

Interpretation

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Interpretation

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Was Tocqueville a Philosopher?

The Distinctiveness of His View of Liberty

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Tocqueville did not call himself a philosopher. In fact, he clearly distinguished himself from the philosophers, and his work contains a criticism of their self-deceptive extremism and misanthropy. Nevertheless, he did not reject the truth of the fundamental uncertainty or contingency of human existence revealed by philosophic inquiry. His task was to surpass the philosophers from a human perspective by teaching human beings how to live well as human beings with that truth. Tocqueville believed himself to be a “new kind” of “liberal,” because he was a partisan of distinctively human liberty (MEM, 1, p. 402. Tocqueville’s texts are cited by abbreviations noted in the References.)

The philosophers, in one way or another, tend to exaggerate the scope, power, and human significance of human reason. They deny, in their pride, the distinction between human thought and God’s. Following the desire which motivates reason by itself, their minds aim at a consistency or unity that denies and even destroys the existence of particular or seemingly accidental beings.

Only God can think generally and particularly at the same time. Only he can comprehend in one vision the heterogeneous character of reality. For human beings, the whole, in truth, is incomprehensible. If they perceive it, they do so poetically, not scientifically. Even or especially human self-understanding is necessarily incomplete.

Philosophers tend to forget that the human capacity to generalize seems to exist to compensate for the human mind’s inability to comprehend truly reality’s infinite complexity or variety. Human generalizations or systems always do violence to reality, particularly human reality. Philosophers tend to produce doctrines and systems, and hence to lose details and distinctions, particularly human ones. They manifest a fundamental hostility to the particularity of human existence (DA, pp. 429–52; cf. Lawler, 1990).

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PLATONIC PHILOSOPHY

For Tocqueville, Platonic philosophy is distinguished by its “sublime impetus” (DA, p. 545). As theory or knowledge, however, it is “childish,” even “ridiculous” (MEM, I, pp. 343–47; LET, p. 130). The Socratics or Platonists believe naively that metaphysical reason can discover a firm foundation for human morality and support the human “aspiration toward immortality and the infinite” (LET, p. 130). They give human beings a very high idea of themselves, and they support, in particular, the lofty projects of aristocrats. Only with such metaphysical beliefs can human beings have “a sublime, almost a divine love of truth” (DA, p. 462). Tocqueville finds belief in such “natural religion” even among the Americans, in the “pure deism” or Unitarianism of their intellectual and political leaders, their self-perceived natural aristocracy (LET, pp. 50–52).

Such aristocratic or pretentious belief has the salutary tendency to be self-fulfilling. If human beings really believe they somehow transcend time, they really do tend to produce achievements that endure the test of time extraordinarily well (Lawler, 1983). But it goes without saying that an enduring reputation for spirituality, such as that enjoyed by literary figures like Plato, is not the same thing as immortality.

All human beings, Tocqueville says, have “implanted” within them a “taste for the infinite and a love for what is immortal” (DA, pp. 534–35), and hence, whenever and wherever they may exist, they love to hear that they have immortal souls and are essentially spiritual beings. From this perspective, Platonists are inevitably at least partly flatterers, and their literary endurance is a reward for their flattery. In Plato’s work, Tocqueville says, one finds “the most durable and most efficient cause of the great literary successes” (LET, p. 130). Hence he recommends that “[a]ll who have ambitions to literary excellence in democratic nations should ever refresh themselves at classical springs” (DA, p. 476).

Tocqueville seems to regard Plato’s writing as the first and in some respects the exemplary manifestation of the “literary spirit,” the tendency of the human imagination to present an idealized view of man and nature that is achieved by suppressing details that would produce a more modest and hence more accurate and less humanly satisfying view of the human condition and human prospects (RE, pp. 62–67; DA, pp. 462–63). Tocqueville says that the ancient writers, unlike modern ones, were always careful with details, but always with the intention of “seeking an ideal beauty.” Hence they did not present all the details of reality. In their literary endeavors, they were essentially poets (DA, pp. 476, 483).

Tocqueville also asserts that “[t]he soul has needs which must be satisfied” (DA, p. 535). The real greatness of Platonism is its acknowledgment of this

fact, its partisanship on behalf of the soul. Platonic or classical writers differ from modern ones particularly because they lack the fanatical passion for innovation or revolution that comes from the soul when the soul is denied (OR, p. 147; DA, pp. 543–45). Plato “addressed himself to the noblest and most *persevering* instinct of our nature” (LET, p. 130, emphasis added). By asserting that the human soul’s needs are really met, that the soul is really somehow immortal, Plato teaches human beings that there is no reason to rebel radically against their human condition, that being human is good. If his doctrine about the soul’s immortality were not only sublime but true, he would not be misanthropic.

But materialistic philosophers are right to notice that human beings cannot and do not act, ordinarily, as if Platonism were true. They usually do not act in accordance with the words they love. The condemnation by the “Platonists” of “the various sensual pleasures” is unrealistic (MEM, 1, p. 318), and the satisfaction that they promise the soul is at least largely illusory. Human beings, in truth, have no access to metaphysical or fundamental knowledge. They do not know what is immortal. They are essentially beings with bodies, and in truth they know nothing without bodies.

If a “real philosopher,” as Tocqueville seems to have thought, is “someone who takes pleasure in metaphysical speculation,” then “such,” as Beaumont observed, “was not Tocqueville” (MEM, 1, p. 10). Metaphysical inquiry did nothing for Tocqueville but make him miserable (LET, p. 64). All it produced was an awareness of his fundamental uncertainty or contingency, of the “incomprehensible miseries” which are at the heart of the human soul’s seemingly arbitrary location in a particular body. As a result of “contemplating himself,” he saw that man exists on earth “for a moment wandering on the verge of two abysses, and then is lost.” The unadorned “[h]uman destiny” is to experience oneself “for a moment” as other than nature and God, and to know only one’s “passions, doubts, and unexpected good fortune” (DA, p. 487).

Tocqueville thought that Plato “as a philosopher” is “superior to any” (LET, p. 343), but he certainly did not think he taught the truth. Human beings, he says, do desire to know the highest or fundamental truths, but this desire produces misery, not happiness, because the attempt to satisfy it produces, not truth, but paralyzing doubt. In his belief that self-awareness is necessarily incomplete and full of misery, he thought himself closer to Pascal or Rousseau. According to Pascal, “[w]e desire truth and find in ourselves nothing but uncertainty. . . . We are incapable of not desiring truth and happiness, and incapable of either certainty or happiness” (1966, p. 146). A highly self-conscious person or people, those who are far from the innocence of children or the illusions of aristocrats, can still appreciate Plato’s sublimity, but they cannot believe in his theory, because they have assimilated, in one way or another, Pascal’s criticism of the philosophers in general and Platonism in particular.

MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The early modern philosophers skeptically denied the possibility of any form of human immortality. Their radical doubt or atheism, they thought, was life-enhancing. They opposed the stupor promoted by the spiritual or otherworldly illusions of Platonism (LET, p. 319; DA, p. 543). They sought to perfect human liberty with reason, to overcome its irrational limitations, to eliminate human misery by making the incomprehensible comprehensible. The modern assumption is "that everything in the world can be explained and nothing in the world passes the limits of intelligence" (DA, p. 430). Individuals and society could be remade completely according to the universal and homogeneous principles of reason. The result would be nothing short "of a regeneration of the human race" (OR, pp. 12–14).

The modern philosophers, experience has shown, had a greatly exaggerated view of the extent to which human beings could live in the light of reason and rationally transform human existence. Their goal was, from its beginning, vague or indistinct or "indefinite." It became progressively more fantastic or monstrous over time. The modern project became progressively less empirical and acquired the qualities of a "religious revival" and mysticism. Its hopes, of course, were always less reasonable than those of the Christian religion, because it assumed dogmatically the nonexistence of a "supernatural" reality, a reality inaccessible to human reason, in which they might be realized.

The modern philosophers' atheistic theology of liberation, their assertion that "the first, incomplete Creation can be corrected by a second one made by human hands," never came to terms with the truth that the liberation it promises cannot be produced by human beings, by history (Hereth, 1986, p. 52). Its inevitable or logical or philosophical replacement, Tocqueville says, is the prideful and antihuman doctrine of "pantheism," the truth of which could never be affirmed by a reasonable or self-conscious human being. It will become true only if human beings or human self-consciousness cease to exist. Pantheism, Tocqueville says, is radically opposed "to the true nature of man's greatness" (DA, p. 452).

The modern project began as a "noble error," a product of "excessive pride" (ER, pp. 231–32). Its atheism truly, if incoherently, meant to be of service to human liberty. But, as an error, it could not sustain itself indefinitely in the light of reason. Because its partisanship on behalf of rational consistency was fundamentally misanthropic, it denied the goodness or real existence of genuinely human distinctiveness or liberty. Its tendency was to become more explicitly and unempirically deterministic. Instead of taking its bearings from the complexity of human experience, it more and more relied on the imposition upon reality of systems fabricated by the imagination. Through such imposi-

tion, it eventually achieved its desired systematic consistency, or removed the impediments the existence of humanity presents to human reason by simply denying the real existence of human liberty or individuality. The individual was suppressed in favor of the species, and the species itself disappeared in even more general explanatory systems. With humanity absent, human knowledge seemed to become both comprehensive and easy. The philosopher or theorist, by systematically degrading others, found an easy way to flatter himself or his mind (See Lawler, 1990; cf. Ceaser, 1986, pp. 458–60).

This destruction of humanity, however, is not simply the product of logical deduction. It is confirmed by the experience of the modern or “enlightened” or extremely self-conscious individual. Individuality comes to be experienced as nothing but a miserable illusion that must be surrendered or destroyed in the name of truth and contentment. The individual “is overwhelmed by a sense of his insignificance and weakness” (DA, p. 435). He experiences the unreality of his particular existence, the feeling that his particular or individual existence is unsupportable. This apparently fundamental or philosophical knowledge produces the practical doctrine or “ideology” that the experience of one’s individuality should be eliminated by whatever means necessary, that individuals should be reduced to a “mass” (ER, p. 160).

Human beings are to be reduced to an apathetic “imbecility,” no longer reflecting upon and hence no longer caring about either past or future (DA, p. 735). They are to surrender or be forced to surrender their sense or independence or concern about individual destiny and hence their “rights.” They will no longer have rights because they will no longer experience the need for them. They are to live contentedly with their contracted desires in an eternal present. They are no longer miserable because they desire to be immortal but cannot become so. They can no longer reflect upon the fact of their particular, temporary existence, a fact, which, in truth, has no “necessary” or “cosmic” significance.

The modern philosophic project is fundamentally destructive of humanity because it radically doubts the existence of anything which is not simply comprehensible by reason, which eludes the reason of the philosopher or theorist. Its proponents “deny anything which they cannot understand,” and they cannot understand the true complexity of human liberty or particularity (DA, p. 430). By brutalizing other human beings and hence capturing them within one’s deterministic system, the modern thinker attempts to divinize himself. But in the end, he cannot help seeing that he has no reason to exempt himself from the logic of this systematic brutalization. The rationalism of the philosophers, especially when applied to the problem of human misery, leads inevitably to the unity promised by comprehensive determinism or pantheism. What it opposes, inevitably, is distinctively human existence. It ends up “banishing men,” for their own good, “from the history of human existence” (RE, p. 62).

LIBERTY VERSUS REASON AND HAPPINESS

Tocqueville seems to affirm the Christian or Pascalian or “postphilosophic” suggestion that the philosophers, in one way or another, engage in a pretentious revolt against the truth about human existence (Pangle, 1987, p. 195). This “metaphysical revolt” seems to be characteristic of philosophers or, more generally, very self-conscious mortals, as such. The truth is that human capacities cannot satisfy human aspirations. Reason, especially when informed by human passion or pride, cannot help suggesting that human beings ought to be something else.

Because human beings, including or especially philosophers, are full of passion, they cannot be “merely reasonable being[s]” (MEM, 1, p. 340). Tocqueville himself longed sometimes “for peace of mind and moderation of desires,” but he never seems to have had them. He also says about himself “that it is unreasonable to long for a better fate than that of man. But such is my involuntary and irresistible impulse” (LET, p. 148). Human beings, he agrees with Pascal, cannot but desire a greatness which is beyond human experience. Tocqueville does not say that it is unreasonable for him to be dissatisfied with being human, just that it is unreasonable for him to dream of some other form of existence.

The philosophers may sometimes teach that human beings ought to live well by candidly coming to terms with the limitations of their condition, but they rarely follow that advice themselves. The Platonists and the early modern philosophers attempt to turn human beings into gods, either by word or by deed. The late modern or deterministic thinkers turn human beings into brutes. The attempt to divinize man or turn him into an angel, to forget or attempt to overcome his bodily limitations or needs inevitably leads, Pascal says, to human brutalization (Pascal, p. 60). The philosophers apparently can conceive clearly of angels or gods and beasts, but not of human beings. Their thought is that being human is unreasonable and undesirable.

Human beings, in truth, exist in a “middle class” condition between beast and god. This condition, experienced “as a thing of mediocre worth,” is intrinsically unsatisfactory from the perspective of both reason and happiness (LET, p. 103). Consequently, Tocqueville, as its partisan, affirms human liberty as a “noble” feeling or passion which “defies analysis” and also resists contentment or happiness (OR, p. 169).

Human liberty has nothing to do with “logic,” and, in fact, opposes it. It is a “virile” opposition to necessity (OR, p. 10). Love of liberty for its own sake is “incomprehensible” to those who have not been given it. It is not something that philosophers as philosophers or thinkers can comprehend. Reason, by itself, points to equality or uniformity. The noble preference for liberty or diversity of humanity comes from somewhere else. If a particular metaphysical doc-

trine, such as Platonism, can be judged to support human liberty under certain circumstances, it is because it is full of pride, not because it is reasonable. Tocqueville believes he was a partisan of human liberty while being remarkably free of illusions, especially metaphysical ones. He is proud that his pride could exist while being less deceived than others.

The philosophers often say that metaphysical inquiry leads to happiness, and hence that “devot[ion] . . . to the labors and pleasures of the mind” is good for its own sake (DA, p. 452). They even say that the way of life of the philosopher is “the life that contains the final answer to the point of human life as such” (Koritsansky, 1987, p. 102). They can do so only because their perception is distorted by pride or human passion. Tocqueville writes of the “ardent, proud, disinterested love of the truth” (DA, p. 460, emphasis added). Such a view is essentially aristocratic. It is full of the illusions of aristocrats, especially the belief that thought or metaphysical awareness frees one from necessity, that it somehow overcomes truly one’s anxious dissatisfaction with one’s mortality, that a human life could be constituted by “a pure desire to know” (DA, p. 460). It seems inevitable that, eventually, the “desire to know” would dispell the aristocratic illusions that made it seem to lead to wisdom and happiness.

Modern philosophers sometimes say that philosophy is useful. They have shown that it can help to produce material prosperity, which is a real good for beings with bodies. But, in the decisive sense, its utility is quite questionable. It cannot fundamentally transform the human condition. Its “enlightenment” seems most powerfully to make human beings more self-conscious or more aware of their fundamental contingency and uncertainty, of their distinctively human misery, of the fact that human desires exceed, and will always exceed, human capacities. It emphatically does not overcome scarcity. The fundamental, unconquerable human scarcity is the scarcity of time. Enlightenment makes human beings more and more conscious of time, more aware that they simply do not have enough. It robs them of all enjoyment. It replaces happiness or contentment with the ever-elusive pursuit of happiness.

THE RESTLESS, PROUD, UNHAPPY AMERICANS

According to Tocqueville, “[t]he greatest of all conditions for happiness” is “the tranquil enjoyment of the present good” (LET, p. 348). Such enjoyment is a gift of fortune, and it is one which is not given to human beings as such. Human beings, because they have souls with their own, insatiable needs, “soon grow bored, restless, and anxious amid the pleasures of the senses” (DA, p. 535). Enjoyment and contentment are not marks of human distinctiveness or nobility. They are not points of pride. The restless American materialists do not have them and, in truth, scorn them.

The Americans willingly sacrifice the present for the future. They pridefully

or heroically, “with a furious ardor,” pursue, but refuse to enjoy, prosperity (DA, pp. 400–406, 535). Tocqueville himself looks down with condescension upon those who are content with their present lot. He views them, in his pride, as less human or less spiritual than himself. He regards the willingness to sacrifice the present for the future as one of the sublimest human qualities. He knows that it can never be reduced to material self-interest, because, in truth, it makes human beings miserable.

Following Pascal, Tocqueville describes the human being as the brute with the angel in him. The angel is dependent on the brute, although the angel does not like that fact. But the angel is also capable of teaching the brute, of expanding and refining brutish desire, and of showing the brute how to satisfy these new desires. The human being’s restless, incessant pursuit of physical enjoyment cannot be explained without reference to the angel, to the angel’s desire to dominate and be freed from the brute (DA, pp. 546–47). The desire for wealth and luxury, the desire for more, shows one’s freedom from the constraints of unrefined or merely brutish satisfaction. It is the angel who cannot be satisfied; a brute, by himself, can readily find satisfaction and contentment. According to Pascal, the mark of human greatness is never being satisfied with one’s condition (pp. 62–65).

Tocqueville says that the democratic American “has a natural taste for liberty,” and an inordinate love of well-being (DA, pp. 506, 553). The danger may be that the latter may overwhelm the former, but it is also true that the former is the cause of the latter. The feeling of the emptiness of any particular moment of physical satisfaction and the resulting desire for more is not without its pride or consciousness of liberty. It is a mark that one has a soul with its own needs, that one is unable to distract oneself completely from those needs, that one desires spiritual satisfaction, even if it is not really available (DA, p. 535). The self-conscious materialist is obsessed with material well-being or physical satisfaction because he knows spiritual satisfaction is impossible. He is proud of his theoretical superiority to naive idealists or spiritualists, of the candor by which he confronts the futility and misery of his condition. Tocqueville strongly expresses his preference for “restless” materialism over “a kind of decent [or unself-conscious] materialism” that would exist without pursuit of “forbidden delights” (DA, p. 534). To the extent that democratic materialism fosters “a taste for easy successes and immediate pleasures,” Tocqueville opposes it from a human perspective (DA, p. 440). But he does not, for the most part, present the Americans as self-indulgent, unassertive hedonists, like Socrates’ democrats.

A highly materialistic people is a highly individualistic or self-conscious one, one which is shaped by a certain metaphysical awareness or anxiety, by the “incomprehensible miseries” of time-bound existence. Such a people, full of distinctively human misery, cannot enjoy or find contentment in the leisure promised by abundance. They are, in fact, proud of their inability not to work,

of their avoidance of leisure as nothing but boredom and anxiety. They connect their greatness to this misery (DA, pp. 535–38, 402–403). So much work is unnecessary from the perspective of any brute; it is a manifestation of human freedom.

A whole people “restless in the midst of abundance” is Tocqueville’s extraordinary or unprecedented discovery. The Americans are “lucky,” but do not feel so (DA, p. 536). They experience their existence as accidental or unfortunate. They think, with ever-growing feeling, that they deserve compassion. They come to think that all human beings, as equally unfortunate accidents, do. They daringly attempt to overcome their accidental existence in opposition to nature by attempting to conquer nature, by overcoming their contingency, their dependence on fortune or chance (Winthrop, 1986, p. 249). But they also are aware, from time to time, of the futility of this attempt. Hence they are, from time to time, “haunt[ed]” by a “strange melancholy,” the mood of philosophers when they come too close to the truth. This melancholy can lead to a “gripping” “disgust with life” that strikes especially “in calm and easy circumstances” (DA, p. 536).

The Americans “have little time for thinking,” because they deliberately do not find time for it. “[T]hey are,” Tocqueville says, “just as afraid of profundity as they are of themselves” (DA, pp. 440–41). They fear profound truth, especially truth about themselves, because they think they know what that truth is. They want to believe that metaphysical or theological inquiry ought to be disparaged as insignificant, as a waste of valuable time. They want to deny, but cannot always, the reality of their fundamental experience of reality. This experience of theirs is shared by Tocqueville and Pascal, and they quite reasonably if “ignobly” avoid it as much as possible to avoid misery (DA, p. 444). According to Pascal, “the natural unhappiness of our feeble mortal condition” is “so wretched that nothing can console us when we really think about it” (Pascal, p. 67).

Tocqueville joins the Americans in attempting, not always successfully, to avoid metaphysical thought. It also made him miserably melancholic. He, like the Americans, was “not suited for . . . idleness” or leisure, because it might bring such thought to mind. He was, especially on “tranquil days” and in “happy circumstances,” often “disturbed about nothing.” He was overcome by “a great and ridiculous misery,” seemingly “without cause and effect” (MEM, 1, pp. 332–33, 352; 2, pp. 319–20; LET, p. 349).

But Tocqueville, more clearly than the Americans, knows that his greatness is in his inability to avoid or be diverted from the misery of metaphysical awareness or anxiety altogether, and he is proud of his greatness. Tocqueville tells the “sad story” of his “anxious and insatiable soul.” He says that “[i]t is a little bit the story of all men, but of some more than others, and of myself more than anyone I know” (LET, p. 149). In his perception of his unrivaled human sadness or misery, Tocqueville ranks himself higher than any human beings he

knows. He ranks the Americans much higher than most human beings, certainly higher than satisfied aristocrats or devout Christians. He understands them so well because he shares so much in common with them. His description of their restlessness, anxiety, and unhappiness, their despair at not possessing more, could hardly be criticisms. They are, in a human sense, praise.

Perhaps, in the decisive respect, Tocqueville believes the Americans really to be enlightened. He criticizes them for a lack of proper pride or ambition and for a rather banal or calculating understanding of religion. But he sometimes seems to present pride and religion as life-enhancing illusions (DA, pp. 542–46). The true greatness of the Americans is in their misery. The danger is that they will become altogether too miserable, that their “constant restlessness” will wear out their wills, and hence that they will give up their true distinctiveness or greatness. They will think or feel the misanthropic conclusion of the line of thought that directs the project of the philosophers and self-destruct.

The Americans, Tocqueville says, have, above all, a “passion for equality.” Their awareness that human beings cannot really satisfy this passion is reflected in their growing irritation and anxiety as they continue to make egalitarian progress. Small, persistent inequalities upset them more than large, eradicable ones. What they want is complete equality, and they cannot and will not be satisfied with less. The passion, Tocqueville says, is “ardent, insatiable, eternal, and invincible” (DA, p. 506).

“[C]omplete equality,” Tocqueville observes, “is always slipping through people’s fingers, the more when they think to grasp it, fleeing, as Pascal says in eternal flight” (DA, p. 198). Whether they realize it or not, the Americans believe, as Tocqueville’s rare explicit reference to Pascal suggests, that the achievement of such equality will somehow free them from their distinctively human misery. Their passion for equality is the passion to be freed from their humanity or self-consciousness or liberty. As Americans become more theoretical, they tend to conclude more clearly that equality, completely or uniformly achieved, or socialism (and eventually pantheism) is the remedy for the disease called individuality. They progressively more clearly and explicitly affirm the misanthropy of the philosophers, because the complete equality they seek does not exist among human beings.

Most of the time, the Americans are not thinkers, and their religion and their women (and the domestic contentment they provide) save them to a great extent from encountering the consequences of what they really know. Such moderation is indispensable for their human liberty, because their knowledge by itself drives them to self-destructive excesses. The possibility of their self-destruction should their encounter with what they really know become more frequent or more systematic is prefigured in the self-destruction of Pascal, whom Tocqueville describes as the most amazing or purest of the thinkers. According to Beaumont, Tocqueville’s friend and collaborator, “there was no one whom he studied with more perseverance and more interest” (MEM, 1, p. 12).

PASCAL'S POSTPHILOSOPHIC WISDOM

Pascal, says Tocqueville, "ralli[ed] all the powers of his mind to discover the most hidden secrets of the Creator." He cared only for his "soul," and not for "this life," hence he died "prematurely." His mind or soul destroyed his body; he self-destructed (DA, p. 461). He wore himself out, as Tocqueville says about the American materialists, by his "constant restlessness" or pursuit (DA, p. 444).

Pascal, it seems, could not bear the limitations of this life. Tocqueville does not report that Pascal ever discovered the Creator's "most hidden secrets," nor that his extraordinarily "pure desire to know" primarily produced pleasure for his mind. Pascal believed that what he most needed to know, the truth about his particular fate or immortality, his mind of necessity could not know. Human thought or self-awareness, the awareness of the contingent being placed arbitrarily in the infinite universe, produces misery. For the human mind, this misery is incomprehensible. A human mind cannot know why or for what human beings exist. Human existence is experienced by the human mind as accidental.

According to Pascal, human beings cannot escape this misery entirely and remain human and retain their greatness, but neither can they bear it for long. "[A]ll our dignity consists in thought," Pascal says, but thought by itself is of nothing but misery (p. 95). The misery is lessened somewhat by the fact that human beings can take pride in it (p. 71). The affirmation of human greatness in spite of its misery is the human point of pride, but it is not the pride of the philosophers, who self-deceptively are not or simply will not admit that they are miserable.

Yet pride is not enough, hence human beings, to affirm their human greatness, also need faith in a Creator hidden from the mind, but they must be fortunate enough to have it. The absence of that faith is the "ultimate misfortune" for human beings, beings self-conscious enough to experience ultimate doubt (Pascal, p. 157). Tocqueville does not present Pascal, the thinker, as having faith, because Tocqueville, the thinker, did not.

It is the absence of faith or trust, be it Platonic, Christian, enlightenment-progressivist or some other, that causes thought to be of nothing but misery and to be self-destructive, and Tocqueville believed that he and, to a lesser extent, the Americans knew Pascal's misery. He also knew that human beings could not exist long without faith. One must believe, at least to some extent or sometimes, in order to live freely as a human being. Human liberty is necessarily limited or shaped by faith or trust.

The faith of the Americans, as Tocqueville presents it, is fortunate for the perpetuation of their human liberty, but it is also quite tenuous, because it is an aristocratic inheritance which is inconsistent with their skeptical approach to the world, with their "philosophical method," which they have "found in them-

selves" (DA, p. 430). Ordinarily, Pascal says, human beings must divert themselves from thought or self-awareness to avoid self-destruction by achieving at least some happiness or contentment (Pascal, p. 66). The Americans, knowing or feeling this, prefer to believe "without discussion" or examination. The purpose of religion, according to Tocqueville, is to keep an individual "from time to time, from thinking about himself." It is a "salutary control on the intellect," which preserves "happiness and dignity" (DA, pp. 432, 444–45).

TOCQUEVILLE'S POST-PASCALIAN WISDOM

Tocqueville, as a political scientist or statesman, considers diversions from a human perspective as both salutary and necessary for human distinctiveness or liberty. He does not present Pascal as being diverted, but, instead, as metaphysically single-minded. This awe-inspiring way of existing eventually caused his self-destruction. Neither Tocqueville nor the Americans nor other human beings can or should follow his example. Allan Bloom is surely wrong to say that Tocqueville "evidently regards [Pascal] as the most perfect of *men*" (Bloom, (p. 252; emphasis added), although he was, for Tocqueville, the most radical of thinkers. Pascal's criticism of the philosophers' prideful self-deception is one Tocqueville affirms, but Pascal's more candid or explicit contempt for "this [human] life" he also presents as misanthropic.

Tocqueville regarded his work and his passion for politics as a diversion from metaphysical anxiety or misery (MEM, 1, pp. 415, 435), as, to some extent, an anti-individualistic affirmation of the "salutary bondage" of common sense (DA, p. 434). Some reliance on common sense is necessary for all human beings to avoid the total surrender of individuality. Tocqueville attempted not to "despise" his fellow human beings or "despair" concerning human endeavors. He attempted to serve their good with moral earnestness and integrity. He discovered that he had an "instinct" for justice that moderated his awareness of his greatness, and he was able to affirm equality insofar as it was a principle of justice, and hence a limited or moderate principle (LET, pp. 84, 99, 110–12, 141). His moderation made him a partisan of liberal "reform," which exists somewhere between fatalism and revolutionary transformation, and which is appropriate to the "middle class" condition of human existence (ER, pp. 231–32).

He regarded the diversion of self-conscious materialists to be less adequate than his, to be less able to fend off self-destruction. The infinite desire for more, unmoderated, comes from the antihuman quest for "limitless independence." He attempted to supplement or moderate "restless materialism" with aristocratic or political and religious concerns, to shore up and extend among the Americans their perceptions of their proud, but not wholly individualistic,

greatness. He did not want to destroy their greatness, or his own, but to limit or form it into an experience human beings could find bearable. He was a partisan of human particularity or liberty.

CONCLUSION: TOCQUEVILLE AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

The philosophers say, for one reason or another, that philosophic inquiry supports or even is human liberty and human happiness. As far as Tocqueville can see, they are in error or blinded by an antihuman pride. Evidence of this error is found in their metaphysical doctrines, which from Platonism to pantheism express hostility toward human liberty or distinctiveness. He joins Pascal in candid acknowledgment of the fact that by itself metaphysical inquiry leads to nothing but doubt and hence human misery. It leads the philosophers and even Pascal to assert that human beings ought to be something else.

This misery, however, is at the core of human greatness, and Tocqueville, for a motivation other than reason or happiness, is a partisan of that greatness or dignity as something choiceworthy in itself despite its limitations. He is proud that this partisanship seems to rank him higher from a human perspective than the philosophers, and perhaps even higher from the perspective of the truth. He evaluates metaphysical doctrines as a statesman should, as life- or liberty-enhancing diversions, not as reflections of the truth. Hence he knows that determinism is only “very probably untrue,” but “most certainly pernicious” under modern circumstances (ER, p. 227). Platonism, while theoretically implausible, is a salutary antidote to the excesses of materialism or determinism, and Tocqueville finds it and even infuses it into American religion. Trust in its truth, if possible, moderates human misery enough to allow human beings to concern themselves with their souls, to look boldly toward the future, and not to surrender their humanity.

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