-to-day basis, to more mundane means of persuading citizens to become involved in their communities—such as civil associations, local self-government, and, above all, religion. Tocqueville admires the martial virtues, but he also cautions that democrats regard them (with some justice) as acts of "blind and barbaric fury" (594). To those dissatisfied with democracy's lowering of horizons, his blunt message stresses the need to accept different virtues, even if they believe them inferior: The goods of aristocracy must be abandoned "forever" (9), but we can still derive from democracy "all the good that it can do" (235). Tocqueville's exposition of these new virtues is contained in his discussion of "the doctrine of self-interest well understood" (500–3).

Tocqueville purports to discover this doctrine among a group of unnamed American moralists who teach that "virtue is useful" or that, by serving the common good, each man ultimately serves himself (501). These moralists should therefore be distinguished from free-market theorists who claim that "the useful is never dishonest" (503) or that private selfishness produces public benefits (i.e., that 'greed is good'). Rather, these are moralists in the strict sense: They are the democratic counterpart of those aristocratic thinkers whom he says were secretly concerned to discover virtue's utility (501). Whereas those thinkers sought to uncover the rewards for virtue in a world where the "official" moral teaching spoke only of self-sacrifice, these multiply scattered observations of occasions where virtue pays to convince a commercial and calculating people to act in accordance with duty. As a result these American moralists have turned "personal interest against itself" and provided their countrymen with a not wholly rational justification to act on "the disinterested and unreflective sparks that are natural to man" (502; cf. Behnegar 2013, 208–9).

Put differently, Tocqueville suggests that though this "doctrine" claims to be one of "enlighten[ed]" selfishness, it is really anything but. With a mixture of bemusement and guarded confidence for the future, he records how the Americans engage in the most complicated intellectual gymnastics to convince themselves that in making sacrifices for the common good they are really acting from mercenary motives: "They would rather do honor to their philosophy than themselves" (502). Interest well understood is thus a kind of noble lie, a doctrine that is not "evident in all its parts" but that is "necessary" for moralists to adopt, even "should they judge it imperfect" (503). For by teaching a commercial people that devotion to the common good brings benefits, it encourages Americans, almost despite themselves, to overcome themselves. "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" (488).

And yet, because this doctrine claims to be rational, for it to be accepted, the connection it posits between sacrifice and reward must be discernible, at least most of the time. Tocqueville thus says it "contains a great number of truths" (503), because where citizens are called on only "to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth" for the common good, selflessness will be less demanding and the resulting payoff clearer. This doctrine therefore cannot recover the heroic virtues of aristocracy, but it can help inculcate a set of un-extraordinary but solid and dignified middle-class virtues. It "does not produce great devotions; but it suggests little sacrifices each day; by itself it cannot make a man virtuous; but it forms a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted," and "masters of themselves" (502). But these sacrifices, small though they are, are sacrifices nonetheless. By turning personal interest against itself, this doctrine accordingly preserves and, to an extent, refines the twin elements of that paradoxical moral thinking that separates us from the other beings. Thus, Tocqueville concludes, although self-interest well

[9] Additionally, because the inhabitants of a soft despotism are unlikely to resist the encroachments of a neighboring hard despotism, these two threats are necessarily intertwined.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

understood "perhaps prevents some men from mounting far above the ordinary level of humanity," it does an admirable job of keeping many others there who would otherwise fall below it (502).

Now, this moral outlook obviously entails a real descent from the heights of religious devotion and the longing for immortality, but Tocqueville also suggests, in one of his most remarkable statements, that habituating citizens to think in terms of their long-term interest in this world is "the only" path "remaining to us to lead the human race by a long detour back toward faith" (524). Because we are finite beings with a concern for the future, habits of delayed gratification will inevitably cause us to look beyond this life. Because there are "a great number of sacrifices that can find their recompense only in the other world" (504), religion is a necessary supplement to any doctrine that understands virtue as ultimately conducive to an individual's long-term utility. Yet, Tocqueville also refuses "to believe that all those who practice virtue out of a spirit of religion act *only* with a view to recompense" (504, emphasis added). Reward is one motive of religious men, and among "the crowd" at all times it is paramount, but those who claim it alone drives their behavior "deceive themselves. I respect them too much to believe them." Because Christianity joins a hope for heavenly reward with a sublime and poetic feeling of self-forgetting—one that expects "no other recompense than the pleasure of contemplating" the divine order (504–5)—even when religion appeals primarily to self-interest, it has the potential to preserve self-sacrificial sentiments, if only in the background.

Tocqueville's recommendations for preserving religion in democratic times are therefore famously flexible and low aiming. Here too, his strategy is to find a way to turn "personal interest against itself" (502), and he credits the American clergy with a certain religious statesmanship apparently oriented to this end—a statesmanship that, considering what he says to Kergorlay, may actually be his own. He claims that preachers in America recognize that whatever tries to destroy materialism will be destroyed by it (422) and that they thus confine themselves only to waging "necessary struggles" (423) against the instincts of the majority. But although they apply themselves "to finding the spot" (423) where religion and commercialism converge, they do so strategically, knowing that to shift the opinions of their congregations they must not risk alienating them. They thus advertise the temporal benefits of faith to "touch their listeners better" (505), and they speak the language of individualism and self-interest to counteract it: "Thus it is in respecting all the democratic instincts that are not contrary to it and in taking aid from several of them that religion succeeds in struggling to its advantage against the spirit of individual independence that is the most dangerous of all to it" (524).

Such a piety, of course, would have appeared unacceptably compromised to Tocqueville's religious and aristocratic contemporaries. But Tocqueville's clear message to them is that democracy is a "*fait accompli*" (13) and, moreover, that once they accept this they can help ennoble democracy by bringing their devotional sentiments onto its side (11). His political science begins from the recognition that we have a substantial degree of freedom, but only within the "vast limits" of our historical condition (676; cf. 7–8, 470–71, 666). Tocqueville's limited hopes for the possibilities of democratic religious life, in other words, presuppose that the Enlightenment's influence over our thoughts and sentiments cannot be uprooted, but also that it can and must be supplemented in a way that will allow the longing for immortality to be cultivated, refined, and directed to the extent that remains possible. The "whole art of the legislator consists in discerning well and in advance" the "natural inclinations of human societies in order to know when one must aid the efforts of citizens and when it would rather be necessary to slow them down. For these obligations differ according to the times" (518). In a commercial republic in which people "are naturally little disposed to believe" (424), religion must come down to earth. If instead it demands complete self-abnegation, the churches will empty completely—and this may result, as Tocqueville's discussion of America's "religious follies" has shown, in outbreaks of fanaticism. By contrast, where religion compromises by asking only for small sacrifices, where it has accepted and in so doing has sought to augment the petty character of democratic ambition, it can reignite a psychological engine that will lead, ultimately, to the recovery of a naturally latent hope for immortality.

At its best, then, according to Tocqueville, religion can be no more than "the most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries" (519)—an element in tension with democracy's natural instincts, but one that can retain a limited influence over them because it remains the most widely available outlet for our naturally occurring self-transcending and devotional passions. But it is also not the only such outlet. Tocqueville, after all, previously indicated that it is the intellect that usually transforms those passions into hopes (284, 504–5, cf. 32), and he accordingly discovers the peak of intellectual activity in Pascal's "ardent, proud, and disinterested" passion for knowledge (435). Pascal's "pure desire to know" (435), according to Tocqueville, was born of a "sublime and almost divine love of truth" (436) resembling the "sublime idea of the duties of man" that was the official, self-sacrificial moral teaching under aristocracy. In the same way that the consideration of that idea "pleased" those who professed it (500), this "inexhaustible love of truth that nourishes itself and enjoys itself incessantly without being able to satisfy itself" (435) is, as Tocqueville describes it, both intrinsically rewarding and demandingly self-sacrificial. It led Pascal to pursue neither "great profit" (as do most democratic scientists) nor "glory alone" (as do aristocratic ones), but only to seek "to discover the most hidden secrets of the Creator"—an activity that, however, caused him to "tear his soul" from his body and "to die of old age before forty" (436).

Contemplating such a possibility, Tocqueville writes, "I halt in bewilderment and understand that it is no ordinary cause that can produce such extraordinary efforts" (436). If we take this mention of "no

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ordinary cause" to refer to the social state—"the first cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas that regulate the conduct of nations" (45)—it would seem that Tocqueville considers Pascal a rare and exceptional human type, someone who transcends the dichotomy between democracy and aristocracy. Such a "speculative genius" can arise anywhere, "whatever the spirit of his country and his times should be. There is no need to aid his ascent; it is enough not to stop it" (437). But Tocqueville also predicts that people like Pascal will be much rarer under democracy: To permit the flourishing of genius one thing; to encourage it is quite another. In aristocracies "a high minded idea . . . of man" (436) was inextricably linked to the conception of self-affirmation through self-sacrifice that is present to its greatest extent in the Pascalian type, and it set a tone for society and thus directed human activity in a way that made the flourishing of that type much more likely. Aristocracy's "official" moral teaching led ordinary people to satisfy their longings for immortality by accepting the dogmas of the church, but it encouraged a rare few to seek out the most hidden secrets of the Creator for themselves (cf. 417).

In choosing Pascal as his model of intellectual greatness, then, Tocqueville suggests a close connection between intellectual and religious life. In the individual soul, the search for truth is the purest and most intense form that our religious psychology can take, and the extent to which that psychology is or is not cultivated by the political science guiding modern democracy will determine whether those born with Pascal's "native spark" (436) ultimately see it kindled. This is why Tocqueville's political science seeks to "reanimate" democracy's religious beliefs "if possible" (7). Throughout *Democracy in America* Tocqueville expresses his confidence that it *is* possible to do so because, as he asserts, our natural longing for immortality will erupt one way or another. But he nowhere claims with a certainty that the solutions he outlines for refining and directing that desire *will* work. His book provides a blueprint for his solutions, but it necessarily leaves the practical management of his political science to "philosophers and those who govern" (523), to those future Tocquevillians with a limited power to shape democratic society in response to its specific needs—because "these obligations differ according to the times" (518). But in a statement that reveals much about Tocqueville's confidence for the future, as well as the overall purpose of his project, he says that if he had believed the problems facing democracy to be insurmountable, "I would have limited myself to groaning in secret about the destiny of those like me" (672).

CONCLUSION

Of course, it is difficult to say what estimation Tocqueville would have of the pressing issues facing the United States and other liberal democracies today, and to attempt to mine his work for recommended solutions to our problems—which are of course much changed from those of the America he observed—would be to invite obvious difficulties. Broadly speaking, however, if his analysis of our moral and spiritual situation remains applicable, as I argued at the outset, his work may provide us with at least some preliminary indications of aspects of our political and intellectual life that merit either being encouraged or resisted. Above all, as we have seen, his advice to future political scientists—a term that he uses very broadly—is to provide avenues for acting on what he regards as our natural and inevitable longing for a kind of greatness that demands self-transcendence or self-sacrifice. To this end, as previously noted, he recommends that democratic statesmen find ways to develop national projects that can unite a democratic people and provide a theater for its ambition. Tocqueville might therefore welcome calls from our leaders for community involvement and even perhaps for some forms of national service, but he also indicates that he understands such ideas to be largely contrary to the natural, day-to-day mindset of a democratic and commercial people. As such, it is likely he would place the greatest stock in doing what is possible, given the constraints of our historical situation, to affect that mindset in positive ways—for example, by encouraging the small sacrifices (and the opportunities for limited yet real prestige) that come from participation in local government, by working to resist trends in American religion encouraging excessive individualism and commercialism, and by counteracting developments in our intellectual life denigrating the importance of the individual.

But Tocqueville's most valuable contribution to us today may well consist not in any particular recommendation, but instead in the spirit of social scientific inquiry that underlies his writing. Guided by that spirit, Tocqueville undertook to grapple with the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment, and to uncover how it has shaped our politics in inescapable ways, by beginning from a series of simple observations of American political life—observations that were conducted without preconceptions and that gave a renewed seriousness to ordinary moral and political opinions. This process, in turn, permitted him to arrive at a complex understanding of human psychology and to alight on a problem arising from it that called into question the fundamental presuppositions of his Enlightenment predecessors. Tocqueville, it is true, does not inquire more deeply into the character of the psychology he articulates—he does not, for example, explicitly raise the question of whether there is a tension between our "natural disgust for existence" and our "immense desire to exist" (284). But he does show that, because the theoretical founders of our regime did not recognize the existence of these twin longings they inadvertently laid the groundwork for a number of unanticipated political dangers. In calling attention to this problem, Tocqueville's political science also shows us how to begin to resolve it responsibly, in a way that not only acknowledges democracy's unmovable practical strength but also is aware of its claim to justice.

To be sure, Tocqueville is altogether sober about the threats democracy poses to the future of the human spirit, and his analysis further suggests that these

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dangers pose a real moral challenge to it. If the tyranny of the majority and democracy's mediocritizing influences prevent individuals like Pascal from reaching their natural potential, is not democracy, from one perspective at least, unjust? But although aristocracy had proven more conducive to the flourishing of human greatness, it also came at a tremendous moral cost, one that, in turn, called this very greatness into question, because it rested on the misery and subjugation of the vast majority of ordinary people—and it "is impossible to imagine anything more contrary to nature and the secret instincts of the human heart than a subjection of this kind" (383). Conversely, although democracy is "perhaps less elevated" than aristocracy, "it is more just, and its justice makes for its greatness and its beauty" (675).

As we have seen, Tocqueville's "art of the legislator" entails a delicate balancing act, one that seeks to discern and, where necessary, to counteract the natural tendencies of particular human societies. Thus, he says that if he had been born in an aristocratic century, he would have joined the Enlightenment in encouraging the study of the physical sciences in order to improve the material condition of ordinary people (518). But as the preceding considerations have suggested, his understanding of this balancing act is not just political but also moral: His analysis shows that both democracy and aristocracy present competing and compelling claims to justice, and it may even be the case that these conflicting attachments are in some way present in every human soul. Each of us, Tocqueville suggests, cannot help but acknowledge the moral case for human equality, just as we also cannot resist being troubled by the threat it seems to pose to the future existence of people like Pascal and Tocqueville himself. By thus elucidating the tension-ridden character of our moral hopes, Tocqueville's reflection on democratic politics also reveals the inherent limitations on what we can hope for from it. He shows us that democracy's claim to justice is compelling but also by no means unblemished and, for this reason, that a perfectly just society can never be realized. In so doing, Tocqueville transcends the partisan divide of his time and our own and lays the basis for a moderate democratic politics.

References

Anastaplo, George. 1991. "On the Central Doctrine of Democracy in America." In *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, ed. Ken Masugi. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 425–61.

Banfield, Edward C. 1991. *Here the People Rule: Selected Essays*. Washington, DC: AEI Press.

Bartlett, Robert C. 2001. *The Idea of Enlightenment: A Post-Mortem Study*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Behnegar, Alice. 2013. "Tocqueville's Puzzling Secularism." In *Enlightenment and Secularism: Essays on the Mobilization of Reason*, ed. Christopher Nadon. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 199–212.

Berns, Walter. 1986. "Religion and the Founding Principle." In *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, ed. Robert Horwitz. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 204–29.

Bloom, Allan. 1990. *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays, 1960–1990*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Boesche, Roger. 2009. "The Dark Side of Tocqueville: On War and Empire." *Review of Politics* 67 (4): 737–52.

Ceaser, James W. 1985. "Alexis de Tocqueville on Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual." *American Political Science Review* 73 (3): 656–72.

Ceaser, James W. 1990. *Liberal Democracy and Political Science*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Eden, Robert. 1990. "Tocqueville and the Problem of Natural Right." *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (3): 379–87.

Glendon, Mary Ann. 1993. *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse*. New York: Free Press.

Goldstein, Doris S. 1975. *Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville's Thought*. New York: Elsevier.

Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay. 1961. *The Federalist Papers*. Ed. Clinton Rossiter. New York: Signet Classics.

Hebert, L. Joseph Jr. 2008. "Individualism and Intellectual Liberty in Tocqueville and Descartes." *Journal of Politics* 69 (2): 525–37.

Hebert, L. Joseph Jr. 2012. *More than Kings and Less than Men: Tocqueville on the Promise and Perils of Democratic Individualism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Herold, Aaron L. 2013. "Spinoza's Liberal Republicanism and the Challenge of Revealed Religion." *Political Research Quarterly* 67 (2): 239–52.

Herold, Aaron L. 2014. "'The Chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church': John Locke's Theology of Toleration and His Case for Civil Religion." *Review of Politics* 76(2): 195–221.

Hinckley, Cynthia J. 1990. "Tocqueville on Religious Truth & Political Necessity." *Polity* 23 (1): 39–52.

Israel, Jonathan I. 2001. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jefferson, Thomas. 1984. *Writings*. New York: The Library of America.

Kessler, Sanford. 1977. "Tocqueville on Civil Religion and Liberal Democracy." *Journal of Politics* 39 (1): 119–46.

Kessler, Sanford. 1994. *Tocqueville's Civil Religion: American Christianity & the Prospects for Freedom*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Koritansky, John C. 2009. *Alexis de Tocqueville and the New Science of Politics: An Interpretation of Democracy in America*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Kraynak, Robert P. 1987. "Tocqueville's Constitutionalism." *American Political Science Review* 81 (4): 1175–95.

Kraynak, Robert P. 2001. *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Lawler, Peter Augustine. 1993. *The Restless Mind: Alexis de Tocqueville on the Origin and Perpetuation of Human Liberty*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lawler, Peter Augustine. 1999. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lively, Jack. 1965. *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Locke, John. 1965. *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Ed. George W. Ewing. Washington, DC: Regnergy Gateway.

Locke, John. 1982. *Second Treatise of Government*. Ed. Richard Cox. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson.

Locke, John. 1983. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Ed. James H. Tully. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Maletz, Donald J. 2005. "Tocqueville on Mores and the Preservation of Republics." *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (1): 1–15.

Manent, Pierre. 1996. *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Manent, Pierre. 2006. "Tocqueville, Political Philosopher." In *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*. Ed. Cheryl B. Welch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 108–20.

Mitchell, Joshua. 1995. *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Neuhaus, Richard John. 1984. *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

Pangle, Thomas L. 2006. *Leo Strauss: An Introduction to His Thought and Intellectual Legacy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Pangle, Thomas L. 2010a. "How and Why the West Has Lost Confidence in Its Foundational Political Principles." In *Religion, the*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Enlightenment, and the New Global Order, eds. J. Judd Owen and John M. Owen IV. New York: Columbia University Press, 74–106.
Pangle, Thomas L. 2010b. *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Salkever, Stephen G. 1987. "The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Liberality and Democratic Citizenship." In *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*, eds. Kenneth Deutsch and Walter Soffer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 245–68.
Sandel, Michael. 1996. *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
Stauffer, Dana Jalbert. 2014. "Tocqueville on the Modern Moral Situation: Democracy and the Decline of Devotion." *American Political Science Review* 108 (4): 772–82.
Tessitore, Aristide. 2013. "Enlightenment Philosophy, Biblical Religion, and Tocqueville's New Science of Politics." In *Resistance to Tyrants, Obedience to God: Reason, Religion, and Republicanism at the American Founding*, eds. Dustin A. Gish and Daniel P. Klinghard. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 223–48.
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1951. *Oeuvres Completes*. Ed. J. P. Mayer. Paris: Gallimard.
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1985. *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*. Ed. Roger Boesche. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2000. *Democracy in America*. Eds. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2004. *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Eds. François Furet and François Mélonio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2010. *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De La Démocratie En Amérique*. Ed. Eduardo Nolla. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2011. "Speech Given to the Annual Public Meeting of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences on April 3, 1852." In *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship*, eds. Brian Danoff and L. Joseph Hebert Jr. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 17–29.
Viroli, Maurizio. 2002. *Republicanism*. New York: Hill and Wang.
Washington, George. 1997. *Writings*. New York: Library of America.
West, Thomas G. 1991. "Misunderstanding the American Founding." In *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, ed. Ken Masugi. Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 155–77.
Zetterbaum, Marvin. 1967. *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Zuckert, Catherine. 1981. "Not by Preaching: Tocqueville on the Role of Religion in American Democracy." *Review of Politics* 43 (2): 259–80.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000258 Published online by Cambridge University Press