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Tocqueville's Perspective

Democracy in America: In search of the "new science of politics"

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In a well-known passage, Hannah Arendt defended the thesis that the occidental tradition of political thought is marked by a clearly datable beginning and an equally clear-cut termination. "Our tradition of political thought had its definite beginning in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. I believe it came to a no less definite end in the theories of Karl Marx."¹ This may well be true. But in Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), Marx's contemporary and senior by 13 years, we see once more a thinker who has that bold thought shared by all who can properly be called "political thinkers": Everything depends upon government and upon politics—or, in other words, the most important of sciences is political science.²

Was Tocqueville a political scientist? It seems to me that this question, which might appear rather superficial and pedantic, opens a path not only to a more precise understanding of Tocqueville, but also to the reactivation of questions basic to the field.³

That Tocqueville was not a scientist; that even had he wished to be one he would not have been a good one; that his intentions were totally other than those of a political scientist; and that his work belongs to the history of political rhetoric—these are judgments to which authorities on Tocqueville, thorough admirers of the great Frenchman, feel themselves compelled. However, there is a significant line from Tocqueville which opposes this view. In the "Author's Introduction" to Part I of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville writes: "A new political science is needed for a world itself quite new." ("*Il faut une science politique nouvelle à un monde tout nouveau.*")⁴ This sentence, placed at a

1. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking, 1968), p. 17.

2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a (politics as the most important and leading science); Hobbes, *De Cive*, Preface ("certainly the most valuable"); Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book 9 (everything depends upon the art of government). What Friedrich H. Tenbruck has sketched as "*Die Glaubensgeschichte der Moderne*" (*Zeitschrift für Politik*, N.F. 23 [1965], pp. 1–15), is discernible in the succession of those sciences in which recent generations have placed their hopes, from political economy to ecology.

3. With regard to the wealth of facets in recent Tocqueville research, see Robert Nisbet, "Many Tocquevilles," *The American Scholar*, 46 (1976/77), 59–75.

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), hereinafter abbreviated as *D.i.A.* The citations in parentheses refer either to J. P. Mayer's *Œuvres Complètes*, "édition définitive" or to the Beaumont edition (B). (Users of the 1969 paperback edition should note that translations differ, as does the pagination.)

dramatic point in this highly dramatic introduction,⁵ can scarcely be understood as anything but an indication of the ambition of its highly ambitious author. Should we not read Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and his entire corpus for that matter, as an answer to this need? This is the question I wish to answer.

To be able to do this, we must first deal with three established notions concerning Tocqueville's writings which would distort the view of his "new political science," assuming that it exists. The first is the opinion that there is no scientific intent underlying Tocqueville's work; that he is a liberal thinker of the first order, but not a scientist. To so characterize him, however, is to fail to recognize the peculiarity of his scientific purpose and to thereby misunderstand his continuing, timeless significance. The second view is closely linked to the first. He who sees in Tocqueville the liberal thinker in an age of emerging democracy and understands his book on America only as a "tract for the times," will be inclined to regard him as the great successor of Montesquieu. This picture of Tocqueville as Montesquieu's successor appears to be one of the most firmly settled views in the research on Tocqueville. In contrast, I would like to demonstrate that Montesquieu does not supply the key to an understanding of Tocqueville, and that to view him within this tradition leads to a failure to understand his modernity. Tocqueville's actual teacher, if one is to be ascribed to him, is Rousseau. The third obstacle standing in the way of an understanding of Tocqueville is the fixation on a problem that was not even his, i.e., the tension between freedom and equality allegedly central to his work. Tocqueville's actual problem was that of freedom and solidarity, of individuality and sociality; and it is here that his significance for our own age lies. I shall attempt to establish these three theses in order then to proceed with a systematic treatment of at least the basic ideas of Tocqueville's "new political science."

I

When an undisputedly great author remarks in the introduction to his principal work that an era which is quite new demands a new political science, it ought to be obvious that this suggestion is to be taken seriously and that the work itself may be readable as a response to this challenge. But such a reading seems to be anything but obvious.⁶ Is there any scientific purpose at all behind Tocqueville's work? Even James Bryce, otherwise full of admiration for Tocqueville's book, could no longer recognize its scientific character. In

5. *D.i.A.*, p. 6 (*O.C.* 1, p. 5).

6. The first to follow this suggestion were Jack Lively in *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) and Jürgen Feldhoff in *Die Politik der egalitären Gesellschaft. Zur soziologischen Demokratie-Analyse bei A. de Tocqueville* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1968), pp. 117ff.

Bryce's words, written in 1888, fifty-three years after the appearance of the first volume of *Democracy in America*: "Let it only be remembered that, in spite of its scientific form, it is really a work of art quite as much as a work of science . . ." And even more pointedly: "The *Democracy in America* is not so much a political study as a work of edification."⁷

George W. Pierson, again no petty critic, but a man who devoted his entire life to research on Tocqueville, comes to a similar conclusion.⁸ Tocqueville's book on America is allegedly full of defects, and Pierson can only explain the book's rank and enduring acclaim by the personality of its author and by the fact that Tocqueville was a sociologist, one of the first in France. This is a dubious honor, as it results from identifying nothing but defects and errors in the classic.

It is to Otto Vossler that we owe the most thorough and informative attempt to prove the unscientific character of Tocqueville's work. His 1973 book on Tocqueville is again a testimonial of love and admiration for its object.⁹ Yet he contends that whoever looks for a scholarly purpose and intent in Tocqueville's literary work is on the wrong track. Tocqueville is

a Frenchman writing for France, for political education and therewith a better future for his countrymen. He aims for a political effect and is not seeking pure knowledge for knowledge's sake. He is not interested in science, but in practical political utility and success. . . . He writes neither as historian nor as sociologist, but as concerned political educator and admonisher, as passionate Frenchman—and it is as such that both he and his work are to be judged.¹⁰

For Vossler, the determinative bar to Tocqueville's book on America being scientific lies in a sentence in the "Author's Introduction" to the first volume: "I admit that I saw in America more than America; it was the shape of democracy itself which I sought . . . so as at least to know what we have to fear or hope therefrom."¹¹ This sentence purportedly shows first, that Tocqueville did not seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge, second, that he sought knowledge for its practical utility, and third, that he pursued this knowledge for the sake of a particular object, France. As far as Vossler is concerned, each of these intentions separately, not to mention cumulatively, precludes Tocqueville's work from being scientific.¹²

7. James Bryce, "The Predictions of Hamilton and Tocqueville," in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), Vol. I, p. 325.

8. George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938).

9. Otto Vossler, *Alexis de Tocqueville. Freiheit und Gleichheit* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1973).

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 83.

11. *D.i.A.* I, p. 12 (*O.C.* I, I p. 12).

12. Vossler never tires of testifying that Tocqueville is "no scientific mind, not a philosopher at all" (Vossler, pp. 91, 151). The demand for a new political science is thus not to be taken seriously.

Now it is certainly true that Tocqueville seeks scientific knowledge for its utility as an intellectual aid to France. But must this preclude it from being scientific in character? If I understand it correctly, no one strove for knowledge for the sake of knowledge until the middle of the nineteenth century. In no field of knowledge was knowledge for its own sake the central concern, but rather, it was always a matter of the knowledge's meaning, or, in Max Weber's terminology, its *Wertbeziehung*. The meaning could be theoretical, practical or technical. The *science politique* of Tocqueville still stands squarely in the tradition of political science as a practical-philosophical discipline.¹³ As with everyone before him, the knowledge he seeks in this field is sought not for its own sake, but for the sake of correct action.¹⁴ Nor can the fact that Tocqueville pursues his study of democracy in America for the sake of France keep it from being a scientific contribution to our understanding of the era.

Gerhard Krüger¹⁵ has described the modern concept of science as being defined by the attempt to achieve the double emancipation from natural sensuous experience and from the bonds of the practical community surrounding the researcher. In the historical-political sciences, too, there has been no shortage of attempts to supplement the obviously fallible human power of judgment with more precise, universal instruments of measurement and observation. Outside the realm of quantifiable magnitudes (with which political science is only peripherally concerned), the results to date of these efforts have been minuscule. But the modern demand upon the researcher that he radically abstract himself from the "prejudices" and value standards of his political community has triumphantly prevailed. Oriented to the standard of theoretical science, "It must know," in Krüger's words, "in order to know, and not for the purpose of leading a social life."¹⁶ Such an understanding of science is entirely foreign to Tocqueville. But can this justify denying him any scientific intention whatsoever, and thereafter, in the manner of Vossler, no longer looking for such an intention in Tocqueville's works? Tocqueville wants to become acquainted with democracy in America, to subject it to scientific examination, even if only "so as to know what we," i.e., the French of his time, "have to fear or hope therefrom." Hope and fear refer to a good, to the manner in which life is conducted in community—not just any sort of life in common, but that which is possible for the French. Only when such hope and fear legitimately enter into scholarly inquiry can the normative problems of politics, or if you will, the question of the ends toward which our lives are directed, be appropriately addressed.¹⁷ For

13. Regarding this tradition, see Wilhelm Hennis. *Politik und praktische Philosophie*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart, 1977).

14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a5–6; 1103b27. The purpose of political knowledge is not changed in Machiavelli or Hobbes, either. They only radicalize it.

15. Gerhard Krüger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1958).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

17. Hans Jonas argues for a "heuristic of fear" in *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1979).

Tocqueville this was self-evident. To take this fact as an indication of the unscientific character of his findings reveals more about our contemporary understanding of science than about Tocqueville.

The addressee of Tocqueville's book on America (his *ouvrage politico-philosophique*, as he always called it),¹⁸ was certainly not the scientific community. It was directed toward those who were responsible for France's destiny. In Tocqueville's terminology, which is identical with that of Plato and the entire tradition, it was directed toward the "legislators," the "leaders" of France. The point of view, the scholarly perspective in Tocqueville's work, is also that of an imaginary legislator, of a statesman in search of the knowledge he needs. This has been one of the classical scholarly approaches to political science since Plato's *Laws*. In the United States Tocqueville seeks and finds lessons "from which we"—and that means especially the legislators—"can derive benefit." To ask questions in this manner was to take a scientific perspective and was not merely an attempt at popular education, which for the modern scholar is apparently the very epitome of an unscientific design.¹⁹

If one seeks to salvage to some extent the scientific character of Tocqueville's work by classifying it in the pre- and early history of sociology,²⁰ this, too, conflicts with Tocqueville's own understanding of his work. He spoke only very condescendingly of Saint-Simon and his school and of Comte. And what if not his self-understanding as a political scientist could have prompted him, in his capacity as president of the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, to deliver an important lecture on "Politics as Science"—which in any case provides us with a certain insight into his systematic understanding of the required "new" science. I will deal briefly with the contents of this lecture, Tocqueville's only extended statement concerning his idea of political science.²¹ Confronted with the conventional objection that the field of politics is too polymorphous, too unstable to support the foundations of a science, Tocqueville distinguishes that which belongs to the art of statesmanship from politics as a science. Politics as a science is constant: the art of governing is elastic. Politics as a science "lies grounded in the very essence of man, in his interests, his capacities and his instincts, whose direction changes with the times but whose essence is unchanging, imperishable as his species itself." This science teaches "which laws best suit the general and enduring being of

18. Cf. James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 83, 165.

19. This aspect of Tocqueville's scientific perspective is penetratingly analyzed by Seymour Drescher in *Dilemmas of Democracy: Tocqueville and Modernization* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), pp. 23ff. ("He was always a politician or a potential politician addressing other politicians and citizens" p. 25.)

20. Most forcefully, Jürgen Feldhoff, *op. cit.*

21. *Œuvres Complètes* (Beaumont edition), IX, pp. 111ff. The most important passages are in the collection edited by Albert Salomon, *Alexis de Tocqueville. Autorität und Freiheit* (Zürich: Rascher, 1935), pp. 138–52.

man." Tocqueville continues: The "greatness" (*grandeur*) of this science prevents many intellects from noticing it. However, if one were to observe "this significant science" attentively, the various elements of which it is composed would palpably emerge, and one would arrive at a precise conception of the whole.

For such an observer, the great writers would no longer present such a mass of confusion. Some, the very great, seek

the natural laws of the societal body and the rights which the individual exercises, i.e., the laws which best suit the societal structures depending upon which characteristics they possessed from their origins and which they acquired. They seek the governmental systems appropriate according to situation, place and time. These are the great authors: Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Rousseau, to mention only some of the most illustrious names.

But, he asks rhetorically, why must one demonstrate the existence of political science in a country where its power has made itself manifest on every hand?

You deny the existence and deeds of political science! Look around yourselves!

Who has so altered the face of the modern world that were your grandfather to return to earth, he would recognize neither the laws, the morals, the clothing nor the customs which he once knew—scarcely even the language which he once spoke? In short, who brought about the French Revolution, this most momentous event in history?

Was it the politicians of the eighteenth century, the princes, the ministers, the great feudal lords? Nothing of the kind!

The great creators of this colossal Revolution were precisely the men of that time who had never taken part, even in the slightest degree, in the affairs of state. Everyone knows that political writers, political science and often even the most abstract science planted in the minds of all our fathers the new seeds from which suddenly grew so many political institutions and statutes unknown to their forefathers. . . . Among all civilized peoples, political science gives birth to the general ideas, or at least lends them their form. From these then later arise the events in whose midst the politicians move and the laws which they think they are inventing. The barbarians are the only ones in whose politics one recognizes only practice. Our Academy, gentlemen, has the task of preparing a place for this useful and fruitful science and of determining its field of activity. This is its honor, but also a danger.

It is a danger for the very reason that this science could only prosper under the condition of freedom. Tocqueville's speech is a subtle treatment of the decline of freedom under the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon.

Now if one knows only (and I am getting ahead of myself) that a fundamental axiom of Tocqueville's political science was "that everything in politics is only derivative and symptomatic, except for the ideas and feelings of the people, which embody the causes of everything else,"²² and if one does not know that Tocqueville was equally convinced "that political societies are not

22. Letter of October 26, 1853, in Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 215 (*O.C.* Beaumont VII, pp. 300f.).

the products of their laws, but are from the very beginning determined by the feelings, beliefs, ideas and habits of the hearts and minds of their members,"²³ then one will not be able to understand why he felt compelled to ascribe such greatness to this science. But if what he says in his speech to the Academy is true, i.e., that political science "forms something like an intellectual atmosphere around every society, which the spirits of the ruled and the rulers inhale and from which they alike, often unconsciously, draw the principles of their behavior,"²⁴ then it is understandable why he attributes such fundamental importance to this science and why he feels himself a part of it.

Nevertheless, one might question whether it is really to the point to ask whether Tocqueville should be read as a political scientist or a sociologist. Is not what Tocqueville has to say to us the same in either case? But this is not so. To read Tocqueville as a sociologist is to pose questions or ascribe questions to him which were not his. We can not really get a reply from an author who did not regard himself as a sociologist by posing him sociological questions. On the other hand, we can not receive or understand what he may have had to say to us if we refuse to receive it in the language which he speaks. Everyone knows that in translating a poem from one language to another, much is lost. But how much more must be lost when we are deaf to the questions expressed in the idiom of a particular science because we believe it will yield the correct and, for us, "relevant" scientific sense only when we have (to use the modern term) "reconstructed" the texts to conform to our own questions.

To understand Tocqueville as a sociologist is to fundamentally misunderstand him. For all truly political thought, the relationship between man and citizen is the central political problem, but for sociological thought it is a problem which no longer exists.²⁵ As successor to Machiavelli and Rousseau, Tocqueville fights once again the specifically Western struggle against the disjunction between the private and the public. He does this in the tradition, and using the categories, of classical political science. In a letter dated October 26, 1853, Tocqueville complains:

We belong to another era. We are to a certain extent antediluvian animals which might soon be displayed in natural history museums to show how beings once looked that loved freedom, equality and honesty. All are strange tastes, which presuppose totally different organs on the part of this world's present inhabitants.²⁶

It is a "totally different" manner of thinking which distinguishes the political science of Tocqueville from the incipient sociology of his time and from that of ours. Not that Tocqueville would automatically be understood if he were to be

23. Letter of September 17, 1853, in Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 214 (*O.C.* Beaumont VI, pp. 226f.).

24. The address to the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* in Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

25. This is the basic idea of Siegfried Landshut's *Kritik der Soziologie und andere Schriften zur Politik*, 2d ed. (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969). See also his introduction to *Alexis de Tocqueville: Das Zeitalter der Gleichheit* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1954).

26. See note 22.

read as a political scientist; but one bars every possibility of understanding Tocqueville when one is not prepared to understand him as he himself wanted to be understood. Nothing in his work evidences an affinity, everything evidences a decided enmity, toward the emerging sociological thought of his time. In his entire work, Tocqueville's concern was nothing but an attempt to prevent the separation of man from citizen. He was not concerned, as his younger contemporary, Marx, was, with the elimination of this polarity in a definitive solution to this problem. More realistically than Marx, Tocqueville could only conceive of this problem's solution in the shape of egalitarian democratic tyranny. To prevent this form of solution to the problem was the driving force behind his passionate intellectual effort.

Just as access to an understanding of Tocqueville's thought is obstructed when we overlook the fact that he reflected on the problem of politics in the categories of classical political science, so also do we obstruct our access to him when we, as it were, give him the wrong genealogy in the history of political thought. Tocqueville himself precipitated this fate in a peculiar way.

II

Insofar as the effectiveness and brisance of a political thinker is concerned, his placement in a particular family tree is not a matter of indifference. A thinker in the tradition of Plato is more "exciting" than one in the tradition of Aristotle; and the relation of Hegel to Kant and of Marx to Ricardo is the same in this regard. In an often-quoted passage from one of Tocqueville's letters composed during the time he was working on his second volume on America, he wrote: "There are three men in whose company I find myself for a while each day: Pascal, Montesquieu and Rousseau."²⁷ Let us leave Pascal to one side. Diez del Corral has sympathetically investigated Tocqueville's connection to him.²⁸ That Tocqueville stands in the intellectual tradition of Montesquieu is a commonplace since Royer-Collard's comparison of the first volume of *Democracy in America* with *The Spirit of the Laws*. Tocqueville is the "faithful disciple of Montesquieu" (Raymond Aron), the Montesquieu of the nineteenth century. And Rousseau? An influence is "not identifiable" writes Otto Vossler,²⁹ who within the space of a few years published a large monograph on Rousseau and one on Tocqueville which especially emphasizes Tocqueville's

27. Letter to Kergolay on November 10, 1836; *O.C.* XIII, 1 p. 418. In Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

28. Luis Diez del Corral, *La mentalidad política de Tocqueville con especial referencia a Pascal* (Madrid, 1965).

29. Vossler, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 204. Although Vossler emphasizes with such love of detail Tocqueville's attachment to his great-grandfather, Malesherbes, he mentions not one word concerning the close friendship between Malesherbes and Rousseau. If one accepts Vossler's thesis concerning Tocqueville, the "family man," Rousseau must have been rather close to him.

aristocratic family tradition. The same social origins, the same concern with freedom, the same open and unbiased spirit—what could be easier than to name Montesquieu and Tocqueville in the same breath? What could be more erroneous than to place Tocqueville, the great gentleman, in a closer relationship with the petty bourgeois from Geneva, the resentful outsider, the patriarch of the Revolution, Jean-Jacques? However, I know of no “epistemological-sociological” chain of reasoning that is more decisively misleading than this one.

Certainly, it is fruitful to compare Montesquieu and Tocqueville, especially with regard to Tocqueville’s theory concerning the new forms of despotic domination. Certainly, the younger man stands in a sort of succession to the man born 116 years (and what years!) before him. Nor could he have anything against our seeing in him a new Montesquieu. Indeed, he wanted to accomplish something similar to what that great man of his own social station had achieved. But under what radically changed conditions! They are worlds apart with regard to their places in fundamentally different societies, and with regard to the experiences which each sought to intellectually master. “A new political science is needed for a world itself quite new.” There can be no doubt that this sentence, which is our starting point and which contains a judgment of the old political science, is essentially directed toward Montesquieu. In *Democracy in America* there is a whole series of passages which begin roughly: “I am not speaking about . . .” and continue with familiar viewpoints of Montesquieu which Tocqueville classifies as indisputable, common sense positions not meriting further elaboration.³⁰ Typical of this sort of tacit dismissal of Montesquieu is Tocqueville’s examination of honor in the United States, a classic example of a paradigm change. Montesquieu is not mentioned at all. At the beginning of Book 29 of *The Spirit of the Laws* is the statement: “I assert, and it appears to me, that I have written this work only for the purpose of proving this contention: The spirit of moderation must govern the legislator.” Tocqueville writes in order to prove a totally different contention, namely, that equality, absent fortunate countervailing forces such as exist in America, could lead to the degradation of man. He seeks to cultivate understanding for moderation, the unavoidable mediocrity of democracy. He reconciles himself to it but is not fond of it. The weak, dull souls which it can produce trouble him, and all his maxims of statecraft aim at nothing other than the repeated creation of incentives to stronger spiritual sensitivity within the framework of unavoidable moderation. What he fears is that the citizens of democracies “may in the end become practically out of reach of those great and powerful public emotions which do indeed perturb peoples but which also make them grow and refresh them.”³¹ For that which is distilled from Montesquieu, he has nothing but scorn. “I have always considered what is called a mixed government to be

30. Cf., for example, *D.i.A.* I, p. 286 (*O.C.* I, I p. 326); II, pp. 608–609 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 257).

31. *D.i.A.* II, p. 619 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 269).

a chimera.”³² And what, if not Montesquieu’s theory of despotism, is the target of the following proud passage?

The chief and, in a sense, the only condition necessary in order to succeed in centralizing the supreme power in a democratic society is to love equality or to make believe that you do so. Thus the art of despotism, once so complicated, has been simplified; one may almost say that it has been reduced to a single principle[.]³³

According to Montesquieu, the “principle,” the pernicious motive, of despotic domination is, as we know, fear (*crainte*). Tocqueville’s work on democracy closes with a dull “General Survey” that reads like a tortured exercise in diligence. The actual conclusion can be found at the end of Book IV, chapter 7, a continuation of Book IV, chapter 6, which bears the title “The Sort of Despotism That Democratic Nations Have to Fear.” This, the actual conclusion of the entire work and, at the same time, of his analysis of despotism, reads (and I believe that one need not have learned to stalk the semantic nightingale from Leo Strauss to catch the allusion): “Let us then look forward to the future with that salutary fear (*crainte salutaire*) which makes men keep watch and ward for freedom, and not to that flabby and idle terror (*cette sorte de terreur molle et oisive*) which makes men’s hearts sink and enervates them.”³⁴ It is surely no coincidence that in the final sentence of a work dealing with modern despotism, fear is called “salutary.”

In this penultimate chapter, Tocqueville compares the dangers of aristocratic times with those of democratic times. Naturally, he knew that *Federalist* No. 47 states: “The oracle who is always consulted and cited on this subject [of the preservation of liberty, and separation of powers] is the celebrated Montesquieu.” But since Madison had written these words, the world had changed completely. The endangered good remained the same: freedom and human dignity. However, the dangers lurked elsewhere. They were harder to recognize in the age of equality than in the era of personal rule. Thus Tocqueville remarked: “Other dangers and other needs [than in aristocratic times] face the men of our own day. The political world changes, and we must now seek new remedies for new ills.”³⁵

Montesquieu had little to tell Tocqueville concerning either the identification of the new evil (the degradation of mankind in individualistic egoism and amour propre) or the new remedy (democratic sharing of responsibility). Rousseau, on the other hand, could tell him much. In all of Tocqueville I find not one sentence which would contradict Rousseau’s teachings when these are correctly understood. On the contrary, there are countless of his lines which strike one as pasted-in excerpts from Jean-Jacques’ work. For, all differences

32. *D.i.A.* I, p. 232 (*O.C.* I, p. 262).

33. *D.i.A.* II, p. 654 (*O.C.* I, p. 309).

34. *D.i.A.* II, p. 676 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 335).

35. *D.i.A.* II, p. 675 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 334).

aside, the latter's writings bear a fundamental affinity with Tocqueville's romantic soul.

In the fragments for the *Ancien Régime*, Tocqueville portrays the change in the ideas and feelings of the French between the king's relinquishment of absolute power and the beginning of the elections for the Estates-General.

At first one thinks only of the formation of the Estates-General. Thick tomes are hastily filled with undigested erudition. One labors to reconcile the Middle Ages to the conceptions of the present. Finally, the question of the old Estates-General disappears completely. One discards the whole mess. In the beginning, one only speaks of how the powers might be better balanced, the relationships between classes better regulated. Soon, however, one follows, pursues, then frantically chases the idea of pure democracy. At first, Montesquieu is quoted and explained; in the end one speaks solely of Rousseau. He became the only teacher of the Revolution in its heyday and will remain such ³⁶

Thus, I believe that the key to understanding Tocqueville—his principles and his political maxims as they relate to the new despotism—is to be found in Rousseau insofar as it can be found in any “forerunner.” Montesquieu may have been Tocqueville's mentor as far as the form or the analytic ordering of subjects is concerned.³⁷ Rousseau is Tocqueville's real teacher when it comes to substance, indeed, the substance which is at issue: human freedom.³⁸

36. Quoted in Landshut, *Zeitalter*, p. 240.

37. George W. Pierson in *Tocqueville and Beaumont*, *op. cit.*, p. 769, reduces the influence of Montesquieu to the stylistic similarity of the chapter headings. A rebuttal of this aside of Pierson is undertaken by Melvin Richter, “The Uses of Theory: Tocqueville's Adaptation of Montesquieu,” in M. Richter, ed., *Essays in Theory and History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 74–102. Richter sees Tocqueville as Montesquieu's successor primarily in terms of method, in an adoption of Montesquieu's analytic categories. But the differentiation of circumstances, institutions and morals is not peculiar to Montesquieu. We find it from Plato and Aristotle to Rousseau, in every political thinker who approaches the ordering of a polity from the perspective of a legislator, i.e., with an eye to purpose and formative potential. It belongs to the unquestioned tools even of Rousseau, that is, the Rousseau of the “maxims of government,” which Roger D. Masters worked out in *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976 [1968]).

Richter places Tocqueville in the context of that style of thought which J. G. A. Pocock has named “civic humanism.” Machiavelli, Harrington, Montesquieu, the Scots, the Federalist, among many others are assembled by Pocock within a great community—“civic humanism.” This connection is too tenuous to make Tocqueville the “pupil” of Montesquieu.

38. The thesis that Rousseau was Tocqueville's “teacher” naturally requires that one very clear distinction be made: Tocqueville writes in totally changed circumstances. Rousseau's revolutionary principles (popular sovereignty, freedom and equality) are now prevailing law. One must live with them and make them fruitful. Tocqueville's political world also stood open for change. It was no longer a matter of a prudential, practical-philosophical “*science du législateur*,” but rather of actual tasks and possibilities for the legislator, at whose disposition the constitutional and administrative order by and large stood.

How little Montesquieu and how much Rousseau signified for a theoretical mind of Tocqueville's time in understanding the contemporary world, is underscored by Lorenz von Stein. Von Stein (born in 1815 and thus ten years younger than Tocqueville) wrote in his *The History of the Social Movement in France, 1789–1850* (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1964): “Montesquieu

In this essay I cannot deal more closely with the fundamental agreement between Rousseau and Tocqueville's thinking—an agreement not extending to details, of course, but one consisting in the manner in which Tocqueville sees the problem of politics, the future of man under the conditions of equality. Examples must suffice. When one stumbles across a connection between Rousseau and Tocqueville, one is almost in danger of underestimating the differences which naturally exist between them: Rousseau, still under the conditions of the *ancien régime*, intellectually anticipated the society of equals, while Tocqueville encountered such a society in full development in America, self-confident and secure in its continued existence. Indeed, the belief that a large state could not exist as a republic (much less, a democracy) was one of the firmest convictions of political theory. Tocqueville saw before his eyes in America a huge empire, organized in a republican and democratic fashion, whose existence was less endangered than any of the great European monarchies. Further, it is without exception with Rousseau's categories that he explains this astonishing state of affairs and sees and understands what is happening in America. When he writes in summary that America's federal form allows it to enjoy "the power of a great republic and the security of a small one," it matches almost word for word a sentence from Rousseau's work on Poland.³⁹

But more basically, which traditional thinker could have supplied Tocqueville with the categories he needed in order to understand the fundamental destiny of the new world, i.e., democracy? Or who could have helped him understand a country in which the will of the people expressed itself through the laws, public opinion, and the prejudices of the masses—a will limited by morals grounded in a religiosity of seemingly modest demands, but for that reason all the more powerful? Tocqueville's appropriated Rousseau's concept of freedom in describing the republic as defined by the "slow and quiet action of society upon itself," distinguishing it from constitutional monarchy, in which authority "in a sense outside the body social, influences it and forces it to progress." "In the United States the motherland's presence is felt everywhere."⁴⁰ All the maxims of Rousseau's political genius had aimed at produc-

merely showed what the old constitution might have been, not what the new one was to be" (p. 108). Allan Bloom refers to the "intimate relation" between Tocqueville and Rousseau—a surprising discovery for him, as well. See his "The Study of Texts," in *Political Theory and Political Education*, M. Richter, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 135–37.

39. *D.i.A.* 1, p. 264 (*O.C.* 1, 1 p. 300); Rousseau, *The Government of Poland* xi, toward the end in *Œuvres Complètes*, Bibl. de la Pléiade III, p. 1010, translated with an introduction and notes by Willmoore Kendall (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 72. To be sure, Montesquieu, too, saw the possibility of a federated republic which would benefit from the intrinsic health of (small) numbers and, at the same time, thanks to the federation, command the advantages of a great republic (*The Spirit of the Laws* IX, 1). Regarding this question of utmost importance to Tocqueville, cf. Schleifer, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–18.

40. *D.i.A.* 1, pp. 53, 85, 362, (*O.C.* 1, 1 pp. 56, 95, 412) ("la patrie se fait sentir partout")

ing this result. "It is a just observation," Tocqueville quotes Hamilton, "the people commonly intend the PUBLIC GOOD. This often applies to their very errors." Who could overlook the fact that Hamilton was quoting Rousseau?⁴¹ According to Tocqueville, the society of equals stands before the alternative of the egalitarian, free republic and egalitarian despotism. For the individual, this alternative means being a citizen or a subject—*citoyen* or bourgeois. Tocqueville sees, as Rousseau had, the moral problem in a world in which equality has ruptured the ties of dependence and belonging. In every conceivable way, egoism must be broken, diverted, circumvented, by forcing men to concern themselves with others' affairs as well as their own. To lay upon men the bonds of brotherhood, or to tie these bonds anew, as the case may be, and to make them legitimate—this is Rousseau's central problem, formulated in the first lines of *The Social Contract*. And Tocqueville is concerned with the same thing. Perhaps the most frequently used word in Tocqueville's work is the word "bonds" (*liens*). No more than did Rousseau does Tocqueville wish to extinguish the individuality of the person. However, for the sake of morality and the nobility of the soul, man, who is threatened by "individualism" (Tocqueville's term for what Rousseau called *amour propre*⁴²) and abandoned to his egoistic weakness in the egalitarian, anomic, "unfettered" society, must be surrounded in every conceivable way with the bonds of brotherhood. Only the political order which tears the individual out from behind the walls of his ego can secure these bonds and continually tighten them.

Tocqueville is no more a liberal than is Rousseau. To the extent that they are, they are liberals of a very special kind. Neither is interested in the governmental order from the perspective of bourgeois liberalism, i.e., out of the motive of securing freedom for the individual. Certainly the individual needs freedom and guarantees of this freedom, too. But this freedom is active, oriented to the social and political order, and its services are constantly laid claim to by the social and political order—the freedom of the *citoyen*, not of the bourgeois. What must be cultivated is the spiritual disposition to freedom, the "taste for freedom," the "satisfaction of being free," "dependent not upon man but upon God and the law." This freedom unites men; it is not the freedom of the individual who withdraws into his own private space.

Tocqueville shares with Rousseau a thoroughly pedagogical, formative view of the political problem. If Rousseau could say that Plato's *Republic* was the most magnificent book written on education, Rousseau's philosophical endeavor itself centered on nothing so much as the elevation of man to his true nature, needful to him and perhaps possible. As is well known, *The Social Contract* is presented in summary form in the *Émile*, a book which Tocqueville

41. *D.i.A.* 1, p. 139 (*O.C.* 1, 1 p. 156).

42. Jean-Claude Lambert, *La Notion d'individualisme chez Tocqueville* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970).

must have known especially well; parallels to the *Émile* are particularly evident in the second volume of *Democracy in America*.⁴³

The moral-educational probing is tied to something else which is important to an understanding of Tocqueville in the light of Rousseau. If we distinguish in politics or pedagogy between principles and maxims, the *Émile* is almost exclusively a compendium of instructions, of maxims of the pedagogical art. Indeed, the book presents itself thus in its first sentence: "This collection of reflections and observations, without order and almost without cohesion . . ."
The Social Contract, on the contrary, bears the subtitle, "or Principles of Political Right" (*ou principes du droit politique*). In the first sentence of *The Social Contract* one reads: "I wish to determine whether there can be in the civil order of life, any kind of principle (*règle*) for a legitimate and incontestable form of government."

Generally then, one sees in the political Rousseau only the man of the "principles"—Freedom, Equality, Popular Sovereignty—the doctrinaire of the *Contrat Social*. In Germany this is a tradition extending back to Kant. But *The Social Contract* is only a fragment of a planned larger work on "Political Institutions." That never completed work would in any case have dealt with much more than just principles. Even at the conclusion of *The Social Contract* itself, Rousseau writes, "After the true axioms of constitutional law are established and an attempt has been made to provide the state with its foundation . . ."
(IV,9). That is, there is to be a consideration of this foundation with the help of the maxims of the art of governing. Three-quarters of *The Social Contract* deals with the art of governing—not with principles as general rules, but with how to "lend drive and will" to the body politic, with what "must be done for its preservation" (II,6), and with how one must alter general goals according to the circumstances in establishing a good state (II,11). The perspective (what is fashionably termed the "theoretical interest" [*Erkenntnisinteresse*] but is more properly called the "need to know" [*Wissensbedürftigkeit*] from which the knowledge of political science in Rousseau's sense, beyond the question of universally applicable principles, is sought, is the perspective of the legislator, and, in the course of time, of the statesman. His knowledge, viewed as a whole, is empirical, substantive and saturated with experience. Like the Greek *φρόνησις*, it is prudential and practical in character, able to differentiate one situation from another. Precisely in these matters, Tocqueville could have learned at least as much from Rousseau as from Montesquieu.⁴⁴

43. This is true above all of the third section of Volume II, which treats of the "Influence of Democracy on Mores Properly So Called."

44. Here I must let these suggestions and assertions suffice and hope at a later time to be able to portray in greater depth Tocqueville's "inspiration"—the term is perhaps more fitting than any other—by Rousseau. Only a completely rigidified picture of Rousseau, e.g., that of the theoreticians of "identitäre Demokratie," could make the reference to their relationship appear so questionable. (Cf. the convention report by Jutta Höffken in *Politische Vierteljahrschrift*, 21 [1980], p. 410.)

III

Guided by Tocqueville's relationship to Rousseau we find the path into the deeper levels of his thought. What Rousseau says of himself in anti-Cartesian fashion, namely that he feels and senses before he thinks, is also true of Tocqueville. He considers men's feelings as more important, more fundamental to their life together, than their thinking, i.e., than their rationally considered rights and interests. "I am convinced," he writes in a previously quoted letter dated September 17, 1853, "that political societies are not the products of their laws, but are from the very beginning determined by the feelings, beliefs, ideas, and habits of the hearts and minds of their members, and that these latter are in turn formed through nature and through education."⁴⁵ Tocqueville's concerns do not originate in his head; the head is an organ of the worrying and hoping soul. Like Rousseau, Tocqueville is convinced "that the true greatness of man consists exclusively in the accord between the feeling for freedom and religious sentiment" and that the question at issue is "the enlivening and taming of the soul" (*ibid.*).

If that is so, Tocqueville's true problem can not be that of freedom and equality, as one reads everywhere. Just as our epistemological-sociological prejudices cause us to see Tocqueville in the tradition of Montesquieu instead of that of Rousseau, so do we ascribe to him a problem which is in fact the dominant real-historical problem of the nineteenth century and still to some extent of our century: the power struggle of the third and fourth estates, liberal bourgeoisie and proletariat, or if you will, of freedom and equality, liberalism and democracy. Real-historically, these were the stakes in the struggle over education, the franchise, power and taxes. From the side of the bourgeoisie, this struggle was reflected in the thought of men from John Stuart Mill to Max Weber and Carl Schmitt. But Tocqueville is no bourgeois. His situation, his philosophical instinct, and his bias toward freedom and human dignity, permit him the same distance from the real-historical conflicts of the period after the Revolution as Rousseau enjoyed in the period preceding it.⁴⁶

Tocqueville always saw but one alternative for the future: either an unfree, egalitarian society of disconnected and weak individuals under the domination of a new despotism, or the free egalitarian society of those who remain free through close association. Each of these possibilities is defined by equality. They differ in the association, the spiritual and political league, which makes it possible for equals to preserve their strength and therewith their freedom. Democracy, the equality of conditions, furthers the danger of men succumbing

45 *O.C.* [B] vi, pp. 226f., in Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

46. Naturally, this must be taken with numerous grains of salt. Tocqueville the active politician had his place in the political class conflicts of his day—he always remained a "defender of property" (A. Jardin). Michael Hereth convincingly discusses the stale thesis that Tocqueville is the classical author for the opposition of freedom and equality. "Die Gleichheit als Gegner der Freiheit?" in *Aus Polink und Zeitgeschichte* B 31/80 (August 2, 1980), pp. 34ff.

to the *amour propre* of individualism. There is no road leading back to aristocracy, to a society founded upon an inequality which binds all men tightly together. Even the old, pre-democratic idea of freedom is finished. "According to the modern, the democratic, and—I dare say—the correct conception of freedom, every man has from his birth onwards an equal and perpetual right in everything which touches on himself alone," from which it follows "that the sovereign will can only proceed from the coming together of the decisions of all wills." "From this point on, obedience"—Tocqueville here means personally owed obedience—"has also lost its moral foundation; and between the manly and proud virtues of the citizen and lowly compliance of the slave there is no middle ground."⁴⁷

Thus men's mutual detachedness, the other side of equality, threatens freedom; and Tocqueville's "new political science" sees itself faced with the specific task "of showing men what they must do to escape tyranny and degeneration once they become democratic." This, Tocqueville wrote in 1836—after the appearance of the first volume of *Democracy in America*—was the most general idea with which one could summarize the meaning of his book.⁴⁸

IV

With that we can finally turn our attention to the task of representing, at least in outline, Tocqueville's "new political science." Tocqueville, and still more the Tocqueville literature (to which we owe so much for the understanding of the man), make this difficult. Tocqueville, like every political philosopher, wrote with a purpose: he wished to reconcile democracy and Christianity, convinced "that only freedom (I mean, moderate and regular) and religion, in a joint effort, can pull men out of the swamp into which democracy casts them as soon as one of these supports is missing."⁴⁹ He also wants to reconcile the men of his own class to democracy, and he does nothing which could detract from this purpose. Why call Rousseau the forefather of the revolution, why talk of fraternity, when this third concept of the revolutionary trinity has been so besmirched? But the linkage of freedom, equality and fraternity concerns Rousseau, and it is fraternity, the equivalent of the friendship which supports harmony in the *πόλις*, that points to those central ideas from which something

47. From the essay of 1836 on "L'État social et politique de la France avant et depuis 1789" (in Landshut, *op. cit.*, pp. 141f.). The strict rejection of all personal domination and thus of the subordination of one person to another in the new state of affairs (the core of Rousseau's concept of freedom) appears to me to be Rousseau's most important legacy. And just as with Rousseau, it is all the more crucial that those consequently abandoned to individual isolation (*Vereinzelung*) be joined together through intensive "social contracting." That is the fundamental idea, common to Rousseau and Tocqueville, of the "*science politique nouvelle*." The new science of associations is only its most important subdiscipline.

48. Letter to Kergolay, December 26, 1836 (*O.C.* XIII, 1 p. 431) Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

49. Letter of December 1, 1859 (*O.C.* [B] VII, p. 295). Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

like a “system” of his “new political science” can be inferred. In sentences which, once again, sound very “Rousseauan,” the elderly Tocqueville wrote to a friend in 1856:

You can hardly imagine, honorable lady, how painful and terrible it is for me to live in this moral isolation, to feel as if I were living outside the intellectual community of my country and time. Solitude in the desert would be no more difficult for me than this isolation in the midst of humanity. For, I will confess to you this weakness, isolation has always frightened me; and to be happy and even serene, I always had to live in a certain concord with others and to be able to count upon the understanding of my own kind—perhaps more than one can reconcile with wisdom. To me especially the line applies: “It is not good to be alone.”⁵⁰

Since Aristotle’s definition of man as a being characterized by speech, i.e., characterized in a special way by sociality, and requiring the political community in order to develop fully as ζῷον πολιτικόν there have been many linkages made between anthropology and politics. They occur in the central themes of classical political philosophy, of modern rational natural law, and even in the work of Marx—at the end of these efforts and purportedly superseding them. None of them seems to me to be more valid or more modern in its “hoping hopelessness” than that of Tocqueville.

The bitterness of loneliness is a primeval human experience. Tocqueville affirms this; but he radicalizes an experience suffered so much more prevalently in modern society by making this oldest pronouncement of our Judaeo-Christian conception of human history the basis of his entire political thought: It is not only oppressive and sad—it is *not good*, it weakens and destroys spiritual strength and the soul of man if he is not torn from behind the walls of his ego into constant, social and brotherly responsibility. The broadest association in which this can be accomplished is the state. In aristocracy, this happened “naturally” on account of the historical abundance of social “*liens*.” In the society of equals it must be pursued “artificially.” However, this is only possible on a basis which is in each instance historically given and therefore fortuitous and contingent. America shows how it can be done, for there the circumstances, the laws, and morals, held off an even greater danger of isolation stemming from equality of conditions. It is the task of the legislator, of the “leaders of society” (from whose ideal perspective and for the sake of whose enlightenment Tocqueville’s political science is pursued) to utilize all the ties in a given social fabric, to strengthen or “artificially” reestablish them in order to promote the bonds of brotherhood. Even when he insists that that which was “natural” in aristocratic society must be pursued “artificially” in the society of equals, Tocqueville is not a rational constructionist. Entirely within the footsteps of Rousseau, he seeks social ties within the given. To establish these ties

50. Letter of January 1, 1856, to Madame Swetchine (*O.C.* [B] VII, p. 295). Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

and protect them from harm is the task of the “leaders of society,” just as it is the task of the educator to guide the pupil in accordance with his talents and the circumstances.

If the interpretation of Tocqueville’s political science takes as its starting point the statement, “It is not good to be alone,” we are past the relationship of freedom and equality and are dealing with human togetherness in mutual dependency and aid. Here lies Tocqueville’s central thought, in the light of which everything else, even his doctrine of the new despotism, is explicable. I will clarify this by referring to the chapters on individualism in the second volume of *Democracy in America*.

In aristocratic societies, all men are linked to their fellow citizens above, below and inside their order of rank. In a manner of speaking, they are adjacent to one another. They are therefore almost always “closely tied to something outside themselves,” and thus often ready “to forget themselves.” In democratic ages, on the other hand, devotion to another human being would be rarer. “The bond of human affection stretches and loosens.” Under the conditions of equality, every class comes closer to the others and mixes with them. Men become indifferent and “at the same time, alien to one another.” “Aristocracy formed of all citizens a long chain that reached from the peasant up to the king; democracy breaks the chain and segregates each link unto itself.”

Thus, not only does democracy make men forget their ancestors, but it also clouds their view of their descendants and isolates them from their contemporaries. Even man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.⁵¹

This is despotism’s golden opportunity. Fearful by nature, it perceives in men’s isolation the surest guarantee of its own duration. No vice of the human heart so suits it as does egotism. “A despot will lightly forgive his subjects for not loving him, provided they do not love one another. . . . Despotism, dangerous at all times, is therefore particularly to be feared in ages of democracy.”⁵²

How is one to combat this? “Citizens who are bound to take part in public affairs must turn from their private interests and occasionally take a look at something other than themselves.” In the common management of the community’s affairs, everyone notices that “he is not as independent of his fellows as he used to suppose and that to get their help he must often offer his aid to them.” One must endeavor to attract the esteem and affection of those in whose midst one must live.

Those frigid passions that keep hearts asunder must then retreat and hide at the back of consciousness. Pride must be disguised; contempt must not be seen. Egotism is afraid of itself.⁵³

51. *D.i.A.* II, p. 478 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 106).

52. *D.i.A.* II, p. 481 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 109).

53. *D.i.A.* II, pp. 481–82 (*O.C.* I, 2 pp. 110–11).

In America, the perfected democracy. Tocqueville sees that it is possible, was possible there at any rate, to combat the democratic isolation which leads morally to the numbing of hearts and politically to despotism. "The Americans have used liberty to combat the individualism born of equality; and they have won." By preventing the centralization of administration, America's lawgivers gave every region "its own political life so that there should be an infinite number of occasions for the citizens to act together and so that every day they should feel that they depended on one another. That was wise conduct."

Squarely on the path cut by Rousseau, Tocqueville virtually enthuses: The free institutions which the Americans possess and the political rights of which they make such active use

provide a thousand continual reminders to every citizen that he lives in society. At every moment they bring his mind back to this idea, that it is the duty as well as the interest of men to be useful to their fellows. Having no particular reason to hate others, since he is neither their slave nor their master, the American's heart easily inclines toward benevolence. At first it is of necessity that men attend to the public interest, afterward by choice. What had been calculation becomes instinct. By dint of working for the good of his fellow citizens, he in the end acquires a habit and taste for serving them (*D.i.A.* II, p. 484).

The great means of spreading this inclination are the "associations," the unifying alliances, sometimes for political purposes but more importantly those "which arise in bourgeois life and have no political purpose." How important such alliances are for Tocqueville is generally known. It is precisely here that he seems to be continuing Montesquieu's teaching concerning the freedom-preserving function of the *pouvoirs intermédiaires*. But that is entirely incorrect; at least the context is so totally different that the reference to Montesquieu rather clouds the meaning of "associations" in Tocqueville's writings. The intermediate powers of Montesquieu only have their place in monarchy; their presence "forms the essence of the monarchical form of government" (*Spirit of the Laws* II,4). Mechanically, they are necessary to prevent the degeneration of monarchy into despotism. Because Tocqueville's concept of freedom is entirely different from that of Montesquieu, the task of Tocqueville's "associations" in preserving freedom, in morally establishing both community and freedom, is totally different. I can not demonstrate here how subtly Tocqueville distances himself from Montesquieu on this point. Tocqueville insinuates that even in relation to aristocratic society, to which alone Montesquieu's teaching applies, Montesquieu recognized only the cruder, more mechanical aspects of the limitation of power. These are "easy to comprehend."⁵⁴ There is in Montesquieu no discussion of the "less well-known but not less powerful barriers" of inclination, morals, religion, provincial prejudice, custom and public opinion, which had formed themselves like an "invisible ring" around the old power of

54. *D.i.A.* I, p. 286 (*O.C.* I, 1 pp. 326-27).

the state.⁵⁵ Montesquieu, child of the Enlightenment, had underestimated religion and thus failed to recognize the actual reason for the duration of despotic regimes, whose roots lay in religious feeling and not in fear. In the same way he misperceived the power of religious and moral restraints in constitutional monarchy, where they hindered despotic degeneration. Tocqueville's teaching concerning associations is also thoroughly imbued with the observational acuity and the moral spirit of Rousseau. This, as he emphasizes, "*science nouvelle*"⁵⁶ of the art of association becomes the "fundamental science"—*science mère*—in democracy.⁵⁷ The individual would sink into impotence and debility and culture itself would be threatened by barbarism if men did not avail themselves constantly of associations. "Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another."⁵⁸ These lines contain the true essence of Tocqueville's "political science."

This being so, it is clear that the true object of political science, its systematic center, must be the factors which promote or, as the case may be, oppose "human interaction." What brings men together? What drives them apart? The modern answer, already found in the Enlightenment and in Hobbes, is clear: interest. Tocqueville, no less than Rousseau, knew that to move men one must appeal to their interests.⁵⁹ But as on the one hand the "human mind" inclines to the banal, material and useful, so on the other hand it is "naturally drawn toward the infinite, the spiritual, and the beautiful. Physical needs hold it to the earth, but when these are relaxed, it rises of its own accord."⁶⁰

Lasting ties can only be established on the basis of ideas, passions and feelings, which always bind men together, even if in hatred toward one another. When "[n]o longer do ideas, but interests only" bind men together (democracy's specific danger), "it would seem that human opinions were no more than a sort of mental dust open to the wind on every side and unable to come together and take shape."⁶¹ When, as in France before the February Revolution, "restricted goals and points of view which are taken from private

55. *D.i.A.* I, p. 287 (*O.C.* I, 1 p. 327).

56. *D.i.A.* II, p. 486 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 114). The chapter entitled "Of the Use Which the Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life" begins with a clear distancing from the "*pouvoirs intermédiaires*" of the old regime: "*Je ne veux pas parler* . . ." The designation of "*science nouvelle*" also distinguishes his teaching on "*associations secondaires*" (his consistent choice of words) from that of Montesquieu.

57. *D.i.A.* II, pp. 488, 494 (*O.C.* I, 2 pp. 117, 174). Tocqueville's belief in the power of associations must be viewed in the context of the manifold associational movements of the time (Bucheze, Lacordaire, Lamennais, St. Simon and the early socialists). Tocqueville's position within the thought of his time has, in the absence of even a minimally satisfactory biography, virtually not been researched at all. An overview is provided by Maxime Leroy, *Histoire des idées sociales en France*, Vol. II: *De Babeuf à Tocqueville* (Paris, 1962).

58. *D.i.A.* II, pp. 486, 487 (*O.C.* I, 2 pp. 114, 115).

59. Classically stated in *The Government of Poland*, Chapter IX (*op. cit.*, p. 79).

60. *D.i.A.* II, p. 424 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 44).

61. *D.i.A.* II, p. 396 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 15).

life and its interests" progressively take the place of "general views, sentiments and ideas,"⁶² the common weal goes downhill, and revolution is just around the corner. What these lines from the well-known address of January 1, 1848, to the Chamber of Deputies express of contemporary political concern, also forms the deepest foundation of Tocqueville's political theory. That men must be bound together in the state by ideas and views held in common, that not interests but feelings and opinions form the social cement, that only they prevent isolation and the dissolution of the chain—this is the persistent theme of Tocqueville's truly theoretical work, the second volume of *Democracy in America*.

It is easily seen "that no society could prosper without such beliefs." Without ideas in common, there can be no common action; without common action, there are of course men, but there is no societal body.

So for society to exist and, even more for society to prosper, it is essential that all the minds of the citizens should always be rallied and held together by some leading ideas; but that could never happen unless each of them sometimes came to draw his opinions from the same source and was ready to accept some beliefs ready made [*croyances toutes faites*].⁶³

Dogmatic convictions are no less indispensable for man's "living alone than for acting in common with his fellows." It is not conscious choice which causes men to adopt most of their views without examining them for themselves—"the inflexible laws of his existence compel him to behave like that."⁶⁴ *La loi inflexible de sa condition*—one must search long and hard to find any more decisive anthropological declaration in Tocqueville.

Tocqueville's "*cogito*" is diametrically opposed to that of Descartes. One might formulate it as follows: "I am able to be a man among men because I, like all the others, accept most things unexamined." In the name of freedom and human dignity, Tocqueville rehabilitated prejudice. "[A]ny man accepting any opinion on trust from another puts his mind in bondage." "But," continues Tocqueville, "it is a salutary bondage, which allows him to make good use of freedom."⁶⁵ Men can not survive without dogmatic beliefs. Their possession is desirable; and of all dogmatic beliefs, regarded from a purely worldly and scientific perspective, religious beliefs are "the most desirable of all."⁶⁶ There is "hardly any human action . . . which does not result from some very general conception which men have of God, of His relations with the human race, of the nature of their soul, and of their duties to their fellows." These ideas are "the common spring from which all else originates." All religions which remain within this realm and do not strive to go beyond it "impose a salutary

62. Address to the Chamber of Deputies on January 27, 1848; Landshut, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

63. *D.i.A.* II, p. 398 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 16).

64. *Ibid.* (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 17).

65. *D.i.A.* II, p. 399 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 17).

66. *D.i.A.* II, p. 408 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 27).

control on the intellect.” and though they do not save men in the next world, they “greatly contribute to their happiness and dignity in this.”⁶⁷

I shall leave to one side the many advantages which religion confers on democratic peoples in particular—the central point of comparison between America and France—and only direct attention once more to that central political idea which is almost a warranty of salvation: the combating of egotism by means of socialization. From Machiavelli via Hobbes, to Rousseau, the relation of the Christian belief in God to patriotism is the core problem of modern political theory. All three men tried, as Rousseau said of Hobbes in *The Social Contract*, “to reunite the two heads of the eagle.” This is Tocqueville’s problem, as well, and with Rousseau he can say: “Everything which destroys social unity is without value. All institutions which bring man into contradiction with himself are worthless.” Tocqueville expresses it in a letter as follows:

I should like it if the priests would tell men more often that they, even as Christians, belong to one of these great human associations which God has doubtless founded in order to make visible and palpable those ties by which individuals are bound to one another. These associations are called peoples, and their territory the motherland. I wish that we might stamp it deeply on each and every soul—everyone belongs first to this collective entity and only then to himself.⁶⁸

Here is someone who actually believes he can look over God’s shoulder—to see that God “doubtless” founded the great associations in order to make visible and tangible the ties, the *liens*, by which individuals are bound together. There must be no indifference regarding the motherland; nor dare one make of this indifference a spiritless virtue, “which weakens some of our noblest instincts.” “When a people’s religion is destroyed, doubt invades the highest faculties of the mind and half paralyzes all the rest.” Such a skeptical state “inevitably enervates the soul, and relaxing the springs of the will, prepares a people for bondage.”⁶⁹ Again and again he states that skepticism always seemed to him to be “the worst evil in the world.”⁷⁰

What one finds most scarce today are the passions, genuine and powerful passions which hold life together and guide it. We can no longer desire, no longer love and no longer hate. Skepticism and humanitarianism completely paralyze us; make us incapable of performing either good or evil in a grand style; force us to flutter clumsily around a myriad petty things, of which not one attracts us, powerfully repels us or forcibly arrests us.⁷¹

67. *D.i.A.* II, pp. 408, 409 (*O.C.* I, 2 pp. 27, 28).

68. Letter dated October 20, 1856 (*O.C.* [B] VI, p. 347), in Salomon, *op. cit.*, pp. 226f.

69. *D.i.A.* II, p. 409 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 28).

70. Letter dated August 1, 1850 (*O.C.* [B] VI, p. 154) in Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 207. Certainly Tocqueville, as a modern man, must have repeatedly had to wrestle with skepticism within himself. Nevertheless, it is a fundamental misunderstanding to think that Tocqueville’s way of thinking can be reduced to the formula of “skeptical liberalism” (thus, R. Leicht in Höffken, *op. cit.*, p. 408, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 26/27, 1980).

71. Letter dated August 10, 1841 (*O.C.* [B] VI, p. 117), in Salomon, *op. cit.*, pp. 197f.

V

Tocqueville has always been regarded as a great liberal thinker whose major concern was how freedom could be preserved in equality. That he, who was, if a liberal, then “a liberal of a new sort,” would be in this manner misunderstood, was one of Tocqueville's constant worries. On March 22, 1852, he wrote:

They are absolutely set upon making me a party man, although I am not one. They ascribe passions to me and I only have opinions; or better, I have only one passion —the love of freedom and human dignity.⁷²

It is hard to see where the typical liberal aims could ever have been Tocqueville's. He had but one aim, and for its sake he sought to harness politics and the political order: “to combat the weaknesses of the human heart.” The weakness of man lies in egotism; spiritual self-degradation follows upon it. The ever-present weakness of men is intensified by their isolation, the dissolution of the *liens* of the old society in the society of equals. Therefore, the “world itself quite new” demands a new political science. For not the ruler, but political rule, political life together is what must render our weakness assistance. It is precisely for this reason that political science is the most important of all the sciences.

The diagnosis of the new form of despotism has been regarded as Tocqueville's greatest achievement in the field of political science. One can only agree with this. However, his accomplishment is obscured, his institutional reflections are given undue weight, when he is viewed from the scientific perspective of our time and it is overlooked that Tocqueville is, precisely here, a political scientist in the tradition of Plato and Rousseau—a moral historian, or, if you will, an analyst of the order and disorder of the human soul in the age of democracy.

In order to make Tocqueville's concerns more understandable to the modern mind, we might do well to elucidate Tocqueville's analysis of egalitarian despotism with the help of the categories of Max Weber.

The evil with which Montesquieu was still confronted was absolute monarchy which threatened to degenerate into unrestricted personal rule, the “despotism” of Louis XIV and his successor. Tocqueville wrote within the context of any entirely different world: a democratic world, in which even caesaristic rule, such as that of both Bonapartes, legitimized itself in a plebiscitary-democratic way. This democratic caesarism no longer bears the character of personal rule, i.e., of personal loyalty. The chain is broken, the new master is faceless. He is not interesting, and Tocqueville had nothing to say about him. Thus Tocqueville writes that “despotism corrupts the man who submits to it much more than the man who imposes it,”⁷³ and, “I am much less interested in the question

72. Letter dated March 22, 1837 (*O.C.* [B] VI, pp. 70f.), in Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

73. *D.i.A.* II, p. 668 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 325).

who my master is than in the fact of obedience.”⁷⁴ If we adopt Tocqueville’s analytic tools for the recognition of despotic dangers, the “strong man” is of no interest. He is, as Tocqueville said of Napoleon I, a mere accident.

Tocqueville’s theme is no longer personal domination, but in Max Weber’s sense, rationally legitimated domination and the specific motives to submission which are necessary for it in the age of equality. In aristocratic times, the motives for submission and obedience to a certain extent follow the master; in democratic times, things are reversed. Here the motives for submission are the controlling theme; domination follows submission: *oboedientia facit imperantem*. The character of domination is not defined by the ruler, but principally, as in classical politics, by those who obey: either free men or slaves. Thus, Tocqueville’s indifference regarding the character of the ruler.

Nowhere, at least not overtly (but remember that he is addressing the “leaders of society”⁷⁵), does Tocqueville revert to what he considers an antiquated theme—the analysis of contemporary rule from a personal perspective. He seeks in vain for a word for the new sort of oppression which threatens democratic peoples, a word that would

exactly express the whole of the conception I have formed. Such old words as “despotism” and “tyranny” do not fit. The thing is new, and as I cannot find a word for it, I must try to define it.⁷⁶

What he describes are the small souls’ motives for submission in a system of domination which legitimizes itself rationally, objectively, through increasing provision of security and social welfare. He never speaks of a personal “ruler,” but rather of the “sovereign,” the “tutelary power” or, most often, entirely matter-of-factly, the “central power.” The image of “regulated, mild and peaceful servitude” which he draws is much more easily assimilable with some of the outward forms of freedom than one might think, so that “it would not even be impossible for it to build its nest in the very shadow of popular sovereignty.”
Men

console themselves for being under schoolmasters by thinking that they have chosen them themselves. Each individual lets them put the collar on, for he sees that it is not a person, or a class of persons, but society itself which holds the end of the chain.⁷⁷

Tocqueville could not yet form a mental picture of the extent to which men in the both democratic and technical-scientific civilization of our time would become slaves to the conditions of this civilization. The pampering of *amour*

74. *D.i.A.* II, p. 668 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 325).

75. Concerning who these might actually be, Tocqueville is as unclear as Rousseau was. Here lies the objective-sociological and theoretical dilemma of every political theory in the age of equality.

76. *D.i.A.* II, p. 666 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 324).

77. *D.i.A.* II, pp. 667–68 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 325).

propre, the encouragement of every sort of emancipation from one's duties to others, has become the guiding maxim of democratic politics in all Western nations. We have difficulties conceiving what Tocqueville could have meant by freedom. Tocqueville's freedom (here, too, in conformity with Rousseau) has nothing to do with freedom from distress, burdens or the circumstances in which man may find himself vis-à-vis nature or his own kind. But rather, it is a matter of independence, of man's self-reliance in little things. Rousseau prepared the path for him, but Tocqueville, among the theoreticians of politics, is nevertheless the first realistic analyst of that disenchantment of the modern world resulting from rationalism, industry, improved productivity and bureaucracy. Certainly, and he clearly says so, the concepts of despotism and tyranny do not fit. But what he describes is the illegitimacy of relations which are illegitimate and inhuman even when (and perhaps are made even more illegitimate because) they find popular approval.

Here is the key to the significance which Tocqueville attaches to morals in democracy. Political analysis must turn from the structures of rule to the structures of obedience. Thus, he says again and again that he is concerned not with the ruler, but with obedience. Nowhere—in any case not explicitly, although certainly implicitly—is Tocqueville concerned with the illumination of rule, but rather with that illumination which might awaken the souls of citizens. That is his actual theme, his only theme: How can we prevent the degradation of souls in an age of equality which has been willed by destiny? For Tocqueville as for Rousseau, man in his humanity is defined by his freedom. He can choose the high road or the low road. Keeping him from choosing the more comfortable path is what determines the many institutional suggestions and considerations to be found in Tocqueville. In themselves they are unimportant and dated.⁷⁸ What is important is that man's sense for the higher things he preserved and that his sensitivity to greatness be prevented from falling asleep. Therefore he writes at the end of his major work, and I quote it again:

Let us then look forward to the future with that salutary fear which makes men keep watch and ward for freedom, and not with that flabby, idle terror which makes men's hearts sink and enervates them.⁷⁹

The political world changes, "and we must now seek new remedies for new ills."⁸⁰

This challenge toward the end of *Democracy in America* is a response to the demand for a new political science in the "Author's Introduction." Tocqueville formulates the theme of this science as an appeal to the "legislator":

78. Naturally, the institutions and empirical characteristics of America furnished him with the material for his principal work. And certainly the descriptions and reflections which these occasioned are fascinating and "classic." But the "*science politique nouvelle*," his basic philosophical-political concern, lies beyond these empirical characteristics.

79. *D.i.A.* II, p. 676 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 335).

80. *D.i.A.* II, p. 675 (*O.C.* I, 2 p. 334).

It would seem that sovereigns now only seek to do great things with men. I wish that they would try a little more to make men great, that they should attach less importance to the work and more to the workman, that they should constantly remember that a nation cannot long remain great if each man is individually weak, and that no one has yet devised a form of society or a political combination which can make a people energetic when it is composed of citizens who are flabby and feeble.⁸¹

I believe that I have found what Tocqueville was really concerned with in some lines by Erhart Kästner (the Greek Kästner). They are in the volume of his literary remains, *Der Hund in der Sonne* ("The Dog in the Sun") and helped to give it its peculiar title. I would like to quote them:

There is a wonderful line in Seneca: "*Calamitosus animus futuri anxius*"—deeply unhappy is the soul that anxiously thinks about the future. How true. He who thinks about the future is not happy. But to think anxiously about the future is human. It is a truth of the first order and one with which we must live: Only with the look toward the uncertain, the anxious care, the prospective view, the hope at worry's threshold, the fear for the future—only then does that which distinguishes man begin. Without thought for the future is the dog in the sun. There is no doubt that the dog in the sun has received unexpected honors in modern times. He has become the great promise. The leaders of peoples have promised the tormented and untortured the dog in the sun for so long that in some countries he has become the model. Gradually it is becoming clear what lies at the bottom of it—a colossal contempt for humanity.⁸²

Tocqueville was not the first who saw through the new despotism, the degradation of man by modern civilization. This title belongs to Rousseau. But the service of having first elevated this theme of the dog in the sun, modern servitude, through a comprehensive analysis, to the central theme of political science—this accomplishment is most certainly Tocqueville's.

81. *D.i.A.* II, p. 676 (*O.C.* I, 2 pp. 334–35).

82. Erhart Kästner, *Der Hund in der Sonne* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch, 1975), p. 5.