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Alexis de Tocqueville's Political Science of Revolutions; Theory and Application

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ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE'S POLITICAL SCIENCE OF REVOLUTIONS; THEORY AND
APPLICATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the theory of revolutions presented in the main writing of Alexis de Tocqueville and its importance in the field of political theory as well as its possible application in the field of comparative politics. Scholars specializing in the study of the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville have for many years debated on whether the works of this author offer a comprehensive political theory of regimes and political change. This work supports the idea that in all his major writings de Tocqueville works within the same theoretical framework and develops his own typology of modern regimes. At the same time the work argues that de Tocqueville focuses not on “democracy” as such, but on the notion of revolution in modern politics. The resulting general model proposed by the dissertation combines elements of the ancient cyclical science of regimes with the modern concepts of political progress. The dissertation argues that this theoretical scheme is endowed with immense predictive power. It exemplifies the use of Tocqueville’s political science of revolutions with both historical and contemporary examples. The two final chapters contain a possible expansion of the Tocquevillian theoretical framework to account for the political phenomena that are still in their nascent stages of development.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I please many persons of opposite opinions not because they penetrate my meaning, but because, looking only to one side of my work, they think they find in it arguments in favor of their own convictions.

Alexis de Tocqueville.¹

There is no dictatorship in Louisiana. There is a perfect democracy there, and when you have a perfect democracy it is pretty hard to tell it from a dictatorship.

Governor Huey Long.²

Alexis de Tocqueville seemed to have been fully aware that he would be an author that the students of political thought will desire to quote, but not necessarily interpret. They will find elements that suit them in his thought and treat them like conversation items. Indeed, Harvey Mansfield rightly points out that Tocqueville has not yet received his “full due for the quality of his thought,” and although he has been praised by many, his readers seem to assume that “anyone who writes so well on the surface must be superficial, and anyone who predicts so well must be a seer” (Mansfield 2010, 6). This is reflected in the fact that one will easily find a myriad of small articles and medium sized works devoted to Tocqueville, few of which, however, attempt to look at his thought as a whole, resolve the apparent inconsistencies, and underline the real ones.³

Tocqueville was wary of being called a philosopher; this however does not mean his writings are devoid of a general theory that would explain his “new political science for a world

¹ Tocqueville to Charles Stoffels 2 Feb 1835, quoted in Welch (2001, 215).

² Quoted in Schlesinger (2003, 66).

³ Three notable exceptions are Pierre Manent’s *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy* (1996), Boesche’s *Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (1987) as well as Marvin Zetterbaum’s *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy* (1967).

entirely new” (*Democracy in America* 2010 I, 16).⁴ The aim of this work is to give Tocqueville fuller credit for constructing a completely new theoretical scheme that would explain most of the possible political changes of modernity in a more satisfactory way than the theories of most other thinkers. This work shall prove that there is nothing particularly Nostradamic about the accuracy of Tocqueville’s predictions, which are all based on the same, elegant theoretical model. This model, indeed, constitutes an audacious attempt at embarking on a project of creating a new science of regimes that to modernity would be what Aristotle’s *Politics* (1984) was to the ancient world. In short, the aim of this work is to propose a description of theoretical mechanics that de Tocqueville used in his principal writings, especially in *Democracy in America* (2010), *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*⁵ (2008) and *Recollections*⁶ (2005). I will try to clarify both why the Tocquevillian model has so much explanatory power and at the same time why its origin and shape remains a mystery to many modern political scientists. A large portion of the work will be also devoted to showing how Tocqueville’s insights into revolutions and regime changes can be used in modern political science.

It has to be noted that in spite of the audaciousness of the project, Tocqueville is very diffident in its realization. He formulates his thoughts very cautiously, avoiding pseudo-scientific doctrinarism and determinism. He is what Françoise Mélonio (2006, 346-347) calls an “eloquent philosopher,” and chooses to be less systematic than the first sociologists (Marx, Durkheim, Weber – see Manent 2006). Moreover, he has concrete goals: he is propaedeutic; he desires to teach his contemporaries to avoid certain outcomes. Still, in order to teach about the undesirable

⁴ Elsewhere referred to as DA, with the Roman numerals indicating the volume of the 2010 edition of the work.

⁵ Elsewhere referred to as AR.

⁶ Elsewhere referred to as R.

results, he needs a fairly objective model of all possible political changes. Sadly, when death prematurely ended Tocqueville's life, his work was still not finished. He was still developing and gathering notes to the second part of the AR. Tellingly, as Jon Elster (2006) notes, the ultimately unfinished AR is a far more mature and coherently structured work than the DA.

However, even in AR, Tocqueville did not present his theoretical model of regime change in one cohesive form. Still, based on the dispersed theoretical elements presented in his works, one can reconstruct the outline of his general model of regime change, a model that is genuinely insightful, perhaps even more insightful than the sociological models that came into use later, and that assume an extremely high level of causal determinism. After all, the role of a social scientist, as Tocqueville understood it (Elster 2009), was not so much to predict the actual future, but to understand the alternatives that are open to the society. Tocqueville had the temperament of an active politician, and thus, in his writings he displayed a firm belief in the political elites' ability to make independent and not merely predetermined choices, which in turn enables the pursuit of concrete political goals. He wrote, "For my part I hate all those absolute systems that make all the events of history depend on great first causes linked together by the chain of fate and thus succeed, so to speak, in banishing men from the history of the human race. Their boasted breadth seems to me narrow and their mathematical exactness false" (R, 62).

When writing on the thought of Tocqueville, one must also remember that contemporary political scientists, especially those who rigidly insist on the separation between abstract theories and empirical studies, may have a conceptual problem with the syncretic methodology employed by the Frenchmen. Using contemporary notions for instance, it is hard to establish whether Tocqueville's works should be classified as political philosophy or as early empirical political science. If one is to interpret it as political theory or philosophy, then a question arises: why does Tocqueville omit to quote key theoretical texts such as the Declaration of Independence in DA

and Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen in AR. On the other hand, if one treats Tocqueville as a modern, empirical political scientist, it becomes disturbingly easy to criticize him on methodological grounds. Michal R. Hill (2003), for instance, points out, among other alleged flaws of Tocqueville's *Democracy* – the short time of the trip, the arbitrary choice of informants and a superficial interpretation of the results that substitutes the results of political phenomena for the analysis of their cause.

This work will attempt to show that although some of the methodological criticisms of Tocqueville are justified, his true value rests not in the particular studies he conducted but in the general model for understanding change, revolution and history he proposed. In line with Kuhn's methodology, one might think about Tocqueville's writings as one of the best descriptions of the modern paradigm in social sciences. The "normal sciences" Tocqueville conducted will be always more or less problematic for other researchers, but his paradigm indeed still holds. And the most important element of this paradigm is the clear focus on social and political change. As a matter of fact, political change in Tocqueville is all encompassing; unlike Marx or Hegel, he does not exclude even his own theory from the general current of the great and small revolutions.

Tocqueville constantly confuses us by using the notion of democracy in many different meanings. Some count over 20 (Schleifer, 2000); this work, however, assumes that they can be reduced to two basic forms. Nevertheless, irrespective of how many democracies or aristocracies we will find in Tocqueville's work, all classifications miss the point that the true subject of Tocqueville's thoughts is the changing nature of those notions. He is not a philosopher of a particular revolution, an aristocrat, democrat, socialist or reactionary. This work argues that Tocqueville is a masterful student of revolution itself. The fundamental question he asks at the philosophical level is what does change in politics mean? However, in his writings he also steps down from the philosophical level and asks us what constitutes the particular great change in

modern history? Finally at the normative level he asks the question: how should political actors respond to this change? At the same time it is important to note that unlike in the case of Aristotle, revolution for Tocqueville does not seek merely a new regime, it does not seek rest. History according to Tocqueville can surprise us with great revolutions that indeed create new political worlds with new regime typologies, and new dynamics of development.

As for the logic behind the great revolutions, Tocqueville, as all important political thinkers⁷, constructs his own theory of time and being. In this theory he provides a unique connection between history and nature. In short, he is a historicist⁸ who does not believe in progress. Human nature and “providence” in Tocqueville’s view “traces around each man” a “fatal circle” (DA IV, 1285) that prevents humans from becoming simply perfect and rest in that perfection. History thus becomes close to a zero-sum game, by choosing their virtues societies at the same time choose their vices.

It is true that Tocqueville’s theory is open-ended. It does not treat even itself as the ultimate point in history, it remains ironic and skeptical.⁹ It is also true that Tocqueville’s philosophy is dispersed in his writing and does not take on an organized, academic structure (much like Plato’s dialogues). However, this work argues that the intricacy and the depth of Tocqueville’s thought makes him a self-conscious theorist of politics. In his persuasion, Alexis de Tocqueville sided with none of the most powerful intellectual camps of his times, he did not choose Guizot’s liberal historicism and he likewise rejected socialism and the French ultra-conservative reaction. Moreover, Tocqueville justified his choices philosophically. Alexis de

⁷ Tocqueville rejects the term but he does it in a way that suggests that it is the philosophy that rejects him rather than the other way round (See Chapter 3).

⁸ The meaning of the term will be further explained in Chapter 3.

⁹ ...which enables Tocqueville escape the paradox of the end of history.

Tocqueville is, thus, not postmodern, it is the postmodernity that in some of its aspects became Tocquevillian.

CHAPTER 2

REVOLUTION, DEMOCRACY, AND THE PARADOX OF DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMIZATION

Modern democracy, the democracy of large federal republics and nation-states according to Tocqueville appeared in the Western world in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century and it had no immediate predecessor, although, it culminated a long process of political and social change; the “great democratic revolution” (DA I, 6) as Tocqueville puts it. This lack of precedence created for him a phenomenological problem with naming the very object of his study. Acknowledging the difficulty, this section will try to explore Tocqueville’s understanding of both revolution and democracy.

Firstly, Tocqueville obviously could have, in line with the German school of philosophizing, created his own new language to describe the new political world. This, however, would have been burdened with a certain risk. Over time an artificial, purely philosophical language would become incomprehensible, since it would not match the natural language the new epoch itself would chose to use. Moreover, natural languages, unlike the artificial creations of analytical philosophy, have a disturbing tendency to change the meaning of old words rather than create new ones. Therefore, Tocqueville decided not to follow the Germans. According to his own record and that of his readers, he was a great admirer of the natural language used in speech and popular literature, and he despised the idea of radically rearranging this vernacular in order to force it to accurately express the new “general ideas.” This tendency to create artificial philosophical and scientific languages to describe political phenomena was according to Tocqueville one of the major vices of the democratic philosophy. He was quick to observe that “the love of general ideas shows itself in democratic languages, in the continual use of generic terms and abstract words, and in the manner in which they are used. That is the great merit and the great weakness of these languages” (DA III, 827). The strength lies in containing” the

“vacillating thoughts” of democratic men with “very broad expressions,” which can give some charm even to “vagueness”¹⁰ (ibid., 829). The weakness consists in the fact that generic neologisms have a short life since, as Tocqueville observes, “democratic people constantly change their words” (DA III, 817 *n* 1).¹¹

As for Tocqueville himself, he chooses to follow “the natural laws of language” and “make those laws respected by observing them themselves. (DA III, 827).” Tocqueville’s choice results in a captivating literary style reminiscent of the great French writers. Not without a reason Louis Kergolay in his review of DA compares Tocqueville to Pascal “for the substance of the language” and to Voltaire “for ease and lightness of touch.” (quoted in Jaunme 171 *n* 1). Tocqueville’s French style clearly sets him apart from Hegel. And although one sees many similarities between the two (See Welch 2001, 150-157), Tocqueville was indeed a very different kind of thinker. Being well aware of the linguistic tendencies present in modern philosophy (he wrote after Kant), Tocqueville thus declined to even call his thought a philosophy. He preferred to use the more modest name of the science of politics.

The linguistic mastery of that science, however, came at cost. Tocqueville may have avoided the awkwardness of idiosyncratic terms, but using old, natural words he could not avoid ambiguity. Hence as James T. Schleifer points out “perhaps the most disconcerting feature of Tocqueville’s thought has always been his failure to pinpoint the meaning of *democratie*” (2000, 325). The main tension according to Schleifer occurred between understanding democracy as *état social* [the social state] synonymous with the notion of *égalité* [equality] and democracy as a form of political rule. Schleifer thus assumes that Tocqueville, in spite of all his efforts, failed to

¹⁰ This is not say that Tocqueville is not vague himself. He is, however, quite conscious and open about his vagueness.

¹¹ The *n* stands for (foot) note.

find a “satisfactory” (ibid.) explanation of the relation between the two terms, and remained in a constant state of confusion.

The Roots of the Ambiguity

It seems, however, that in spite of his problems in applying political philosophy to modern political reality¹², Tocqueville shared a crucial insight with Plato and Aristotle. He believed that political philosophy is reflected in the way of life or the *état social*, which in turn produces a regime. A regime, in consequence, both for Tocqueville and for the classics of political philosophy, is an institution that perpetuates and conserves the governing philosophical principle. It does so mainly by finding a rule that diminishes the conflicts between the private lives of citizens and the polity, as well as those between one polity and other polities. In other words, a regime is an epiphenomenon, a product of society that enables it to correct its own imperfections. It follows that the very idea of the regime is something of a compromise, and a perfectly organized society is at the same time its own regime, since by virtue of its impeccable design it produces no conflicts between the private and the political, and in time of need it becomes an army as a whole. Plato gave an example of such a society without politics in the *Republic*. Although Tocqueville, as we will see in the next chapter, is far from approving of the Platonic vision, he at the same time understood that at the deep philosophical level of analysis, the social and the political are molded into a philosophical principle from which they both can be derived. However, since as we have already noticed Tocqueville declines to create a new language to clarify all those nuances, his use of certain terms had to be ambiguous. In other words, Tocqueville could have instead of “democracy” called this new, great philosophical phenomenon

¹² This will be discussed in the following chapter.

der Geist, but he deliberately chose to use a more familiar term albeit in a new and ambiguous meaning.¹³

Examining Tocqueville's use of the terms revolution and democracy in specific contexts, however, points to the fact that we are not dealing with accidental ambiguities. Indeed one can argue that Tocqueville anticipated the "common use of 'models' or 'types' by modern social scientists" (ibid., 49-50). In his notes Tocqueville remarks:

In order to make myself well understood I am constantly obliged to portray extreme states, an aristocracy without a mixture of *démocratie*, a *démocratie* without a mixture of aristocracy, a perfect equality, which is an imaginary state. It happens then that I attribute to one or the other of the two principles more complete effects than those that in general they produce, because in general they are not alone. (quoted in ibid., 335)

The similarity between this passage and Max Weber's method of idealization and concretization (see Heckman 1983) seems obvious. There is however also a marked difference. Tocqueville, especially in the second volume of DA, does not point to clear concretizations. When reading his most famous passages about the democratic pantheism, individualism or the antithetical relation between liberty and equality, one is not sure whether he speaks of a specific place and time or a general tendency. Rather than immediately jump into the social or political specifics, he seems to construct a perfectly democratic city in speech in the same way Plato constructed a perfectly aristocratic one. Tocqueville, to be sure, thinks in terms of what can be described as "models," but when he does so, he illustrates those thoughts with concrete historical events or phenomena that point to the predictive power of the model. In AR he writes for instance about the absolutist centralization in France and the ways in which it paved the way for a particular type of revolution. In DA he writes, among other things, about the importance of stabilizing the

¹³ The problem is exacerbated by the fact that Tocqueville often uses both the old and the new notions of democracy in the same paragraph.

democratic restlessness with the rule of law and illustrated this with a fairly detailed description of the American legal system and a characterization of the practitioners of the legal profession. However, when Tocqueville writes about democracy (or aristocracy) in general, the tastes, desires, aspirations it inspires, he does not seem to be constructing a precise model but a vision that inspires the many probabilistic schemes he ultimately derives from that image of democracy. His philosophical description of the democracy is thus not so much a model or a precise vision of the future. It is a description of the ultimate goal towards which history, according to him, moves but which it never reaches. In other words, democracy is Tocqueville's x axis that the asymptotic function of historic time will keep approaching in the foreseeable future. It is only after a considerable time that a new political paradigm will surface. In a style evocative of Plato's metaphor of the cave Tocqueville writes in the conclusion to DA:

This new society, which I have sought to portray and which I want to judge, has only just been born. Time has not yet set its form; the great revolution that created it is still going on, and in what is happening today, it is nearly impossible to discern what must pass away with the revolution itself, and what must remain after it.

The world that is rising is still half caught in the ruins of the world that is falling, and amid the immense confusion presented by human affairs, no one can say which old institutions and ancient mores will remain standing and which will finally disappear.

Although the revolution that is taking place in the social state, the laws, the ideas, the sentiments of men, is still very far from being finished, already you cannot compare its works with anything that has been seen previously in the world. I go back century by century to the most distant antiquity; I notice nothing that resembles what is before our eyes. Since the past no longer clarifies the future, the mind moves in shadows. (DA IV, 1280)

The above quote is a concise illustration of the main ambiguities that continuously reappear in all of Tocqueville's major works. On one hand, Tocqueville admits that he moves in the darkness¹⁴ [Fr. ...*marche dans les ténèbres*] as do the men imprisoned in the Plato's cave. On

¹⁴ The translation above uses the expression "moves in shadows."

the other hand, the whole work is precisely an attempt, even if not a completely successful one, of turning first towards the fire of historical truth and then perhaps simply towards the truth. At the same time, as far as the light of philosophical truth is concerned, Tocqueville remains suspicious as to the extent to which it can change the course of particular human lives and directly influence politics.¹⁵ At one point on the margin of the manuscript he wrote:

Although philosophical systems can in the long run exercise a powerful influence on the destinies of the human species, they seem to have only a very indirect connection with the fate of each man in particular; it follows that they can excite only a secondary interest in the latter. So men, never feel carried toward philosophical studies by an actual and pressing need, they devote themselves to them for pleasure or in order to fill the leisure that the principal affairs of life leave them. (DA III, 705 *n r*)

At the same Tocqueville himself becomes a philosopher when he openly admits that in the second part of DA his goal is to construct an ideal picture of democracy in its pure, theoretical form. Moreover, trying to explore the possibility of ahistorical truth, Tocqueville, as we shall see, finds Pascalian empty spaces rather than the Marxian earthly paradises.

When judging Tocqueville's ambiguities, one however needs to keep in mind that logically consistent models can be used only when dealing with specific cases. Such syllogisms based on Tocqueville's thought were for instance proposed by Huntington (see 1977/1968) and Jon Elster (2006). At the same time, the ultimate goal of democracy as such can be described only through philosophical insight. When Tocqueville says that he "does not believe in Plato's republic" (DA IV, 1082) he obviously does not mean that Plato is wrong because he creates "imaginary states." Tocqueville admits elsewhere he is guilty of the same "sin." His accusation has more to do with the one-sidedness of Plato's vision where the ideal republic is the one compact form that contains all possible regimes. Indeed, all the existing regimes can result only

¹⁵ For further discussion of this, see Chapter 4.

from the devolution of the platonic ideal. Members of the perfect republican youth become corrupted merely because they have been devoting too much time to gymnastics and not enough to music (*Republic* 547c-548c).¹⁶ In consequence, young republicans become timocratic, later oligarchic, then democratic and finally succumb to a tyrant whose rule is situated only slightly above the lawless anarchy. In this vision, democracy is just a step in the cycle of decline.

Tocqueville opposes this old view of democracy by demonstrating that modern democracy also has its own ideal, and even a tyranny it can potentially lead to has a quality of a new civilizational sophistication that clearly sets it apart from unbridled chaos or the simple realization of the domineering will. Thus Tocqueville differs from Plato in that he points to the duality (aristocracy versus democracy) or perhaps plurality¹⁷ of the ideal political forms, which is a clear rejection of Platonic unity.

To be sure, one can oppose this new vision of an ideal city of democracy for moral reason and Tocqueville undoubtedly does so on the grounds that if fully realized, democracy would undermine liberty. It would put an end to the vision of a human being as a moral actor, for no morality is possible without the ability to make free independent decisions. Even a potentially pleasant and benevolent tyranny according to Tocqueville would be tyrannical, since it would prevent humans from carrying the moral weight of their decisions on their own shoulders. It is therefore not a coincidence that the transformation of the old aristocratic pride into individualism disturbed Tocqueville to a great extent. Individualism may reject old authorities, but at the same time it slavishly submits to the will of majority; thus it is not so much proud as faithful to a new slave-owner. As Tocqueville puts it:

¹⁶ See Plato (1991).

¹⁷ As we will later see Tocqueville's model remains open-ended and assumes the possibility of not only new regimes but also new principles of politics in general.

Moralists complain constantly that the favorite vice of our period is pride. That is true in a certain sense: there is no one, in fact, who does not believe himself worth more than his neighbor and who agrees to obey his superior. But that is very false in another sense; for this same man, who cannot bear either subordination or equality, nonetheless despises himself to the point that he believes himself made only for appreciating vulgar pleasures. He stops willingly at mediocre desires without daring to embark upon high undertakings; he scarcely imagines them.

So far from believing that humility must be recommended to our contemporaries, I would like you to try hard to give them a more vast idea of themselves and of their species; humility is not healthy for them; what they lack most, in my opinion, is pride. I would willingly give up several of our small virtues for this vice. (DA IV, 1126)

Tocqueville in this point again departs from the classical political science of Plato, who treats pride or the love of honor as the vice that begins the decline towards democracy. Tocqueville disagrees and sees pride as a vestige of a different political world, a principle completely alien to the conformist mind of the democratic society. However, it would be a mistake to say that the democratic human has no redeeming features for Tocqueville. On the contrary, Tocqueville is quick to point out that the perfect democrat is not a beast; like the Platonic guardians the democratic humans also have their own selfless ideal and their own “Phoenician” myth of equality (*Republic* 413d-415d).

The most striking feature of Tocqueville’s model¹⁸ is, however, its dynamism. Political writers often tend to view liberal democracy as a state that is either achieved or not. For Tocqueville it is a process, hence in our contemporary terms he should be viewed more as a theorist of revolution than democracy as such. It is not a coincidence that the word “revolution” opens and closes Tocqueville’s discussion of democracy in DA . The old ideal of the political is therefore something the modern regimes move away from and democracy is something they approach by means of motions Tocqueville calls “revolutions.” A revolution is for him as close as

¹⁸ A feature that a large part of this work will focus on.

a real life-phenomenon can come to pure democracy, which otherwise is only a theoretical extreme. Revolution is democracy in practice.¹⁹

Overcoming the Ambiguity of Tocqueville's Notion of Democracy and Revolution

In spite of the fact that Tocqueville's ambiguity is deeply rooted in his philosophy, it needs to be overcome in any interpretative approach to his oeuvre. Democracy, as we have established, is for Tocqueville a complex term that every reader of his works must break down into simpler elements. The complexity is a result of the fact that democracy for Tocqueville combines the description of a regime, a society and an anthropological principle. We have also established that for Tocqueville, democracy as a theory is the goal of a grand historical movement; a point this movement approaches but never reaches. Therefore, the notion of democracy only makes sense when it is tied with the notion of revolution. Indeed, given that modern descriptions of democracy²⁰ define it as a stable state rather than a social process; we need to stress the importance of the notion of revolution in Tocqueville. To use a poignant metaphor, revolution would be to Tocqueville what light was to Caravaggio, it brings out the true shapes of things, and in his vision of reality it constitutes a pivotal departure from the static vision of the ancient masters.

Now, however, a time has come to decompose Tocqueville's notions of revolution and democracy and thus to understand the inner mechanism of his political science; examine the particular strokes of his brush, so to say. In that examination, one firstly notices that Alexis de Tocqueville persistently uses the word revolution in two meanings that are intimately tied to his

¹⁹ According to Tocqueville even those democracies that have avoided a "small" revolution (USA) as a particular, violent event, still exemplify the second type of the larger and slower revolution that according to Tocqueville was happening in the world that surrounded him. Thus every democracy for him is in some way a child a certain revolution; as for the ancient democratic regimes like Athens, he goes as far as to deny the true status of a democracy (those issues will be discussed further in the chapter; all those issues are further described Chapter 3.

²⁰ E.g. the Freedom House Index (2012) or Przeworski's (2000) concept of democracy.

two notions of democracy. One concept states that revolution is a long lasting global drive towards greater equality of conditions, and that this drive is an enduring social tendency of the modern world. The beginning of this process dates back to medieval Europe. He calls it “a great democratic revolution” and stresses that “everyone sees it but not everyone judges it in the same way” (ibid.). He also notices that “for seven hundred years there is not a single event among Christians²¹ that would not turn to the profit of democracy” (ibid. 10).

The other notion of revolution Tocqueville employs is that of a concrete, violent event. In accordance with the nineteenth-century stylistic fashion, he often uses that notion right beside the first one and contrasts them for a supreme literary effect. For instance, he writes that the June days of 1848 “did not quench the fire of revolution in France, but they brought to an end, at least for a time, what one might call the proper work of the February Revolution.” This last use of the word “revolution” can be defined in accordance with the insights of Charles Tilly, who calls revolution “a forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant proportion of the population subject to the state’s jurisdiction acquiesces to the claims of each block” (2006, 159).

Both notions of revolution that Alexis Tocqueville uses later in his various writings first appear in DA. The second notion is, however, more prominent in the second part of the work, which was published five years later and is considered to be a more philosophical piece.

Tocqueville also looks at the mechanisms of revolutions in more detail in AR, as well as in the

²¹ The claim that Christianity is a root cause of modern equality may cause some controversy. What Tocqueville means here is that the idea that all humans are created equal in the eyes of God was alien to most of the ancient world and gained ground only with the rise of Christianity. Of course, the equality in the eyes of God is very different from the modern democratic equality; however, according to Tocqueville the first one is the prerequisite of the second. See Chapter 3 for details.

PR. The following quotation illustrates Tocqueville's two distinctive uses of the word 'revolution':

“The great advantage of Americans is to have arrived at democracy without having to suffer a democratic revolution and to have been born equal instead of becoming so” (DA III, 886; see also DA III, 708 and DA IV, 1210). The above sentence is very startling because before, in the first part of DA, Tocqueville constantly assures the readers that America is a pioneer of a great social revolution. In the second volume published in 1840, however, he suddenly reveals that there was no revolution in America, by which he means that there was no single, pivotal instance of domestic unrest that was comparable in the scope and violence to what happened in France. This is of course a rather controversial approach to the American War of Independence and its aftermath (See Wood 1991). Unlike Rip van Winkle in Irving's short story (1921), Tocqueville does not see this war as something that introduced a new social and political quality in comparison to what preceded it.²²

In this context the reader might be even more surprised by the fact that, although Tocqueville uses the phrase “American Revolution” (e.g. DA I, 92), he continually stresses that it was an action in defense of the principles that the “Anglo-Americans” (DA II, 632) developed much earlier and something significantly different from the French Revolution, especially in the extreme form of Jacobinism. Moreover, Tocqueville notes that the Federalists were at least partly aristocratic, i.e. tempering, rather than underlining, the democratic sentiments. According to him the distinctiveness of America rests in the fact that its society was extremely well prepared to embrace the grand democratic revolution, which according to Tocqueville is an irresistible and “providential” (DA I, 6) fact. Thanks to that, the USA managed to avoid the “normal,” violent revolution that often results from the political actors' misapprehension of the logic of modern

²² It is, in general, fairly common for Tocqueville to disregard the superficial perception of things and seemingly contradict himself.

politics. Naturally, Americans fought for their independence but only to preserve their rights and laws; thus there was no need for an all-embracing “tutelary regime” (DA IV, 1250) to make them equal. In contrast, “Europe has experienced, for half a century, many revolutions ...but all these movements are similar on one point: all have shaken and destroyed secondary powers²³” (DA IV, 1222). This was coupled with a strong “instinct of centralization” which has been “the sole immobile point amid the singular mobility” (DA IV, 1242).

Tocqueville finds the first type of revolution, the general drive towards democracy, a fact that is impossible to oppose. It is the Machiavellian necessity (1985) in his thought; something that according to him every responsible, modern politician has to take into consideration irrespective of all normative considerations. The approach this work takes will, thus, differ from Marvin Zetterbaum’s (1967) treatment of the notion of democracy in Tocqueville’s work. This work will claim that for Tocqueville, the very basic move towards social equalizing is a temporal, “provisional” necessity, not merely a preferable option. It is, however, the task of the particular societies to negotiate a compromise between this necessity and the exercise of rights²⁴ pertaining to human liberty and dignity. The singular “passion for equality” (DA III, 878) that gives rise to the “great revolution” is thus described in the following way, “... all men, all powers that would like to fight against this *irresistible* power will be overturned and destroyed by it. In our day liberty cannot be established without its support and despotism cannot reign without it” (ibid). Tocqueville bases this judgment on philosophical insights into the history of Europe and makes it an axiom of his new political science.

²³ I.e. powers that prevent the establishing of a new “democratic” despotism – families, churches, associations, aristocracies, etc. Tocqueville notes that all those revolutions increased the power of the state.

²⁴ Tocqueville never uses the term natural rights. Rights for him are always exercised by a concrete actor. Even when writing about slavery, Tocqueville notes that “We have seen something unprecedented in history: slavery abolished, not by the desperate effort of the slave, but by the enlightened will of the master...” (Tocqueville 2001, 199).

He is, however, not a political determinist akin to the early sociologists. Apart from *necessita* he also makes plenty of room for *occasione*. Tellingly, he concludes DA by writing, “one must not think that men are not masters of themselves” (DA IV, 1284-1285). Tocqueville does not believe in ready formulas, and his science of politics is not a quest for predictive “law like” (Elster 2009, 11) theses on social life. He, however, does believe in a political theory of non-deterministic models, one that is based on experience and thus allows for modalities in spite of the necessities. He constructs heuristics that instruct statesmen and whole societies; at the same time, he moves beyond a simple imitation of the American model. In writing DA his intent is precisely to answer a fundamental problem of modern statecraft: how to avoid a violent, centralizing and absolutizing revolution in face of the grand change? In other words, how to preserve liberty in times of democracy? His examination of American democracy yields a compelling answer to this question. Tocqueville focuses especially on the slow formation of the classically liberal *mores* thanks to free associations and families. He also stresses the importance of religion and political parties construed as civic institutions and not armies bent on conquering the battlefield of the state.

Democratic Revolution as a Shift in Philosophy, Science, and Culture

Tocqueville defines revolution as a “change that profoundly modifies the social state, the political constitution, the mores and the opinions of a people” (DA 1150 *n w*²⁵). The previous section has introduced the problem of modifying the social and the political spheres of life, which is, indeed, crucial for Tocqueville. The vision of revolution, however, would be incomplete without an analysis of Tocqueville’s description of revolutionary mores, tastes and opinions. One

²⁵ The letter „w” refers to Tocqueville’s margin note that the editors of DA translated and placed under the main text. All notes that are quotation for Tocqueville’s original marginalia use letters as their reference points.

also needs to account for the way in which the great democratic revolution changes the way humans practice science.

For Tocqueville, the main characteristic of the democratic cultural revolution consists in becoming increasingly rational in the practical spheres of technology, family life, art and piety and increasingly irrational in the theoretical spheres of political principles, theology, philosophy and esthetics. This duality is hardly understandable now, as the comprehensive modern understanding of rationality consists simply in observing that it is the practice of choosing methods that are adequate to the goals that we have set for ourselves. The modern utility maximizing notion of rationality has, however, nothing to say about the choice of particular goals and thus reduces principles to preferences and esthetics to tastes. The old, aristocratic notion of rationality, present in ancient and medieval philosophy differed in that the rational part of what it deemed the human soul was responsible not for realizing the goals that spontaneously appeared in the consciousness, but for formulating them in accordance with the objectively rational, philosophical principles. The praxis naturally also partook in that rationality but at a lower level, remaining merely an individual concretization of the theoretical understating of the whole human life. The democratic notion of rationality reverses the points of emphasis. It is the praxis that is now expected to adhere to uniform, calculative rigors, whereas the general philosophical theories of the true and the good are seen as something that spontaneously arise from the sum of individual opinions, which in turn, eventually create the impersonal will of the majority. It is, nevertheless, crucial to understand that this will can never be rational according to the standards of classical philosophy.

For Tocqueville, this problem constitutes the question about the supreme intellectual authority, and he notes that while the democratic revolution leads to what Weber would later call the “disenchantment” (1971, 270) of every-day life, it does not lead to the rationalization of the

theoretical and the theological. On the contrary, it undermines the existence of any rationality that pertains to those spheres of human activity and that is external to the individual mind. Of course since some form of social authority is necessary, it must rest in what Tocqueville calls *l'inafaillibilité de la masse* [the infallibility of the masses]. The whole passage dealing with this issue reads:

Individual independence can be greater or lesser; it cannot be limitless. Thus, the question is not to know if an intellectual authority exists in democratic centuries, but only to know where its repository is and what its extent will be. I showed in the preceding chapter how equality of conditions made men conceive a kind of instinctive unbelief in the supernatural, and a very high and often exaggerated idea of human reason.

So men who live during these times of equality are not easily led to place the intellectual authority to which they submit outside and above humanity. It is in themselves or their fellows that they ordinarily look for the sources of truth. That would be enough to prove that a new religion cannot be established during these centuries, and that all attempts to bring it to life would be not only impious, but also ridiculous and unreasonable. You can predict that democratic peoples will not easily believe in divine missions, that they will readily scoff at new prophets and that they will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity and not beyond.

When conditions are unequal and men dissimilar, there are some individuals very enlightened, very learned, very powerful because of their intelligence, and a multitude very ignorant and very limited. So men who live in times of aristocracy are naturally led to take as guide for their opinions the superior reason of one man or of one class, while they are little disposed to recognize the infallibility of the mass. The contrary happens in centuries of equality.

As citizens become more equal and more similar, the tendency of each blindly to believe a certain man or a certain class decreases. The disposition to believe the mass increases, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world. (DA III, 717-718)

As Allan Bloom²⁶ observes for all Frenchmen “Descartes and Pascal are national authors, and they tell the French people what their alternatives are, and afford a peculiar and powerful perspective of life’s problems.” For Bloom, the two represent the “choice between reason and

²⁶ Let us note that the *Closing of American Mind* is in essence an extended commentary on the cultural aspects of the Tocquevillian great revolution.

revelation” (1987/2012 52). This sheds some light on Tocqueville’s observation that “America is one of the countries of the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed” (DA III, 699). At the same time he writes with passion about Pascal:

When I see him, in a way, tear his soul away from the midst of the cares of life, in order to give it entirely to this inquiry, and, prematurely breaking the ties that hold the soul to the body, die of old age before reaching forty years of age, I stop dumbfounded; and I understand that it is not an ordinary cause that can produce such extraordinary efforts.

The future will prove if these passions, so rare and so fruitful, arise and develop as easily amid democratic societies as within aristocratic ones. As for me, I admit that I find it difficult to believe. (DA III, 782)

By saying this, Tocqueville simply means that the American society is decidedly rational, however, as we have seen, it is crucial to observe in what aspects the new democratic rationality differs from the original Cartesian model. Not surprisingly, what Tocqueville sees as the main element of the Descartes’ method is following deductively the directions of one’s individual mind. This for Tocqueville forms the main principle of modernity in philosophy. “Who does not see that Luther, Descartes and Voltaire used the same method?” he asks rhetorically. At the same time, however, he also inquires: “Why did the men of Reformation enclose themselves so narrowly in circle of religious ideas? Why did Descartes want to use it only in certain matters, although, he made his method applicable to everything and declare that only philosophical and not political things must be judged by oneself?” (DA III, 704). Therefore, Tocqueville suggests that although the new democratic rationality is Cartesian in nature, it has a noticeably wider scope.

This tendency of democracy to promote reliance on individual reason in all spheres of life, including morality, philosophy and spirituality creates what Tocqueville calls individualism and leads to the weakening of all social bonds. Nations, localities and families are all affected. “Thus, not only does democracy make each man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants from

him and separates him from his contemporaries; it constantly leads him back toward himself alone and threatens finally to enclose him entirely within the solitude of his own heart” (DA III, 884). Bloom is especially sensitive to the idea of crippling family ties. In his Tocquevillian commentary on American intellectual life he writes: “The children can say to their parents ‘You are strong, and we are weak. Use your strength to help us. You are rich, and we are poor. Spend your money on us. You are wise, and we are ignorant. Teach us.’ But why should any father want to do so much, involving so much sacrifice, without any reward? Perhaps parental care is a duty, or family life has great joys. But neither of these is a conclusive reason when rights and individual autonomy hold sway” (Bloom 1987/2012, 115).

Interestingly, however, Tocqueville points to the self-restraint of early modernity. As we have noted, Protestants according to him advocated for an individual study of scripture and Descartes for an individual study of philosophy. They, however, withheld their judgment when it came to propriety, esthetics and social mores. Neither did they advocate political revolutions based on the people’s individual judgment. The nineteenth century, according to Tocqueville, went significantly further.²⁷ However, as Tocqueville observes earlier “individual independence cannot be... limitless.” The limit of this independence is the political community, and as Sheldon Wolin rightly observes “Tocqueville might be the last influential theorist who can be said to have truly cared about political life” (2003, 5). Political life in turn has a rationality of its own; and it consists in care for the preservation of the community. Plato, for instance, insisted that his *Republic* is fully rational, precisely because the laws he designed were such that implementing them rigorously (according to his account) would create a polity that would not change (avoid any crises) and thus acquire a collective, eternal life. That is also why democratic, individual

²⁷ He, however, writes without making reference to Hegel, so he reads Descartes literally and treats the Cartesian reason as an actual individual reason and not an impersonal theoretical entity.

rationality for Tocqueville is politically irrational. Indeed, Tocqueville suggests that in democratic times the preservation of political communities requires special devices that would enable the polity to have some sort of collective identity and prevent it from being swayed only by the changing opinions of the majority.

In the past the problem was simply avoided by virtue of a tacit, informal rule that individual rationality can be used only in some spheres of life and not in others. This is the inconsequence that Tocqueville sees in Descartes and Luther. The new democratic society according to Tocqueville is, however, rejecting all the old “gentlemen’s agreements”; it eventually fulfills the demand of the great revolution by applying the Cartesian rule indiscriminately. Drawing a comparison between Bloom and Tocqueville, one could argue that in Tocqueville’s thought Descartes plays a role similar to Kant in Bloom’s reading of modern culture. It is Descartes along with the Christian reformers that according to Tocqueville introduce the fact value distinction, but at the same time remain oblivious to the consequences of this differentiation. Given that science is still expected to be rational, that is, accessible to the mind which uses the Cartesian method, this distinction undermines the very notion of a “political science.” Based on the definition of a political body as a community based on consent, the principles and prejudices that are necessary for the existence of a given political community are not expected to be indiscriminately accepted by all human beings. Thus there can be no fully rational politics, for in order to have politics, some of the scientific rationality needs to be suppressed by traditions and symbols that from the point of view of a Cartesian or Kantian mind will always remain mere superstitions. Tocqueville is very clear about this fact when he warns that treating the American experience as a simple blueprint that the Frenchmen are supposed to follow is a mistake. Tocqueville thus openly admits that he is far from claiming that the Americans have found “the only form of government that democracy may take” (DA I, 27). This

need for uniqueness and political separateness is also visible in Tocqueville's calls for preserving the national pride and his acceptance of the necessity of international war that according to him "almost always enlarges the thought of a people and elevates the heart" (DA IV, 1159). In short, politics for Tocqueville is a mode of collective life that rejects both the idea of world state that would necessarily become tyrannical and anarchy that would make human lives "nasty, brutish and short." In consequence, as Pierre Manent puts it succinctly in his latest book: "...We are at this point left with a choice between a political science – the theory of democracy – that is not scientific and the political science – a collection of social sciences – that is not political. The desire to escape this alternative is thus natural" [translation mine] (2010, 37).

In short, the democratic revolution in culture, philosophy and science consists in a desire to:

...escape from the spirit of system, from the yoke of habits, from the maxims of family, from the opinions of class, and, to a certain point, from the prejudices of nation; to take tradition only as information, and present facts only as useful study for doing otherwise and better, to seek by yourself and in yourself alone the reason for things, to strive towards the result without allowing oneself to be caught up in the means, and to aim for substance beyond form. (DA III, 699)

This, however carries a grave danger for the political life that is based on nuances, traditions and "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) that are nevertheless necessary to forge a sentiment of solidarity.

As Tocqueville explains: "no society is able to prosper without similar beliefs, or rather none can continue to exist in such a way; for, without common ideas, there is no common action, and, without common action, there are still men, but not a social body" (DA III, 713). As a result "for society to exist...all the minds of the citizens must always be brought and held together by some principal ideas; and that cannot happen without each one of them coming at times to draw his opinions from the same source and consenting to receive a certain number of ready-made

beliefs” (ibid). In this fragment Tocqueville once again clearly describes one of his main political paradoxes that collective rationality does indeed require a certain level of individual irrationality. And let us add that the implications of this rule are far more complex than the contemporary “prisoner’s dilemma”²⁸ scenarios would have us think.

However, because the democratic revolution undermined all of the old collective myths, modern democracy is always unstable and has some very strong auto-destructive tendencies. Moreover, without the common myths there is no common language. Therefore, for Tocqueville, the democratic revolution in philosophy, culture and science leads to undermining the value of words and persuasion. Politics thus becomes just a game of interest. Democratic humans “are accustomed to relying on their own witness, they love to see the matter that they are dealing with very clearly; so in order to see it more closely and in full light, they rid it as fully as they can of its wrapping; they push aside all that separates them from it” (DA III, 701).

In practice, one of the most immediately visible examples of this process of “unwrapping” is the modern correlation between the development of media and the simplification of the message. Tocqueville in his *Recollections* observes, for instance, the rise of the new “newspaper” politicians (Montagnards) whose actions are reactive and buffoonish, and whose ideas are based only on a shallow understanding of the matters at hand. To be sure their minds are quicker than those of the old aristocrats (like Tocqueville’s famed relative Malesherbes), but at the same time they lack the political gravitas of their predecessors. As Tocqueville puts it: “They spoke a jargon that was neither quite the language of the people, nor was it that of the literate, but that had the defects of both...; obviously these people belonged neither in a tavern nor in a drawing room; I think they must have polished their mores in cafés and fed their minds on no literature but the

²⁸ For an overview see (Axelrod 2006).

newspapers” (R, 102). One may argue that now we observe the next step in the same direction, the Twitter-politics where the information is indeed “unwrapped” to the base essentials. It would seem that more widely used, technologically sophisticated and rationally constructed the medium, the shorter and simpler the messages it carries.

In religion, according to Tocqueville, the same process of simplification and rationalization can ultimately lead the ideal democratic “city” to pantheism. The reason for the taste for this particular brand of spirituality within a democratic society is that that “the democratic mind is obsessed by the idea of unity.” It is “looking in all directions, and when it believes unity has been found, it embraces it and rests there” (DA III, 758). Ultimately the democratic mind is “bothered” even by the division between the God and the world and even though the concept of pantheism in fact “destroys human individuality... it will have secret charms for men who live in democracy; all their intellectual habits prepare them for conceiving it and set them on the path to adapt it; it naturally attracts their imagination and fixes it; it feeds the pride of their mind and flatters its laziness” (ibid.). Here Tocqueville suggests that the democratic mind searches both for unity and simplicity and secretly tries to escape from its own individualism. However, in order to do so, it needs to find a concept of the transcendental that is so general that it can be accepted by anyone and so unifying that it would encompass all without any need for an organized hierarchical structure.

In spite of Tocqueville’s somewhat caustic description of modern pantheism, one would be hard pressed to find a political theorist who provided a more insightful introduction to Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1854/2012), Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854/1995) or Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *American Scholar* (1837/1990) and who did so before any of the aforementioned works were published. The tendency is visible especially in Whitman; the great poet of the generation had no qualms about describing the democratic man-god. With ingenious

“laziness” he wrote: “And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,/ And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own...And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.” (Whitman 2012, eBook) In total, in Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* the word God appears more than 90 times usually in similar pantheistic or anthropo-theic contexts. And as far as politics is concerned, Whitman powerfully proclaims: “Democracy! Near at hand to you a throat is now inflating itself and joyfully singing” (ibid.).²⁹

The same spirit also penetrates the world of literature where according to Tocqueville “democracy not only makes the taste for letters penetrate the industrial classes, it also introduces the industrial spirit to literature” (DA III, 813). The above dictum is probably one of the most profound insights Tocqueville had made into the nature of both literature and the new art of the democratic era. It predates the now widely used expressions like “film industry,” “show business” or “mass culture” and seems to anticipate Walter Benjamin’s famous *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1968). In his short chapter on democratic literature, Tocqueville just like Benjamin described modern art as being divorced from the old, ritualized mode of production. As a result, art becomes more profitable, but at the same time the artist has to

²⁹ Naturally pantheism in the modern democratic culture has never become an organized cult. However, one can argue that it did become one of the most powerful cultural undercurrents. It is visible today in such phenomena as the philosophy of New Age, the animal rights movement, various ecological theories and in growing global popularity of a simplified, occidental version of Buddhism. Naturally one also finds it in contemporary politics. Let us, for instance, quote a poem of Richard Blanco which was publicly read during President Obama’s second swearing-in ceremony:

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.

One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.
My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day (Blanco 2012).

relinquish the reverence that previously resulted from his privileged status that was akin to a seer or a priest.³⁰ He becomes a mere producer. Therefore, “among aristocratic people, you can hope to succeed only by immense efforts, and these efforts which can bring a great deal of glory cannot ever gain much money; while among democratic nations, a writer can hope to obtain without much cost a mediocre fame and a great fortune” (DA III 813-814).

However, as in the case of Benjamin’s analysis, Tocqueville makes the prediction that the void created by the waning of the old, artistic ritual will be filled with democratic cultural politics. Therefore, in his discussion of the freedom of speech Tocqueville once again uses the metaphor of the majority as a new collective despot, who can actually gain greater power than any of the previous, historical despotic governments. He writes that “in times of democracy, the public often acts towards authors as kings ordinarily do toward their courtiers” and notes that “for few great democratic authors” one counts “sellers of ideas by the thousands” (DA III, 814). The expression “sellers of ideas” here seems to indicate a political or esthetical subservience since as Tocqueville observes elsewhere “in America the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Within these limits, the writer is free; but woe to him if he dares to go beyond them.... Everything is denied to him” (DA II, 418). He also writes that once the old ritual cultural politics disappears, it becomes difficult to recover it without losing all intellectual liberty. This is because the industrial modes of production are too effective; once they are used to create political homogeneity, they deliver propaganda that is so ubiquitous that it smothers any freer intellectual

³⁰ The semi-priestly status of artists is visible in many traditional cultures around the world. One of the most well-known examples is the intertwining of poetry and religion and Greek culture exemplified by the half-mythical figure of Homer. It is also because of this semi-religious power of artists that Plato saw no room for old poets in his city. They would be a challenge to the theology and philosophy Plato himself proposed, the guardians would have no real power over them since they would answer to none but their own talent (*Republic* 379b-381q). One could also point to examples coming from visual arts such as the revered Russian icon painters (Ivanov 1988). It is only in the late western modernity that culture and literature became viewed solely as entertainment or intellectual pastime bereft of metaphysics

creativity. In the past, the art sponsors may have been despotic in their supervision of the arts, but an artist could always find another patron; even the poets banished from Plato's city were free to enter another polis. In the democratic society the artists must be given either complete freedom or become completely enslaved, for s/he can find no alternative to the particular democratic society whose language s/he has mastered. Therefore, trying to forge a common identity that, as we have observed, is one of the demands of collective rationality becomes increasingly difficult. This lack of identity naturally can lead to some anarchy and provoke the philosophers' complaints.³¹ At the same time, using a centrally coordinated cultural industry to forge a collective identity produces results similar to an attempt of using a military flamethrower to combat weeds in a flowerbed. Indeed, the already mentioned Walter Benjamin wrote his treatises on modern art during one of the greatest and most frightful experiments in the history of modern cultural politics.³²

Tocqueville actually foresees this turn of events as one of the most unfortunate probabilities open to the democratic revolution:

I see very clearly in equality two tendencies: one that leads the mind of each man toward new thoughts and the other that readily reduces him to thinking no more. And I notice how, under the dominion of certain laws, democracy would extinguish the intellectual liberty that the democratic social state favors...

If, in place of all the diverse powers that hindered or slowed beyond measure the rapid development of individual reason, democratic peoples substituted the absolute power of a majority, the evil would only have changed character. Men would not have found the means to live independently; they would only have discovered, a difficult thing, a new face of servitude (DA III, 724).

³¹ Such as those that Allan Bloom voices about modern popular music.

³² The Third Reich created the largest and most complex state-sponsored system of cultural industry in the history of mankind (See Evans 2005, 120-187).

This new intellectual slavery that would be later on developed into the famous concept of the soft despotism is for Tocqueville also visible in the development of science that, just like Machiavellian politics, aims at mastering and subjugating nature. Tocqueville notes that “in America, the purely applied part of the sciences is admirably cultivated, and the portion immediately necessary to application is carefully attended to (DA III, 778).” At the same time, the democratic society lacks “the calm necessary for profound intellectual syntheses” (DA III, 779). Interestingly, however, the agitation and movement is superficial. Tocqueville notes here for the first time that really great, profound, revolutionary changes “are not more common among democratic peoples than among other peoples.” He is “even led to believe that they are less so” (DA III, 780).

Importantly, the association of democracy with the progress of science is incidental according to Tocqueville. Young democracies were so creative only because they were born out of revolution that at once “destroyed the remnant of the old feudal society” (DA III, *ibid.*). Thus the compressed forces of modern science that were still mildly stymied during the enlightenment once again expanded when the last political obstacles were removed. It was, however, the short term result of the revolution itself, not an inherent quality of the more democratic regime. In the long run there is nothing that for Tocqueville would suggest that democratic societies will always remain more enlightened or constantly increase their scientific knowledge.

At this point, Tocqueville’s theory of the development of science becomes very similar to the ideas proposed by Mancur Olson (1982), who examining the impact of revolutions on the economy notes that every political establishment over time becomes surrounded by privileged interest groups that block the development of more entrepreneurial, but less connected individuals. And since each revolution shatters the settled establishment and destroys the old affiliation between politicians and interest group, it is followed by a period of technological and

economic development (irrespective of the nature of the regime that emerges out of the revolution). Such a sudden technological jump is also prompted by a need to equip an army during extensive post-revolutionary wars. Contemporarily, one could use the example of the Soviet Union as a post-revolutionary regime that made a huge leap in the development of exact sciences. This would later enable the USSR to enter into an arms race with the USA, which in turn fuelled the technological progress in America and the West. Similar observation can be made with reference to the Nazi revolution in Germany.

Interestingly, all the major technical inventions of the twentieth century (e.g. computers,³³ the internet, jet engines and passenger planes) are the children of one of the world wars or the cold war. As for the period following the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, it is mainly marked by short-term-benefit-oriented invention based on the already existing technologies.³⁴ The *Economist's*³⁵ analysts are already in an alarming tone reporting on the slowdown of innovativeness. It is, of course, still unclear whether this is a long-term phenomenon, it, however, exemplifies the type of possible stagnation of science that according to Tocqueville would be characteristic of an old, mature democracy. In such a social state “reigns a small uncomfortable movement, a sort of incessant rotation of men that troubles and distracts the mind without enlivening or elevating it” (DA III, 780).

In the period immediately following a particular revolutionary change young democracies are acting in accordance with the Machiavellian paradigm. That is to say that their main aim is to gain the fullest possible mastery of nature. They, however, acquire this mastery in a way that is

³³ Personal computers, indeed, developed only towards the end of the period, however, all the technological know-how necessary for private computing came from the cold-war army technologies.

³⁴ One can name examples such as Viagra, Facebook or the i-phone.

³⁵ One of the *Economist* issues was almost exclusively devoted to this problem (01.12.2013), see especially “*Is the Ideas Machine Broken*”, “*The Great Growth Debate*.”

reminiscent of Tocqueville's "soft despotism" in politics. Democratic civilization seeks to conquer without aristocratic triumphalism just as it seeks to control without ostensive violence. Tocqueville draws the reader's attention to this by constructing a masterful metaphor which compares modern plumbing and railroads to the great Roman aqueducts and roads. As the French thinker observes: "people who would leave no other trace of their passage than a few lead pipes in the earth and a few iron rods on its surface could have been more masters of nature than the Romans" (DA III, 799). In spite of those differences in style, the mastery of nature is, however, still enacted with the same Machiavellian goals in mind.

For, although democratic people according to Tocqueville have fewer "warrior passions," they nevertheless still wage war and go on conquests. In fact, Tocqueville focuses heavily on the democratic way of fighting in DA, which is often overlooked by his readers. Tocqueville notes, for instance, that although democracy is often slow to go to war and in its initial phase it may not achieve many victories, over time it becomes a formidable enemy able to throw all its industrial, scientific and economic weight into the conflict. "When war, by continuing, has finally torn all citizens away from their peaceful labors and made all their small undertakings fail, it happens that that the same passions that made them attach so much value to peace turn towards war" (DA IV, 1174).³⁶

At the same time, in a manner reminiscent of President Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex" speech, Tocqueville warns about the ambitions of a democratic army. "There are two things that a democratic people will always have a great difficulty doing: beginning a war and ending it" (DA, IV, 1160). This is because, "within democratic armies the desire to advance is almost universal; it is ardent, tenacious, continual; it increases with all the other desires, and is

³⁶ As did the democratic north in the clash with the aristocratic south and as did the USA in the clash with the imperial Japan, one could add.

extinguished only with life” (DA IV, 1156). The reason for this tenacity is that an officer who is no longer a noble “has no property except his pay” (DA IV, 1155) and can hope for a quick promotion only in times of war. That is why according to Tocqueville “military revolutions [i.e. coups of the democratic states’ army officers]” are almost never to be feared in aristocracies”, but constitute a great threat to “democratic nations” (DA 1559). Moreover, “when a nation feels itself tortured internally by the restless ambition of its army, the first thought that presents itself is to give war a goal for this troubled ambition” (ibid). In consequence, in spite of his acceptance of some military conflict as a necessary vehicle of history and an incentive to develop civic values, Tocqueville notes that “a great army within a democratic people will always be a great danger” (DA IV, 1164). Quoting Machiavelli (DA IV, 1182) he also notes that while aristocracies fought for honor, democracies fight for absolute conquest.

As in the case of many Tocquevillian predictions, the democratic army’s paradox also finds some corroboration in the modern political history. Thus, attesting to the democratic states’ reluctance to go to war, some researchers elaborate on the democratic peace theory,³⁷ while others focus on answering the questions: why do some democracies go to war? Arriving at an interesting conclusion David Sobek (2003) proposes a Tocquevillian answer to the problem and notes that, although, democracies are generally peaceful, if and when they decide to solve their internal tensions through war, they become far more belligerent than the undemocratic regimes. Even more importantly, Sobek, in line with Tocqueville’s observations, notes that democracies usually become geared towards constant conflict when many ambitious and talented people cannot move upward in the society in the times of peace. This, in turn, often occurs in those democracies where the *de jure* elected offices remain occupied by members of the same

³⁷ See Chan (2010) for an overview.

privileged group.³⁸ Thus while not being able to be elected, the democratic commoners can still elect a war as a vehicle for their development. It is also not without a reason that David Bell (2012) equates the concept of a democratic war with a total war of large armies and just as Tocqueville compares this new, merciless way of fighting with the old aristocratic war that had limited aims and was less likely to create a spiral of military buildup. Democratic armies, to put it simply, have a far greater stake in war than their aristocratic predecessors.

Can a Democratic Republic Tame the Democratic Revolution?

Although Tocqueville is notoriously mysterious about his methodology, he does leave some interesting clues as to how he arrived at his conclusions. For instance, he writes that one can “divide science into three parts” (DA III, 777).

The first contains the most theoretical principles, the most abstract notions, the ones whose application is unknown or very distant. The second is made up of general truths that, through still pure theory, lead nevertheless by a direct and short path to application. The processes of application and the means of execution fulfill the third. (ibid.)

Tocqueville’s “new science of politics” is also divided into three parts. The democratic city of speech, the perfect democracy constitutes the theory, the case study of America as the best example of modern democracy comes second. Scattered pieces of advice given predominantly to French politicians are the third, propaedeutic part of Tocqueville’s science. As I have already noted, the uniqueness of Tocqueville’s teaching on politics rests in the fact that all three parts are somewhat chaotically mixed. Again this is visible especially in Tocqueville’s *opus magnum*, DA. It is almost as if one merged Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* (1980) with Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* in one uniform text. It is little wonder that one commentator wrote that, although, DA is “full of

³⁸ Needless to say that persons with political ambitions will enter the army service only if they cannot enter normal politics.

striking insights of lasting value” it is “badly structured and often incoherent.” In short, it is “brilliant, exuberant and messy, it is very much a young man’s first book” (Elster 2006, 64).

There was, however, a method in Tocqueville’s exuberance in DA, and the models Elster writes about are visible not merely in AR. In the theoretical description of democracy, which as we have noted is permeated by a singular spirit of moral disdain, Tocqueville describes the great democratic revolution and explains what particular “small” revolutions it causes.³⁹ In the case-study layer, he, however describes how often Americans achieve success at taming the aspects of the democratic revolutions he finds so morally adverse. The AR, conversely, shows the French shortcomings in accomplishing the same task. Many of those statecraft techniques will be further discussed in the following chapters. It is, however, useful to give a general overview of them at this point and stress that Tocqueville had never seen America as an example of the democratic terror that does away with all liberty, although, as Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings note (2009), over time he did become increasingly critical of American politics (in the period following the publication of the second part of DA and preceding his death in 1859). As Tocqueville puts it: “I discovered without difficulty that the Americans had made great and happy efforts to combat... and to correct these natural defects of democracy” (DA II, 503).

The conflict between the rationality of the individual and the rationality of the community is, according to Tocqueville, overcome by finding a middle ground between the two. Tocqueville calls this middle ground “the doctrine of interest well understood” (DA III, 920). The doctrine consist in knowing “how to combine” one’s “own well-being with that of one’s “fellow citizens.” (DA III, 919). Thus the concept creates a rather unstable *modus vivendi*. It does not abolish the tension between democratic individualism and the democratic collectivism that ultimately breeds

³⁹ The general picture of that great revolution was adumbrated in the previous section. The mechanics of revolutions will be dealt with in the following chapter.

atomization. The doctrine merely masks the problem by managing to somewhat deceptively cloak old virtue in the new democratic garments.

“In the United States, you almost never say virtue is beautiful” (DA III, 920) – warns Tocqueville. And although the doctrine is “not very lofty” and does not produce “great devotion” it is the “most appropriate to the needs of men of our time” (DA III, 922). At the same time Tocqueville quite openly admits that the concept is not “evident in all its parts” (DAIII, 923) and it is precisely because of this that it does not seem to constitute something that naturally arises from the general drive towards equality for him. He described “the doctrine of self-interest well understood” as a product of culture; in short, something “American moralists will claim” (DA III, 920). Some readers of Tocqueville, therefore, conclude that the doctrine of “self-interest well understood” is just an idea Tocqueville plays with, but eventually abandons (See Craiutu and Jennings 2009, Schleifer 2000, Lawler 1992). But in fact Tocqueville is quite consistent. Just like the traditional, non-pantheistic religions, the doctrine of “self-interest well understood” according to Tocqueville is not something that is completely natural for the democratic human, but that nevertheless moderates his natural shortcomings. Moreover, the central government will never promote such a doctrine since according to Tocqueville the government “goes to find man in particular in the middle of the crowd in order to bend him separately to the common laws” (DA IV, 1035). Therefore, like many other civic virtues, in a democratic society the doctrine can be taught only in small, local communities.⁴⁰

A separate chapter will be also devoted to Tocqueville’s ideas about religion. Now let us merely note that the fact that Americans are religious does not imply that religion is a part of the

⁴⁰ The importance of localities for Tocqueville’s concept of the political will be discussed in the following chapters; especially in Chapter 4, which compares Tocqueville’s description of the French and the American society.

ideal type of democracy. For Tocqueville, pure religion is always antithetical to ideal democracy. Nevertheless, religion is important for real democratic societies because it “singularly facilitates” (DA II 475) the exercise of liberty. However, just like the inculcation of the doctrine of “self-interest properly understood”, the teaching of piety is something that takes place at the level of “municipal laws” (DA II, 503). In fact, in volume two of DA Tocqueville goes as far as to construct a whole list of moderating modifications that “American lawmakers” make to the “natural” tendencies of democracy affecting it primarily at the local level. The list of the American moderations of democracy is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. American Moderations of Democracy

Natural Democratic tendency	Modified in America with
Sentiments of envy	Idea of rights
Continual movement of political world	Immobility of religious morality
Theoretical ignorance	Experience of the people [being involved in the local government]
Hotheadedness of desires	Habit of affairs [or interests properly understood]

As for the democratic family, Tocqueville is not so gloomy as Bloom and predicts that eventually it will not only prevail but become strengthened. This bears a certain resemblance to the doctrine of “self-interest well understood.” For where else, if not in the family, would humans find “the milk of human kindness,” (*Macbeth* I. v.) given that they live in an increasingly competitive environment. It seems, however, that Tocqueville was slightly myopic in not perceiving the possibility of a deep crisis of the institution of family in some modern democratic societies.

As for the negative effects the democratic revolution may have regarding the literature and the contemplative activities of the democratic people, Tocqueville mentions two remedies accessible to the Americans. Firstly, he stresses the importance of the English legacy that thanks to the unity of the language enriches the American culture. “The literary genius of Great Britain still shines its light into the depths of the forests of the New World. There is scarcely a pioneer’s cabin where you do not find a few volumes of Shakespeare. I recall having read for the first time the feudal drama of Henry V in a log house”, writes Tocqueville with a dash of that disarmingly charming conceit and ignorance the French still sometimes display towards Anglo-Saxon culture (DA III, 803). Secondly, he notes that democratic societies can and should engage in a selective study of the Greek and Roman classics even if they cease to do so in an average classroom. He, however, also stresses the need for selectiveness and exclusiveness of the establishments that would deal with the liberal arts. “A few excellent universities would be worth more to achieve this goal than a multitude of bad colleges where superfluous studies done badly prevent necessary studies from being done well” (DA III, 817).

In fact, making such studies too popular and thus devaluating their quality may, according to Tocqueville, have some very negative social implications:

If you persisted stubbornly in teaching only literature in a society where each man was led by habit to make violent efforts to increase his fortune or to maintain it, you would have very polished and dangerous citizens; for the social and political state gives them needs every day that education would never teach them to satisfy, they would disturb the State in the name of Greeks and Romans, instead of making it fruitful by their industry. (DA III, 817)

In the above passage Tocqueville stumbles upon one of the great, modern social conflicts – the feud between the intellectuals and the modern market society. Tocqueville knows well that the “democratic heart’s” restless passion for equality (DA II, 503) will blindly combat any form of elitism and thus it will try to give elite education to too many, which in turn will swiftly lead to

undermining the very rule of equality. Testifying to the pertinence of Tocqueville's socio-economic remarks over a century later, Joseph Schumpeter makes almost the exact same observation when he writes about the "sociology of the intellectual" (1947/2008, 145-156). In his famous book, Schumpeter notes that "one of the most important features of the later stages of capitalist civilization is the vigorous expansion of the educational apparatus" which in turn increases the supply of quasi professionals "beyond the point of cost return" and creates a singularly pernicious "sectional unemployment" (1947/2008 152). Schumpeter then goes on to describe how the unemployed, overproduced humanities majors become hostile to the state. They, for instance, refuse to accept substandard work, have little vocational expertise and in favorable circumstances rebel against both the state and the capitalist society.⁴¹

Schumpeter also notes that democracies are inherently unable to control the intellectuals and only the fascist and communist regimes that some of those intellectuals chose to build ultimately can forcefully curb the freedom of the rest. Tocqueville, however, notes that both the general individualism of the democratic society and the potential anti-democratic rebellion of *des clerics*⁴² can be tamed by a moderate form of ideology that would provide a democratic republic with a cultural form and at the same time prevent the dangerous drift towards the more pernicious democratic forms of government. Tocqueville calls this sentiment "national pride", "patriotism" or simply the love of the country. He also distinguishes two separate forms of this social phenomenon. One is described as an instinctive sentiment that is typical of all relatively young political communities where "peoples are still simple in their mores and firm in their beliefs" and

⁴¹ Schumpeter notes that such processes were typical of both the fascist and the communist rise to power. Let us also add that contemporarily similar processes are actually exacerbated by the scarcity of manual labor in the modern automatized society.

⁴² Julien Benda calls a similar societal process the "betrayal of the intellectuals" [*les trahison des clerics*] (1955).

“rest gently upon the old order of things, whose legitimacy is uncontested” (DA III, 385). The other is a more rational patriotism that needs to be swiftly introduced by the elites once the society shows the first signs of aging. This kind of patriotism, just like “self-interest properly understood,” results from a conscious attempt to unite “individual interests of the people and the interests of the country” (DA III, 386). One can call it the patriotism of the “State of the Union Address” or find it in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s fireside chats that can be credited with preventing the bank run to a far greater extent than all of FDR’s curious economic experiments (See Yu 2005). Tocqueville clearly hastens the statesmen to introduce this kind of patriotism as soon as possible and thus give the old instinctive attachment to the society a second life. At the same time, he warns that as modernity unfolds the pure and innocent “disinterested love of country flies away, never to return” (ibid.).

Of course, speaking of youth and old age with reference to whole political communities is just a metaphor. Are the Tibetans whose instinctive patriotism pushes them towards defiant acts of courage in defense of their ancient culture young or old in comparison to the Australians? What Tocqueville means by youth is simply remaining unaffected, for whatever reason, by the great democratic revolution. What he means by aging is the severance of the old ties of social camaraderie.⁴³ Consequently, if a new, more rational patriotism is not introduced in the period in which the polity “comes of age,” the political sphere becomes dissolved and hence the government is forced to rely more and more on manipulation and coercion and less and less on persuasion.

But is the military despotism Tocqueville fears so much also not based on rational patriotism? What bulwark can prevent it from rising? To this question Tocqueville answers: the

⁴³ For an analytical discussion of the modern ties of group identity see especially Miller (2000), Manent (2005) and Anderson (1991).

rule of law guarded by a caste of men of law and tied to the society by transparent local institutions.⁴⁴ The grandson of the famed Malesherbes clearly displayed a strong reverence for the *noblesse de robe* when he wrote that “you find at the bottom of the soul of jurists a portion of the tastes and habits of the aristocracy. Like the aristocracy, they have an instinctive propensity for order, a natural love of forms; like the aristocracy, they conceive a great distaste for the actions of the multitude....” (DA II, 433). It is precisely this natural aristocratic quality of the members of the judiciary that according to Tocqueville makes them an ideal moderating force for the democratic revolution. He does, however, admit that this was clearly not the case in France. He explains this by saying that under the old regime the law became tantamount to a near despotic will of the ruler. Most French lawyers “could not contribute” (ibid.) to making the laws and thus they decided to support the revolution.

When discussing Tocqueville’s practical advice on the curbing the democratic revolution, one must also acknowledge that for all the possible remedies inevitably something has to be lost. According to Tocqueville, a democratic society, for instance, will never produce another Pascal. As the French thinker puts it: “If Pascal had envisaged only some great profit, or even if he had been moved only by the sole desire for glory, I cannot believe that he would ever have been able to summon up, as he did, all the powers of his intelligence to reveal more clearly the most hidden secrets of the Creator” (DA III, 781-782).

Tocqueville and the Paradox of Democratic Legitimization

We have already discussed the democratic revolution in its various guises. It also remains a fact that Tocqueville pays a lot of attention to the negative aspects of this process, although at

⁴⁴ In the USA the juries constitute for Tocqueville a prime examples of such an institution. In them ordinary citizens interact with the men of law and thus create strong ties of affinity with the whole judiciary.

the same time he also tries to maintain a balanced approach. As Guziot facetiously noted, Tocqueville judges “modern democracy as a vanquished aristocrat convinced that his vanquisher is right” (quoted in Jaume 2008, 226). This observation seems light hearted but in fact it leads to a number of fundamental questions. Why does Tocqueville think his “vanquishers” are ultimately right? Why does he not rebel against “them”? Why does he not become a reactionary? Why did his writing become ultimately equally despised both by the socialists and the neo-reactionary intellectual tribe associated with Action Française? Why did the infamous Maurras write that “Tocqueville’s responsibility cannot be passed over in silence” and add that “the mildest, most ingenious, and most dangerous of philosophical malefactors contributed immensely to the general blindness” (quoted in *ibid.*, 39)? And although it was Maurras who, as many would say, blindly supported one of the most morally despicable ideological movement in the history of Western Europe, we still do not understand why Tocqueville was so foresightful; how did he manage to guard himself against Maurras blindness long before Maurras was born? How did he avoid the trap that so many other conservatively disposed minds fell into? In short, why did Tocqueville not turn from a moderate lover of democracy into its hater?

The answer this work proposes to all those questions is that Tocqueville had a deep philosophical understanding of something that I call the paradox of democratic legitimization.⁴⁵ Moreover, in correctly understanding this issue he far surpassed most of the other nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers. Tocqueville simply could imagine all the possible implications of applying democratic legitimization to various regimes. As we have already noted, for Tocqueville

⁴⁵ Jaume and Schleifer uses the term authority. I however find it too general. Authority does not have to be formal whereas legitimization has to combine the formal and the informal claim to power. Of course, one does observe the informal democratic authority in democratic arts and culture. This section of the dissertation will, however, deal with legitimization as a political phenomenon and it will argue that even purely formal democratic legitimization will completely change how a given regime operates.

democracy in the wider, general sense was not a regime type, it was a regime modifier. This section will try to explain what is it exactly that the great democratic revolution modifies and it will call this component of the regime “legitimization.” Legitimization is the theoretical argument the government uses when it explains its claim to hold power to the people it governs. It is thus a way to increase the power of the government by reducing its need to rely on coercion in governing. I have already noted that in both culture and in the society, the great democratic revolution creates many phenomena that we can collectively associate with mass culture and modern, mass society. In the same way in politics it creates a new form of legitimization that is then quite explicitly expressed in legal documents. Let us not forget that modern (post 1773) jurisprudence invented a whole new class of written documents it called “constitutions” precisely to underline the fact that the new democratic regimes have changed the way they legitimize their claim to power.

As all the crucial processes described by Tocqueville, the new form of legitimization is a result of the revolution. In fact, attesting to the power of Tocqueville’s theories Steven Pincus (2008) proposes to rethink all modern revolutions⁴⁶ from the Tocquevillian perspective and view the post-revolutionary regimes as a singular continuation and, indeed, a radicalization of the old political principles developed within a given society. However, one might still wonder why is it the case that the Jacobins were even more absolutist than the French kings, just as Bolsheviks and ultimately Joseph Stalin were more autocratic than the Czar (see Pipes 1990). Similarly, Pincus does not determine why the current Communist Party of China is more bureaucratic than the former hosts of the Forbidden City, or why the Iranian regime remains in many ways similar to occidental despotism, although, it does employ a number of constitutional checks (See Mohseni

⁴⁶ Pincus lists Russia, China, Cuba and Iran.

and Leah 2011). He also does not account for modern, “liberated” Cuba being transformed into a state that resembles a giant, colonial plantation that is manned by workers bereft of freedom and produces mainly sugar and tobacco.

Some explanation is provided by Bertand de Jouvenel, who with a clear Tocquevillian inspiration writes the following account of some of the great modern revolutions:

Thus we see that the true historical function of revolutions is to renovate and strengthen Power. Let us stop greeting them as the reactions of the spirit of liberty to the oppressor. So little do they answer to that no one can be cited in which a true despot was overthrown.

Did the people rise against Louis XIV? No, but against the good natured Louis XVI, who had not even the nerve to let his Swiss Guards to open fire. Against Peter the Great? No, but against the weakling Nicholas II, who did not even avenge his beloved Rasputin. Against that old Bluebeard, Henry VIII? No, but against Charles I, who, after a few fitful attempts at governing, had resigned himself to living in a small way and no danger to anyone. And, as Mazarin sagely remarked, had he not abandoned his minister, Strafford, he would not have laid his head on the scaffold. (1993, 240)

The logic seems clear, modern revolutions increase raw, political power that sooner or later becomes dangerous in the wrong hands since it threatens liberty. There is, however, a problem with this argument. Although Jouvenel’s comment is Tocquevillian in its spirit it will strike a careful reader as an oversimplification of Tocqueville’s original thought. Jouvenel and Pincus both do not conclusively answer why it is not possible to reverse the revolutionary process. Perhaps it is because of this shallow understanding of the nature of a democratic revolution that in his early years in the journal *L’Émancipation nationale* Jouvenel briefly flirted with fascism as a possible form of reversing the process he was so critical of.

Tocqueville is, however, abundantly clear about not being able to return to business as usual after a democratic revolution. He writes about the French De Maistrean conservatives frightened by the democratization of France and waiting for a new absolutism to rise from its ashes using the following words, “I know there are many honest men... who fatigued by liberty,

would love finally to rest far from its storms. But the latter know very badly the port toward which they are heading. Preoccupied by their memories, they judge absolute power by what it was formerly, and not by what it could be today” (DA II, 506). Still, it is not clear what exactly prevents the return.

Tocqueville suggests that the impossibility of recreating the old regime has a lot to do with a change in the form of legitimization. In the course of this change, the state receives more power due to the removal of the old restraints and is able to claim to have a direct access to the “pure, original fountain of all legitimate authority” (Federalist 22 in Carey 2001, 131).

Tocqueville does not deny that the sovereignty of the people “is more or less always found at the base of nearly all human institutions” (DA I, 91). Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between being found at the base and being the very fiber of things. True, Tocqueville sees the somewhat primitive “Middle Age liberty” (DA I, 68) superseded by the equalizing and the democratizing absolutism of the French kings. Nevertheless, it was an imperfect equalization. The Ancien Régime remained limited not only by the remnants of the previous intermediary bodies, but also by the customary “respect that surrounded heads of state” (DA II, 507). The process of democratizing, however, “releases” the rulers “from the weight of public esteem” and thus makes them “drunk with power” (ibid.).

One has to keep in mind at this point that what Tocqueville means by “public esteem” is the polar opposite of the popularity of a modern, democratic politician. His notion of esteem is akin to the notion of majesty, i.e. a collection of traditional expectations regarding the *modus operandi* of the monarch that sets her/him apart from ordinary persons. In contrast, the nature of popularity is to make the rulers seem similar and close to the citizens. The insight Tocqueville makes is a response to the critiques of democracy voiced by the loyalist enemies of the various, French revolutions. They also saw the new form of legitimization as giving too much unchecked

power. De Maistre, for instance, in his praise for the *Ancien Régime* (2003) focuses on the checks on civil power provided by the Church. Bonald (2003), on the other hand, sees the majesty of king as a sacrosanct tradition that limits what a physical person that happens to be the king at a particular time can and cannot do. Finally, Chateaubriand (2003), who remains one of the most Janus-faced⁴⁷ critics of the Revolution, describes Napoleon as a despot precisely because he legitimized his power only by naming himself “the emperor of the Frenchmen,” who rules directly in the name of the people. In his pamphlet on Napoleon Chateaubriand makes two crucial points. Firstly, he notices that Napoleon understood that “the sovereign should arrange [public opinion] each day” (ibid., 14). Secondly, he writes that Napoleon justified “his pretensions to the throne” neither by “tradition” nor by “virtues” which, according to Chateaubriand, he was devoid of “save for his military talent” (ibid., 5).

Tocqueville agrees with Chateaubriand but adds: “Napoleon must neither be praised nor blamed for having concentrated in his hands alone all administrative power. After the abrupt disappearance of nobility, and of the upper bourgeoisies, these came to him by themselves” (DA IV, 1253). Just like Chateaubriand, Tocqueville sees the change of the form of legitimization. Unlike Chateaubriand, however, he does not think that a return to previous ways of legitimizing power is possible. Tocqueville makes a profound discovery that in modernity, both despots and republicans alike will claim to be governing directly in the name of the people rather than ruling by “God’s grace,” or thanks to their civic virtues, as proposed by Plato (1991). This new form of legitimization, according to Tocqueville, will be what we might call a “political steroid” that will

⁴⁷ Chateaubriand famously made the decision to embrace the Bourbons and defame his former protector (Napoleon Bonaparte) with a slanting pamphlet only when he was certain that Napoleon lost all his political and military opportunities. Chateaubriand, thus, had his piece published on April 6th 1814.

make a semi-despotic absolutism more despotic and give a republic a greater potential for expansion.

Contemporary political science, however, often overlooks the issue of legitimization. For instance, course-books on comparative politics (See Booker 2009, Acemoglu and Robinson 2009, Linz 2000) routinely assume that the democratic legitimization is the normatively default form of legitimization and that it increases along with the somewhat arbitrarily measured quality of democracy. Thus, contemporary political science is very often superficial in describing the difference between contemporary authoritarianism or totalitarianism and the old regimes, some of which existed for hundreds or even thousands of years.

Tocqueville, however, understood the difference and believed that it mattered. Naturally, in line with his insights every regime is in some sense representative – that is to say – based on the sovereignty of the people. Nevertheless, old regimes in their official titles and symbols usually legitimized the concrete person of the ruler using two different, additional sources of legitimacy: 1) the theistic source -- visible in titles such as “by God’s grace,” “the son of Ra” etc.; and 2) the timocratic source -- visible in titles such as “the Great,” “the Magnificent,” “the Brave” etc. Usually, old regimes used both sources, although in different proportions. The first type is in general more prominent among Renaissance kingships (Figgis⁴⁸ 1922, 256-263) and the ancient Middle-East.⁴⁹ The second can be seen in the politics of ancient Greeks⁵⁰ and Romans.

⁴⁸ According to Figgis, a king’s divine right was much more than rhetoric. Initially it was used in the clash between Kingships and Papacy in fourteenth century and became an even more prominent political tool in the age of reformation.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of various ancient theistic forms of legitimization see Eric Voegelin’s (2001) *Order and History*, asp. Vol. 1 and 2.

⁵⁰ Tocqueville is also explicit about not being able to return to the “democracies of antiquity” (DA IV, 1082), which he calls “so-called democracies,” noting that they were so extremely aristocratic and exclusive in their nature that it is impossible to imitate them in modern societies.

The fact that political actors in old regimes used particular props to legitimize their power is very significant since using such props, just like using arguments in an ongoing dispute, has clear consequences. Accepting that a person rules because of a certain quality immediately provides the ruler's adversaries with an opportunity to undermine his/her title. Religious authorities can also undermine the title to God's grace, as did Pope Gregory when he forced the Emperor to kneel at the gate of Canossa. Similarly, powerful figures, especially those who believe that they also have some royal virtue in them, can check a timocratic lord – this was famously the fate of Cleomenes, the Spartan King banished around 490 BC. A completely new problem, however, arises when a ruler or an assembly makes a claim to a title derived directly from the will of the people. Indeed, there are few real limits to power thus legitimized.

Moreover, with respect to limits of democratic power, Tocqueville is skeptical about the idea of checks and balances; according to him, once the government claims to possess the democratic legitimization, it will simply do what it wants, and the role of the conscientious statesmen is reduced only to convincing it to want what is not harmful. Tocqueville in his description of democratic governance writes “clearly the opinions, prejudices, interests, and even the passions of the people cannot encounter any lasting obstacles that can prevent them from appearing in the daily leadership of society” (DA II, 278). As for the methods of changing the composition of the government, Tocqueville sees only two possible paths. He notes that the “ruling power of public opinion... in America proceeds by elections and by decisions; in France, by revolutions” (DA I, 207).

Two elements of this theory are especially valuable for modern political science. Firstly, Napoleon's example proves that even a normatively dubious claim to hold a democratically legitimate power utterly changes the political playing field. Secondly, only under the assumption that democratization is a form of legitimization does the real magnitude of Tocqueville's grand

revolution become apparent. Indeed, there are currently very few states in the world whose governments would not claim that they rule in the name of their people. In this respect, the Vatican and Saudi Arabia remain the only notable examples of old regimes that still exists.⁵¹ In the twentieth century, even the totalitarian regimes staged elections and employed the mock-democratic procedures. Therefore, in modern conditions of social life, even a fraudulent democratic legitimization turns out to be far more robust than either the theistic or the timocratic forms. Indeed, embracing the Tocquevillian notions of “democratic despotism” and “soft despotism” leads to a conclusion that the modern world is a truly democratic one. The only disturbing issue is that not all *de nomine* “democracies” perform in accordance with political scientists’ expectations. To understand the reasons for this, the researcher has to redefine the notion of revolution by merging the two aforementioned concepts of revolutionary change, and this is precisely the route Tocqueville ultimately takes.

Why is it then impossible to return to the pre-modern days of a weak political power? The simple answer is that the nature of the democratic legitimization prevents it. Once such a legitimization comes into existence in a society, it cannot simply disappear. A reactionary force wanting to reverse the great democratic revolution can only do so by means of a counter revolution and thus further increase political power and become just another revolutionary group. This is precisely the observation about De Maistre, the father of French reactionary thought, that was made by Eric Voegelin in his *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, where he describes De



⁵¹ The title by “by God’s grace” is still used in Denmark, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, but carries little legitimizing weight as those countries elect their parliaments, which in turn elect the “real” executives. It seems that the last real old regimes are indeed the Vatican and Saudi Arabia. See full titles of rulers and executives at “World Statesmen” (<http://www.worldstatesmen.org/>). In the case of those two states there are no general elections and the ruler’s titles include formulas such as “Vicar of Jesus Christ” and “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques” (See also Abrams 2012). Iran in contrast is already a modern Islamic republic (see the next Chapter).

Maistre as another type of a “gnostic” revolutionary (see also Berlin 1990) and indeed a child of enlightenment he seemed to have despised so much. As Voegelin puts it:

If we assume that de Maistre did not consider his work a vain exercise, we must also assume that he seriously believed he could change the course of Western history by a clear analysis of the problem of the crisis and by suggesting that the only organizational solution that seemed to make sense. That the critical situation of the whole civilization that has been in the making for centuries cannot be transformed into a harmonious order over night by an act of insight and by an agreement between intelligent people, or that something might be profoundly wrong not only outside Catholicism but within the Church itself, was not sufficiently clear to him, just as it was inconceivable to Comte that he could not restore the order of a civilization by his personal renovation or that anything could be wrong with his religion of humanity. In De Maistre as in Comte we sense the touch of enlightened reason that blinds the working of a spirit. (1975, 184)

What is then the Tocquevillian, conscientious solution to the adversities of revolutionary legitimization? A revealing insight is provided by an attentive reader of Tocqueville, Samuel Huntington, who in his *Political Order in Changing Societies* proposes a certain scheme to describe the outcomes of modern revolutions and the results a democratic form of legitimization has on different types of old regimes. The details of Huntington’s reading of Tocquevillian concepts are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. The Relation between Regimes Power and Centralization (Compare Huntington 1977/1968, 144)

	Amount of Power [increased by democratization]	
Distribution of Power [i.e. administrative centralization]	Small	Large
Concentrated	Bureaucratic empire; absolute monarchy [+ violent revolution] 	Totalitarian dictatorship, [new despotism, terror,]
Dispersed	Feudalism 	Constitutional democracy

According to the Tocquevillian vocabulary, the distribution of power can be associated with the administrative centralization (DA I, 43-48) and the amount of power with the growth in what Tocqueville calls *pouvoir social* [social power] (DA IV, 1275). The totalitarian dictatorship can, in turn, be in broad terms associated with the administrative despotism (DA I, 148). There is, however, also a major difference between the Tocquevillian and the Huntingtonian models of regime change; Huntington does not account for the possibility of the soft despotism (DA IV, 1252) that for Tocqueville constitutes yet another, final stage of development of power (see the next chapter for details). In other words, one may say that Huntington in comparison to Tocqueville is more of an unabashed modernist with strong statist tendencies. At the same time, Huntington, however, does acknowledge the poignancy of Tocqueville's criticism of certain forms of political modernity, he, however does so selectively.

It follows from the above table that in the wake of the great democratic revolution social power cannot be diminished; it can be only centralized or localized. This is precisely why Tocqueville puts so much emphasis on the local government. Importantly, this is exactly the context in which Tocqueville is quoted by Huntington who sees him as an advocate of dispersion, but not a radical weakening of social power. As Huntington puts it: "In modern countries, in de Tocqueville's words, 'the science of association is the mother of science; the progress; of all the rest depends on progress upon the progress it has made'"⁵² (ibid. 31).

At the same time, Huntington is a progressive thinker and contrasts his progressivism (i.e. the productive associational dispersion of power) not only with totalitarian power-concentration, but also with the backward and in his view undesirable dispersion of power in the traditional

⁵² In the latest translation (DA III, 902) this fragment reads as „In democratic countries, the science of association is the mother science the progress of all the other sciences depends on the progress of the former.”

societies. Such societies in Huntington's view are characterized by a closed, exclusive familism or something Fukuyama calls the "tyranny of the cousins" (2011, 43). Based on this theory, Huntington famously provided a testable hypothesis for the Southern-Italian study of Putnam (1993). "The Italian village, in contrast [to American], had only one association, and it did not engage in any public spirited activity," wrote Huntington (1977/1968, 31). He also used the Latin America and the Arab world as other examples of something Edward C. Banfield (see Marshall 1998) later called "amoral familism" and treated as a hallmark of a backward society. Moreover, Huntington agonized about the fact that because Americans cherish no memories of the feudal past of English society, they see little difference between civil society and "amoral familism."⁵³ The American founding aimed to curb and disperse an already advanced modern government, not to build it. As a result, "when an American thinks about the problem of government building, he directs himself not to creation of authority and the accumulation of power, but rather the limitation of authority and division of power" (Huntington, 7). This of course has a limited appeal for the third world countries that at the time when Huntington's book was published explicitly chose the path of totalitarian (mainly communist) or authoritarian dictatorship for its promise of an almost instant creation of an undisputable authority that would sever the old colonial, bureaucratic empires, and at the same time avoid a return to the tribal past.

Tocqueville, too, feared that this would be the fate of the societies that would be faced with a desire to modernize early, but would not be socially prepared for the process. Just like Huntington, he saw both the danger of the new despotism and the darker sides of the old way of life. Perhaps he became too idyllic about the medieval past in AR, but even there, he never mentions that a return to this past would be possible. Rather than that, he points out that even the

⁵³ At the same time being "born" modern they did not suffer from the defects of familism.

primitive social reality has something worth preserving. As to the adversities of the familism, they seem a distant problem now from the point of view of the advanced societies. Europe, North America, Korea and Japan in their contemporary way of life seem to undermine any need for a family, so much that an opposite problem of a demographic decline for them seems to be more impending. At the same time, a large part of the less developed world is still struggling with the social problems created by having only a closed clan-like social structure instead of free associations. Tocqueville touches upon this additional reason that explains why a simple return to the idealized social life may not be desirable when he describes the strange similarity between the Native Americans and the old-world aristocrats. Thus in DA, the Native American society⁵⁴ plays in Tocqueville's work the same role that the amorally familial society or the traditional polity plays in the analysis of Huntington and that the southern Italians play in the work of Putnam. Tocqueville calls this type of life "the natural link between civilization and barbarism" (DA II, 534).

While specific language Tocqueville uses to describe Native Americans may strike modern readers as contaminated by racist undertones,⁵⁵ if one moves beyond the vernacular that was very true to its era, one cannot help but notice a stunning perceptiveness and indeed a true affinity Tocqueville sees between his own heritage of a "vanquished aristocrat" and that of a Native American. First he describes the amorality of the traditional Native-American society and, hinting at its aristocratic nature, writes:

So among them, you found none of those doubtful and incoherent notions of good and evil, none of that profound corruption which is usually combined with ignorance and crudeness of mores among civilized nations who have descended

⁵⁴ ...Which, as Tocqueville notes in his discussion of Cherokees, is by no means as primitive as Europeans tend to think.

⁵⁵ For discussion of Tocqueville's rejection of Gobineau's racism, see Chapter 6.

into barbarism again. The Indian owed nothing to anyone except himself. His virtues, his vices, his prejudice were his own; he grew up in the wild independence of his own nature. (DA I, 40)

Secondly, Tocqueville places this discussion of Native Americans at the very beginning of the first part of DA and later returns to it when he has already made it aptly clear that for a democratic society “descending towards barbarism” is a constant and very real threat. In this second longer discussion, he is much clearer about the aristocratic traits that bring a somewhat decadent Frenchmen surprisingly close to the last of Cherokee warriors:

There is no Indian so miserable who, in his bark hut, does not maintain a proud idea of his individual value; he considers the cares of industry as degrading occupations; he compares the farmer to the ox that traces the furrow, and in each of our arts he sees only the work of slaves. It is not that he has not conceived a very high idea of the power of whites and of the grandeur of their intelligence; but, if he admires the result of our efforts, he scorns the means that we have used to obtain them, and, even while under our influence, he still believes himself superior to us. Hunting and war seem to him the only cares worthy of a man. So the Indian, deep within the misery of his woods, nurtures the same ideas, the same opinions as the noble of the Middle Ages in his fortress, and to resemble him fully he only needs to become a conqueror. How strange! It is in the forests of the New World, and not among the Europeans who populate its shores, that the ancient prejudices of Europe are found today (DA II, 531).

Thus, just like Putnam, Tocqueville acknowledges the difference between the aristocratic vertically organized warrior communities and the associations that are horizontal in nature and that combine men rather than set them apart based on notions of warrior pride. Even in his most “aristocratic” work, in AR, Tocqueville is keen to observe how the old polite society despised the idea of working for a living and indeed was hard pressed to see the working men as members of the same species. Tocqueville illustrates this observation with a famous anecdote describing “Madame Duchâteler who, according to Voltaire’s secretary, found no difficulty in undressing before her servant since she could not be convinced that her lackeys were real men” (AR, 181).

Elsewhere Tocqueville notes that by the “eighteenth century” all the early pre-modern civil associations in France had disappeared and Frenchmen were “almost entirely withdrawn into

themselves” (AR, 101). It is also not a coincidence that both in AR and in DA Tocqueville very often uses the word “caste” [*caste*] when describing the old aristocratic group and reserved the word “class” for the description of the groups within the democratic society. It is as if he wanted to stress the rigidity of the pre-modern world versus the mutability of the social status in the democracy.

The vertical and exclusive character of European political parties, cliques and castes was something that deeply troubled Tocqueville. He claimed that this characteristic would give a particularly pernicious character to the administrative centralization that to some extent would be an inevitable phenomenon resulting from the great democratic revolution. He thus writes that the political associations of Europe see themselves as small states within a state and want to control all the administrative power without any deliberation. As he writes: “in Europe, associations consider themselves, in a way the legislative and executive council of the nations” (DA II, 311). They reject political plurality, while the more horizontal political associations in America are its guarantees. A group of equal citizens naturally views politics as a competition between various groups. American political associations according to Tocqueville know that they “represent only a minority of the nation” (ibid.) and thus they constantly deliberate, “talk and petition” (DA II, 311). In contrast in Europe, political associations are vertically organized and consequently they see the entirety of politics as a vertical power game. In this game, the objective is to place one’s own small associational hierarchy at the top of the grand hierarchy of the state.

Indeed, Tocqueville makes a profound discovery concerning the danger of having undemocratic parties within a democratic system, a discovery whose importance would not be fully realized before the breakthrough study of Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965). Tocqueville thus writes about the hierarchical, vertical, political associations in the following way:

Since the principal end of these associations is to act and not to talk, to fight and not to persuade, they are led naturally to adopt an organization that is not at all civil and to introduce military habits and maxims.

Thus you can see them centralize the control of their forces, as much as possible, and deliver the power of all into the hands of a very small number of men. The members of these associations respond to an order like soldiers at war; they profess the dogma of passive obedience, or rather, by uniting together, they have at one stroke made the complete sacrifice of their judgment and free will. Thus, within these associations, a tyranny often reigns that is more unbearable than the one exercised within the society in the name of the government that is attacked. (ibid.)

This gives Tocqueville another reason not to rebel against democracy. Since the great democratic revolution changes not only all the rules of political game, but also the construction of a society, a successful rebellion against it would have to involve creating an alternative society using the means and material provided precisely by that great democratic revolution. To put it another way, if France is no longer an aristocratic society, there can be no real aristocracy; former aristocrats can only create a club within a democratic France and plot to overthrow the new regime. Such is the force of democratic revolution, that indeed even for aristocrats it is impossible to overthrow it without using some of its own methods. The problem with those aristocratic clubs and intrigues is that even if they succeed in obtaining power, they cannot reverse the changes that had already happened. Indeed, they can only beat the society into submission to their particular club. In the very same way, the Nazi-sponsored Arian romanticism could not turn its followers into Teutonic knights and De Maistre could not cancel the Reformation.

Indeed, however, one can argue that both the Nazism and Fascism were, according to the Tocquevillian terminology, a revolutionary movement, based on typically European model of political association. Tocqueville's insight in this respect prefigures that of Barrington Moore (1966) who saw fascism as a revolution from the above, procured by landed elites that coopt some of the capitalists and form an alliance with the executive. According to the same analysis,

communism resulted from a mass peasant revolution.⁵⁶ In consequence, only a strong middle class could foster what Moore calls an “industrial democracy.” It is, however, worth noting that both the communist and fascist varieties of totalitarianism were based on a singular duplication and substitution of the republican state institutions by the party institutions and thus the illiberal association turned into an illiberal state.

Lucien Jaume in his work notes that “Tocqueville’s liberalism... was antibourgeois,” according to Jaume “this was the basis of his persistent rivalry with Guizot” (Jaume 2008, 12). Indeed, Tocqueville does criticize the democratic culture which in his description often seems to be an extension of the bourgeois culture. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that Tocqueville favored one class over the other. As I have already noted, he was one of the last thinkers who thought of political life and in consequence of society as a whole. Moreover, even if he offered some biting criticism especially of the tamed, French bourgeoisie that lost the old spirit of self-government, he never turned his dislike into an anti-bourgeois rage that was the one common element of some of the great political movements of the twentieth century: socialism, Leninism and the 1960’s counterculture. On the contrary, Tocqueville praised the government of the old French municipalities in AR. At times Tocqueville went as far as to write about the French bourgeoisie as the last stronghold of liberty during the absolutist reign. As he put it: “Municipal freedom in France survived feudalism. When the nobility had already ceased to administer the countryside, the towns still retained the right to self-government” (AR, 53). Nevertheless, by the seventeenth century even this bulwark had given in.

⁵⁶ Which indeed seems to be the case in relation to East Asian revolutions, but does not explain the Soviet pattern.

Conclusions

This decomposition of local politics in France, according to Tocqueville, led to a fatal paradox; the democratic revolution without the habit of self-government would create a hybrid government that with Tocqueville's words would be "republican at the head and ultramonarchical in all other parts" (DA, 1260). But trying to reverse the overall democratic revolution would have the very same result. Since the great democratic revolution, as we have already established, changed the mode of legitimizing power, a "return" to the old regime could only happen through some form of elections or mock elections similar to the elections in Weimar Republic, plebiscites of Louis Napoleon. The regime would, however, remain hybrid. Once the old thread of legitimacy is broken and the old forms of legitimization become invalid, no simple return to the previous regimes is possible.

What modern political science calls a full democracy for Tocqueville is simply a regime that on the spectrum of modern politics combines the self-government of the people with the democratic legitimization of the elites. This state, however, cannot be attained by a violent, short revolution because it requires the existence of local institutions and it requires them to consist of horizontal associations rather than hierarchical familial clans. Such institutions, unfortunately, so far have never been produced in a time that would be shorter than the lifespan of one generation. In other words, according to Tocqueville, a modernizing society needs to prepare for the democratization. If it tries to counter it, the produced results might be directly contradictory to those desired. As a consequence: "The vices of those who govern and the imbecility of the governed would not take long to lead them to ruin..." (ibid.).

Tocqueville is, however, by no means uncritical of America, which I will amply show in the following chapters. He sees a far greater danger in Europe. For him the already "democratic nations of Europe have all the general and permanent tendencies that led the Americans toward

centralization of powers, and moreover they are subject to a multitude of secondary and accidental causes that the Americans do not know. You would say that each step that they take towards equality brings them closer to despotism” (DA IV, 1221).

CHAPTER 3

TOCQUEVILLE'S THEORY OF HISTORY AND THE SPIRAL OF REVOLUTIONS

If revolutions are indeed the locomotives of history (Manlia 2006), then Tocqueville's theory of revolutions is in fact a part of his larger theory of time in politics. Clearly, in order to perceive any change, one needs to understand what exactly is changing. In the case of Tocqueville's new political science "great revolutions" change the very way in which we perceive the past and the hopes we have for the future, which means that they effectively change our general view of history. As for the smaller revolutions, as I have already stated in the previous chapter, they are for Tocqueville the epiphenomena of larger processes; they are the way in which gradual, slowly developing changes are translated into the political present.

Tocqueville in his work is clearly interested in arriving at a theory of history and at the same time avoiding a heavy-handed *Zeitgeist*-type of determinism. He wants to both devise a new predictive method and leave room for the free, the unforeseen and the unknown. To certain modern political theorists, those attempts are decidedly confusing and contradictory since they are so immersed in "democracy" that they see history either as a necessary progress or a foreign land that is hardly accessible from the modern perspective. As a second option, some dissenting modern political theorists in an attempt to defend what they see as natural values choose to neglect the very possibility of any theory of history and thus arrive at a political science that is completely ahistorical. Thus, in the field of contemporary interpretative approach to Tocqueville, the current literature seems to be dominated by two main interpretative camps, which, after making allowances for some generalizations, can be labeled as the post-Marxists or historicists approach⁵⁷, and the natural rights/Straussian⁵⁸ approach. In addition to those two philosophical

⁵⁷ See especially Boesche (1987) and Wolin (2003).

⁵⁸ See especially Ceaser (1990), Zetterbaum (1967), Lawler (1993), Manent (1996).

schools, one naturally also finds many descriptive historical works on Alexis de Tocqueville. In recent years, the descriptive Tocquevillian scholarship has been, for instance, enriched by the works of James T. Schleifer (2000), Françoise Mélonio (1998), Aurelian Craiutu (2009) and Lucien Jaume (2008). Moreover, one also needs to mention a whole tradition of comparative studies inspired by Tocqueville.⁵⁹ The main finding of the descriptive-historical and the comparative approach will be, however, summarized in the subsequent chapters. This chapter will focus mainly on the contemporary interpretative approaches to Tocqueville's political science of revolutions; it will also adumbrate the criticism of both of the dominant schools of reading Tocqueville.

In response to the antinomies of the Straussian and the historicist approach to Tocqueville's science of revolution, I will propose a brief sketch of a third approach that tries to address the persistent interpretative problems and propose a stable, middle-ground solution. I do not assume that this new proposition is conclusive and will become widely accepted. However, if my interpretation does as much as start a debate about the possible reconciliation between different interpretative approaches to Tocqueville, it will do far more than I have ever hoped for. My proposition will be presented at the end of the chapter, it will suggest that the extreme insightfulness of Tocqueville's general model resulted from a felicitous combination of his personal talent and the unique theory of revolution that combines the elements of the modern and the ancient understanding of social phenomena. I will also draw a comparison between Tocqueville's theory of great revolutions and the Kuhnian theory of paradigm shifts.

⁵⁹ See especially Huntington (1968), Putnam (2003), and Craiutu and Gellar eds. (2009).

The Historicist Approach

The strong historicist approach to Tocqueville is presented mainly in the works of Roger Boesche (1987) and Sheldon Wolin (2003). In general, both authors are quick to observe Tocqueville's progressivism and liberalism, they, however, interpret the misgivings about socialism and mass democracy as ideological, class-motivated impurities that obscure his main strain of Tocqueville's thought. Sheldon Wolin is particularly critical of the ultimate results of Tocqueville's project that to him becomes a "bundle of contradictions, poses, anachronisms, absurdities, and willfulness" (Wolin 2003, 561). This psychological history that rejects the idea that Tocqueville is a "sovereign author" (ibid. 2003) of his texts is also clearly present in Cheryl Welch's⁶⁰ interpretation of Tocqueville's writings on empire and slavery (2003) and in her more general, descriptive work on Tocqueville's life and work (2001). In comparison to Wolin and Welch, Roger Boesche is less bitter in his criticism of Tocqueville; however, he essentially agrees with Wolin and concludes his study by noting that Tocqueville offers little more than "ambivalence and uncertainty" (Boesche 1987, 264). Boesche, however, unlike Wolin, tries to present Tocqueville as a crypto-socialist (see also Boesche 1983) which, naturally, necessitates a highly selective reading of Tocqueville's works.

The main source of the historicists' uneasiness about Tocqueville is the fact that in spite of his masterful description of the apparent inevitability of the great democratic revolution, Tocqueville "instinctively rejects historicization" (Wolin 2003, 566). Wolin sees this as a symptom of a sinister careerism of a conservative politician who is "concerned not with truth but with revanchism" and ultimately chooses to "take a stand against both socialism and democratization" (Wolin 2003, 470). The argument is repeated by Welch in her discussion of the

⁶⁰ Cheryl Welch's works will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

undemocratic and anti-socialistic elements of Tocqueville's theory of global relations. According to Welch, Tocqueville's ideas on those subjects are a result of "the mechanisms by which he attempts to quell perceptions of moral dissonance" (Welch 2003, 236).

Boesche is more cautious and tries not to introduce interpretations based on his moral indignation openly. He is, therefore, compelled to note that, there are things in Tocqueville that either evades him or that are accidental. He writes,

Tocqueville revealed a personal ambivalence toward the idea that his age was dominated by fate or historical forces that people could not control. On the one hand, he uses this kind of argument when he suggested that the historical tendency toward more equality was irreversible.....On the other hand, when his contemporaries argued in a similar fashion that 'things are in the saddle' – to use Emerson's phrase..., he objected strenuously. (Boesche 1987, 68)

Acknowledging this duality of Tocqueville's attitude towards historical trends is a major advantage of Boesche's interpretation in comparison to those analyses that neglect the presence of a general theory of history in Tocqueville or see him as a mere reactionary with a split conscience. Boesche, however, declines to try to resolve the inconsistency; like Wolin and Welch he is inclined to think that there is some historical scar on Tocqueville's consciousness that prevents him from forming a consistent theory. He is, however, less inclined to start a heated polemic with an author who is dead for some 150 years and admits the he may simply not see the pattern that actually exists.

Boesche also tries to defend Tocqueville against accusations of a lack of social sensitivity that are made openly in Wolin's work and stated implicitly in Welch's analysis. However, in the course of this defense Boesche produces some questionable hypotheses that are, at best, factually imprecise. For instance, Boesche treats Tocqueville's famous "Memoir on Pauperism" (1992) and its evaluation of state-sponsored welfare as a temporary aberration and in a separate article assumes that some of the more socialistic passages in *Le Commerce* were actually penned by

Tocqueville and are far more representative of the French thinker's political views. The journal *Le Commerce* was without a doubt a project of paramount importance to Tocqueville and evidence for this will be given in the following chapter. However, we know that Tocqueville published in *Le Commerce* anonymously (Brogan 2006, 380). Moreover, given the set of expressions he customarily used in his other writings, it is highly unlikely that he personally authored passages like this: "the destruction, in 1789, of corporations and associations for arts and trade, gave the worker his liberty" (quoted in Boesche 1983, 288). It seems more likely that Tocqueville treated *Le Commerce* as a common platform for reconciliation between the "aristocratic" liberals (see Jaume, 2008) and the centrist socialists. Given his difficult political position at the time (see next chapter) and the increasingly statist anti-democratic complacency of the mainstream French liberals, Tocqueville clearly needed allies. At the same time, Tocqueville expressed his misgivings about the state being involved in industry and welfare not merely in the "Memoir on Pauperism;" he did so already in DA, where he wrote that "there is among modern nations of Europe one great cause that, apart from all those that I have just pointed out, contributes constantly to expand the action of the sovereign...this cause is the development of industry, which the progress of equality favors" (DA 1231).

Both Boesche and Wolin see Tocqueville as a prisoner of his time and a child of his class. Wolin, for instance, criticizes the gullible ahistorical reading of Tocqueville using the interpretative tools he borrows from Barthes and Foucault. In the same vein Boesche in his work on Tocqueville paints a lengthy and detailed historicist picture of the era as if trying to dwarf Tocqueville's individuality and prove that all the inconsistencies of his work are projections of the anxieties and fears that were commonplace among the members of the same intellectual milieu. However, as all historicists, both Boesche and Wolin need at least one immovable reference point that stands above history and enables them to construct all their political descriptions. And like

many other modern historicists they more or less openly point to the philosophy of Karl Marx as such an immovable vantage point. Boesche, for instance, insists that Tocqueville is a man whose works reflect the difficult passage from the old philosophy of politics to the new one; while Marx (historically he was only 13 years Tocqueville's junior) is already a new man who finally resolves the Tocquevillian anxiety. As Boesche puts it:

Tocqueville offers ambivalence and uncertainty because, he thought, that this is what the political world has always offered. In his conception of the world, one can uncover none of the classical harmony of Plato or the modern harmony of Marx, both of who assumed that the good things of this world – happiness, justice, freedom, peace, excellence, creativity – are ultimately compatible (Boesche 1987, 264).

Wolin is more self-conscious about this historicist vision and tries to justify it by producing a long chapter that explains why exactly Tocqueville was implicated in ideologies, myths and class interests, while Marx towered above the normal history. The chief argument Wolin uses, however, somewhat disappointingly, boils down to extolling Marx's expertise as an academic philosopher in comparison to Tocqueville's purported dilettantism. This leads Wolin to fill many pages solely with descriptions of Marx's political theory. With a noticeable touch of *resentment* Wolin keeps insisting on the necessity to study Marx in order to understand why Tocqueville ultimately sides with the classical economists in "rejecting the further extension of political rights beyond the middle class" (Wolin 2003, 479). At the same time Wolin eagerly points out that "when Karl Marx left continental Europe and took up the life of exile in London...his immediate theoretical task was to choose among the many partly finished theories he had begun earlier..." while "...when Tocqueville came to America he had no theory, no theoretical vocation" (ibid., 113).

According to Wolin another reason for Marx's supremacy is his economic acumen. Wolin writes that "unlike Marx who developed his mature theory of capital by means of a running

engagement with classical economics – and he never concealed his intellectual debts to Stuart, Smith and Ricardo – Tocqueville made no effort to associate his sweeping claims with previous theoretical contributions” (ibid., 139). This last point of criticism is more justified. Tocqueville’s knowledge of the economy was indeed somewhat superficial, which constitutes a certain weakness of his description. However, all of Wolin’s efforts to favorably contrast the genius of Marx with the uneducated, careerist and buffoonish primitivism of Tocqueville are prone to create a certain suspicion on the part of a careful reader. There, indeed, must be something that is extremely intimidating in Tocqueville for an academic Marxian, if one of the largest recently published monographs devoted to the work of Tocqueville (Wolin’s work is well over 500 pages long) was written mainly for the purpose of analyzing the “sense in which Tocqueville ‘failed’” (ibid, 561). Interestingly, the author never explains in a satisfactory way why out so many other “failed” nineteenth century philosophers it is Tocqueville who earned the honor of being the subject of such a prodigious effort aimed at refuting his philosophy and compromising his sinister anti-democratic motives.

Both Wolin and Boesche in their descriptions of Tocqueville’s usual historicism in fact seem to be using clichés of the category of “reactionary socialism” first introduced by Marx and Engels (1992, 36-42). This approach is indeed accurate to the extent that Tocqueville had sided neither with Guizot and the complacent, statist, French mainstream liberalism nor with Blanqui and the new radicals. In reading Tocqueville as a “reactionary socialist” Boesche focuses on the socially sensitive fragments from Tocqueville’s notes on England (see Tocqueville 1958); the articles that he helped publish in *Le Commerce*, and his commentaries about the dangers of the new industrial aristocracy. At the same time, because of Tocqueville’s rejection of historical determinism, Boesche settles for the vision of Tocqueville as a thinker close to the particular subtype of “reactionary socialist” that according to Marx and Engels should be called the

“conservative or bourgeois socialist,” and who is characterized by a desire to “preserve the existing state of (bourgeoisie) society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements” (Marx and Engels 1958, 54-55). Wolin, on the other hand, seems to suggest that Tocqueville was a different subspecies of “reactionary socialist,” someone much closer to what the *Manifesto* labeled as the “feudal socialist.” The already quoted Wolinian description of Tocqueville is, indeed, an almost verbatim quote from Marx and Engels who describe feudal socialists’ criticism of modern society and their praise of the traditional communities as “half lamentation, half lampoon, half echo of the past, half menace to the future, at times, by its bitter witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart’s core; but always ludicrous in effect” (ibid. 44).

Alan S. Kahan (1992) and Lucien Jaume (2008)⁶¹ in their description of Tocqueville’s “aristocratic liberalism” also seem to work under the influence of the above Marxian category of “feudal socialism;” they, however, stress different elements of the definition and focus more on the “incisive criticism” of the bourgeois rather than the “ludicrous effects”. In general, however, both authors see Tocqueville as a political actor who is implicated in the Marxian class struggle and defends the old liberty both from the money-grabbing new middle-class and the radicalized masses. Kahan, eventually goes as far so to compare Tocqueville’s strain of feudal socialism to modern bohemian countercultures. Jaume, on the other hand, stresses throughout his work that one of Tocqueville’s main motives in his public and literary efforts was to constantly act “against the bourgeois spirit of the July Monarchy” (2008, 101).

⁶¹ Jaume in his otherwise very insightful historical work tends to disregard the American Scholarship on Tocqueville and never quotes Kahan, which is a major academic error on his part. Apparently, not having read the earlier work, Jaume simply repeats many of Kahan’s theses without giving him due credit.

Naturally, as I have already mentioned, both Boesche and Wolin agree that there is some philosophy of history in Tocqueville. However, since both authors admit quite openly that their own philosophy of history is heavily influenced by Marx, they have no choice but to look at Tocqueville's alternative historicism through Marxian lenses and thus see Tocqueville as an underdeveloped or failed Marx. This of course does not imply a malicious distortion. Theories of history, because of their scope, generality and close connections with everyday human life, tend to be quite imperial – they seem to force political philosophers to take sides and dismiss any doubts more than any other component of a given philosophical system. In other words, once a researcher has a theory of history s/he accepts, s/he will reject all other competing theories of history. Indeed, only in certain extraordinary circumstances individuals who possess considerable talent are able to construct a new, original interpretation of political history. The final section of this chapter will deal precisely with such a situation and in doing so it will draw a comparison between Tocqueville's ideas on history and revolutions and Thomas Kuhn's (1996) concept of scientific revolutions.

At this point it is, however, important to note that the tendency of different visions of history to violently clash is clearly visible in the great historical debates between the pagan concepts of cyclical time and the Christian authors like Tertullian, Origen and Augustine for whom the nature of universe was defined by the linear time that starts with creation and ends with apocalypse. In a similar way, Christianity saw the human earthly life as a period that starts with birth that is burdened by the original sin and ends with death that may be sweetened by the hope of salvation, but is devoid of any possibility of Platonic or Plotynian metempsychosis. Indeed, one may argue that all philosophies, religions and ideologies can be defined as ways of conceptualizing reality that extend a given human being's temporal perspective beyond the natural scope of her/his individual life. In this sense, modern historicists are heirs to the Christian

vision⁶² of time, whereas their Straussian opponents sensing the affinity between monotheistic religions and historicism are seeking to achieve philosophical consistency, and as a result have no choice but to return to the ancient cycles⁶³ guided by the unchanging laws of nature and accepts the old Christian historicism only as a vague hope that needs to be separated from philosophy.⁶⁴

The “immanentization of the Christian eschaton” (Voegelin 1952/1987, 166) in Marxism, naturally creates many ethical problems. One needs to acknowledge, however, that the Marxian historicism is extremely effective in the task of replacing the divine historical *telos* with the *telos* of the modern intellectual. It is also apparent that since Marx’s Hegel already stands on his feet, Marx is able to abolish the problem of the inconsistency of the pessimistic vision of worldly apocalypse with the spiritual optimism of the vision New Jerusalem. Marx, therefore, indeed, introduces what Boesche calls the “modern harmony” and as a result in his own way returns to millenarian vision of a glorious end of history without

⁶² Naturally, modern historicism in contrast to the Christian vision will assume that the ultimate course of history is something that the mind of the philosopher can access, whereas, the Christian vision assumes that God alone can have the full knowledge of history.

⁶³ Plato constructs an open cycle of decline, and hence his philosophy can be more easily reconciled with some elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Aristotle and especially Polybius construct closed cycles. Certain eschatological differences between Plato and Christian historicism, however, cannot be reconciled. Plato’s world ultimately does not end and does not move towards a concrete goal of salvation, it merely goes through certain patterns of revival and decline.

⁶⁴ Straussianism is by no means anti-Christian. It, however, introduces a clear division between faith and philosophy and without going too deep into theological discussions; it views Christian historicism only as an expression of one’s personal hopes. At the same time, the secularized post-Christian forms of historicism are rejected altogether. Shadia B. Drury’s (2013) opinion that Strauss like Marx saw religion as “opium for the masses” is grossly exaggerated. He was, however, not religious, even if he regretted this fact. At the same time Leo Strauss was also always amicably disposed towards the men and women endowed with a strong religious sensitivity. He himself beautifully expressed the mixture of those feelings when in a eulogy of a recently deceased friend, a Jewish professor known for his religiosity, he said: „He did not rebuff; nay he attracted these who were not as blessed as he was; who did not find a way of reconciling the old piety and the new science” (Strauss 1963/2013). It is not inconceivable that Strauss was speaking of himself as one of those “were not blessed,” this might be true especially given that he never directly addressed the issue of his personal religiosity and the above passage is as close to a declaration as he ever came. It was the more moderate younger Straussians (who will be mentioned later in the text) who started pushing the boundaries between religion and philosophy that are still quite visible and firm in the writing of Strauss and his immediate student, Marvin Zetterbaum. In the same speech, Strauss declares that as far as classical political philosophy is concerned: “No religion is true but some religion, any religion is politically necessary” (ibid.).

the apocalyptic end of the world as such. The big difference between Marx and Tocqueville is that while Marx's description of reality at hand is extremely grim and vitriolic, his ultimate vision of the history's goal is indeed one of Pollyannic harmony. In the case of Tocqueville, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the situation is reversed. His descriptions of contemporary reality are cautiously optimistic and assume that some political bodies win with history and thrive in the very conditions that utterly destroy others. At the same time, Tocqueville's general theory of history explicitly assumes that no particular type of politics is capable of winning the game humanity plays against reality all the time. Ultimately, all politics has to offer must, at one time, fail and become rebuilt in a semi-cyclical fashion. Tocqueville is, thus, in full agreement with Pascal (compare Lawler 1993,89-108), who did not understand how one can expect everlasting progress of our social condition given all the stochastic elements of reality that affect history. Tocqueville also agrees with Augustine who believed that the city of men as all things human must eventually suffer a decline. Let us also add that including a possibility of a complete failure in a formal model of political development is a routine practice for any student of the probability theory (see Hadari 1989, 48).

The modern historicist's mind will, however, balk at the obvious conclusion that the both mathematically and theologically trained mind of Pascal embraced with ease. This difficult conclusion suggests that if reality, and especially political reality, is indeed best described as a set of complex probabilities, then there is no room for eternal progress and the only hopes for the future that are available to human beings have to be metaphysical in nature. It is far more likely that a modern mind will return to Marx's millenarism than accept such an iron-clad, but ultimately pessimistic logic of the proper political science. This is because the logic of chaos and probability would require the mind that has already rejected the consolation of traditional religion to cope with its own despair in some other way. Some escape from this Pascalian (see Pascal

1901/2012, loc. 419) problem can be found only in the assumption that the disorganized, probabilistic history ultimately will end or that it has ended already. Indeed, according to some, only under such an assumption the teleological postulates of modern politics become acceptable. As Allan Bloom puts it in his preface to Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* "for anyone who thinks that thought is relative to time – that is to most modern men...there can only be knowledge if history at some point stops" (in Kojève 1969, x).

Since in most situations humans prefer knowledge to uncertainty, thinking about history in terms of a line rather than a cycle inevitably means that the thinkers will also assume a movement towards the point of absolute knowledge, towards the end of history. As we shall see, Tocqueville was well aware of this paradox and avoided it in his own philosophy of history simply by stating that although history never stops completely there are moments when following what he calls a "great" revolution it significantly slows down. Incidentally, both for Tocqueville and Kojève's Hegel the French revolution plays a crucial role, they however interpret its importance in very different ways.

The Straussian Approach

The historicist's problem with Tocqueville results from his purported anachronism, classicism and providentialism. The Straussian problem is an almost direct opposite of the historicist's accusations and results from Tocqueville's interest in history and bitter criticism of the classical, ahistorical way of philosophizing about politics. Naturally, Tocqueville himself objects to being read as a determinist, and explicitly rejected historicism, but he did so in way that would never satisfy a "true" Straussian philosopher. The rejection is, however, very conspicuous given that Tocqueville places in the final, concluding paragraphs of *Democracy in America*:

I am not unaware that several of my contemporaries have thought that here below people are never masters of themselves, and that they obey necessarily I do

not know what insurmountable and unintelligent force that arises from previous events, from race, from soil or from climate.

Those are false and cowardly doctrines that can produce only weak men and pusillanimous nations. Providence has created humanity neither entirely independent nor completely slave. It traces around each man, it is true, a fatal circle out of which he cannot go; but within its vast limits, man is powerful and free, so are peoples.

The nations of today cannot make conditions among them not be equal; but it depends on them whether equality leads them to servitude or liberty, to enlightenment or barbarism, to prosperity or misery. (DA IV, 1285)

The above fragment contains the essence of the Straussian/Tocquevillian problem. A whole generation of thinkers educated by a great pedagogue, Leo Strauss, rejected what one author aptly calls the “terror of history” (Dorosz 2010) in the favor of freedom of philosophizing construed as discovering what is simply true and free of the historicist approaches to political thought. Moreover, some Straussians became peculiarly sensitive to the importance of religion for political life⁶⁵ (see Welch 2001, 245). All this, naturally, makes the Straussians particularly receptive to some of Tocqueville’s thoughts. At the same time, the fact that Tocqueville does have a general theory of history and insist that in the foreseeable future political actors are faced with a historical necessity of democratization, creates a considerable problem for the Straussian school.

As we shall see in this chapter, the problem, however, arises not from Straussian’s rejection of Tocqueville’s “democracy”, but from their refusal to accept history rather than nature as a device that guides politics. Democracy from a Straussian perspective (derived from Aristotle) can be accepted only on the ground of it being just in particular circumstances and not historically inevitable. Moreover, for Strauss and his students this is not a normative judgment since they explicitly undermine the fact-norm distinction (see Strauss 1953 and Bloom 1987). Naturally, in response, historicists who oppose Strauss’s school are tempted to follow the lines of Pocock’s

⁶⁵ Which did not mean they uncritically accepted Christian historicism as a vision of history.

argumentation and conclude that the Straussian problem results from the school being “immoderately contemptuous of all historical exegesis” and its belief that “all historians are historicists, and all historicists are moral relativists; all historical information is therefore irrelevant to the intention of the morally serious philosopher” (Pocock 1975, 391). Applying this simplistic Pocockian accusation to the Strassian reading of Tocqueville is, however, misleadingly easy, because it fails to acknowledge the problem of the autonomy of political philosophy, a concern that Tocqueville and Strauss held in common.

Strauss himself notably never published a single word about Tocqueville. However, the Internet Archive, a member of the U.S. Association of Libraries, has recently released a transcript of a lecture on Tocqueville that is said to be a part of Strauss’ 1962 seminar on Natural Rights.⁶⁶ The author of the notes, even if it was not Leo Strauss himself, clearly displays a Straussian frame of mind. He is at the same time fascinated by Tocqueville and puzzled by his historicist inclinations. He calls DA a “remarkable two volumes” and claims that “no book comparable in breadth and depth has ever been produced afterwards” (2012/1962). He, however, also describes Tocquville’s vision of history as essentially Burkean and writes that Tocqueville

...dogmatically accepts the democratic notion of justice, justice is simply identical with equality, so that the kind of reasonable inequality corresponding to merit is not considered. The fundamental reason is the serious will of Providence. But then of course, since he can't help thinking about it, he gives an analysis and the analysis leads to criticism inevitably. (ibid.)

Therefore, the author concludes: “One can perhaps put it this way, and it is not perhaps the worst thing that one can say about this kind of political thought; it is an approach which is perfectly

⁶⁶ The authorship of the notes is still not certain. I have obtained a partial confirmation from Leo Strauss’ former student (David North); however, the ultimate confirmation will require separate archival research in the Leo Strauss’ collection stored at the Chicago University, which I am planning to conduct at a later time.

sound for most practical purposes, but it is never sufficient from the point of view of theory” (ibid.). The above quote is tantamount to rejecting Tocqueville’s authority as a philosopher.

The claim that this is indeed a genuine Leo Strauss lecture is corroborated by the fact that the same topic, i.e. the criticism of Tocqueville’s historicist discussion of the inevitability of democracy, was taken up by Strauss’ graduate student – the late Marvin Zetterbaum, who worked with Strauss in Chicago in 1962. In his research, Zetterbaum solves this problem by rejecting the hypothesis that Tocqueville treated the claim concerning democracy’s inevitability seriously. Zetterbaum arrives at this conclusion based on his assumption that Tocqueville must have been deceptive either about his commitment to liberty and freethinking or about his commitment to the “inevitability hypothesis.” Ultimately, Zetterbaum concludes that similarly to Tocqueville’s teaching on religion his “inevitability hypothesis” is a “salutary myth” (1967, 19) that enables him to present to his audience something that he thinks is right based on the natural law alone, but would be rejected if presented in a genuinely philosophical non-historicist form. According to Zetterbaum, Tocqueville is an intelligent thinker, who is well aware of the surface unseemliness of the democratic *mores*, but at the same time realizes that, in its deepest nature, democracy is “the only just social condition” (ibid., 41). Therefore, knowing that the surface of democracy is not nearly as lustrous and becoming as that of aristocracy and doubting in the power of philosophical persuasion, he simply presents democracy as inevitable.

Nevertheless, based on Zetterbaum’s own view of politics, one can doubt whether a conclusive philosophical argument in favor of Tocqueville’s democracy truly exists. This is because Zetterbaum describes a perennial conflict between justice and human nature that in the conditions of just equality will never embrace the Aristotelian political virtue. To this dilemma, according to Zetterbaum, Tocqueville proposes only “temporary palliatives” (ibid., 159) such as associations, religion, education and Lockean common sense. In spite of the inability to solve this

dilemma, Zetterbaum claims that Tocqueville ultimately sides with the Straussian philosopher, precisely because he understands that the democratic order as every actual political order can be upheld only by “art” or “myth” (ibid.). Zetterbaum thus seems to answer Strauss’ purported doubts by revealing that only a true philosopher can be so apt at using noble lies to cover his deep philosophical inclinations.

Zetterbaum’s thesis that “the core of [Tocqueville’s] teaching is hardly hopeful” (ibid.); is extremely insightful and will be elaborated later on in this work. However, Marvin Zetterbaum seems to read too much into Tocqueville. He claims that in his unpublished writings, Tocqueville is much less sure of the inevitability of democracy, but he quotes little evidence to prove this claim apart from Tocqueville’s famous rejection of philosophical fatalism in a letter to Gobineau (ibid., 17 and Tocqueville 1959, 227). This passage is, however, no different from the identical declaration found in the officially published edition of *DA* (IV, 1285 – quoted above). In contrast, in the case of Tocqueville’s opinions on religion where Zetterbaum also sees some inconsistencies between the published and unpublished writings, we can now confirm his insight by showing that there truly is a marked discrepancy between Tocqueville’s private notes on Catholicism and democracy and the idyllic view of the peaceful coexistence of the two that he presented in his published writings.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the “inevitability hypothesis” is clearly not a noble lie or a myth, since it consistently appears both in Tocqueville’s private writings and in his official work, in both cases coexisting with the rejection of determinism. Tocqueville clearly wanted those seemingly contradictory ideas to stand side by side, and thus rather than assume the existence of a noble lie, one should first look for an explanatory model that would reconcile the

⁶⁷ See Chapter 4 for details.

inconsistency that is far too obvious to be a mistake and far too forcefully and consistently stated to be a deception.

In contrast to Zetterbaum, some other Straussians are more cautious in reconciling Strauss with Tocqueville. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, for instance, follow Zetterbaum in their focus on Tocqueville's attempt at restoring some elements of Aristotelian virtues in the democratic societies (2006), but both are conspicuously silent about Tocqueville's philosophy of history. James Ceaser in line with the Straussian school does his best to deprecate the importance of Tocqueville's theory of history that according to him originally sprang from Burke's philosophy. He, nevertheless, does acknowledge its existence and writes: "Although Tocqueville glimpsed the possibility of a universalistic historicism and advanced one such mild variant of his own, he identified the historicism of his day mainly with those who sought to explain the fate of *particular* nations or people" (in Masugi 1991, 299).

In his book (1991), Ceaser further tries to save Tocqueville from accusation of being a mere historicist by compartmentalizing Tocqueville's teaching into three subfields. Ceaser distinguishes the discussion of political science as the historical knowledge of place; the general, philosophical political science and the practical political science focused on devising heuristics for particular statespersons. The method Ceaser uses to prove that Tocqueville is not a historicist at his deep philosophical level is, naturally, to stress that Tocqueville's general political theory is based on nature and not history, and that Tocqueville only introduces historical thinking to examine particular cases. This leads Ceaser to a conclusion that "when considering a historical era, political analysis focuses not literary on a time period as such" (Ceaser 1990, 43). The era for Ceaser is thus nothing more than a particular stage in the life of a particular civilization. In the case of Tocqueville, Ceaser claims, for instance, that modernity for the French thinker does not

have a global scope, but is limited to Christian civilization, and as a result, the sharp edge of the inevitability hypothesis needs to be considerably blunted.

James Ceaser's interpretation seems to be correct in acknowledging that Tocqueville's political science is only seemingly chaotic and that one finds in it a clear division into theory, case studies and normative prescriptions. However, Ceaser's dehistoricization of Tocqueville is problematic. Although Tocqueville does focus on the nations of Christian heritage in *DA*, in his writings on Islam and colonialism he also speaks of revolutions spreading beyond Christendom. Moreover, already in *DA* Tocqueville writes about the Asiatic democratization, anticipating insights that are strikingly similar to Edward Friedman's historical exegesis of the Chinese revolution (1974). Therefore, although, James Ceaser is right in describing Tocqueville's philosophy as a form of "mild historicism", the particular explanations of the reasons for this "mildness" are not satisfactory.

Mindful of the ambiguity of Tocqueville's theory of history, three other prominent Straussians who are known for producing outstanding Tocquevillian scholarship (Manent 1996, Lawler 1993, Rahe⁶⁸ 2009) decided not to focus heavily on disproving Tocqueville's historicism and with even fewer misgivings than Ceaser or Mansfield⁶⁹ accepted that Tocqueville recognizes at least two great historical formations⁷⁰ which in the foreseeable time will continue to produce political contingencies. In acknowledging this Manent, Lawler and Rahe present themselves as

⁶⁸ Paul Rahe's contributions to the Tocquevillian scholarship will be further discussed in Chapter 4. A summary of Lawler's and Manent's interpretations of Tocqueville will be provided in this chapter.

⁶⁹ Ceaser and Mansfield are more of Straussian traditionalists. They tend to exclude or minimize the importance of history in the political science of Tocqueville, while Lawler, Manent and Rahe try to amicably reconcile history and political theory.

⁷⁰ One can list the ancient world, the rise of Christianity and the rise of modern democracy. Tocqueville, however, at times describes Christianity merely as an intermedium between the ancient aristocracy and the modern democracy, so the typology is problematic.

moderate Straussians. All three abandon Zetterbaum's noble-lie interpretation and instead try to approximate Tocqueville's inevitability hypothesis to Leo Strauss's teaching on the distinction of the ancients and the moderns. They also reject the ultra-orthodox Straussian reading of Tocqueville provided by Thomas West⁷¹ (1991), who boldly classifies Tocqueville as a modern historicist, who „misunderstood the American founding” (ibid., 155) and concludes that Tocqueville's teaching should not be considered a viable part of the modern American political theory. Lawler, Manent and Rahe clearly focus more on what Tocqueville may have had to say about the most recently emerging social phenomena and try to steer clear of the whole inevitability discussion.

Pierre Manent, in his distinctively synthetic philosophical style, associates the general social form that precedes democracy with aristocracy and remarks that in their extreme form both the aristocratic and the democratic social orders seek to impose certain conventions on nature, however they do so for opposite reasons. Indeed, Tocqueville acknowledges the existence of both those tendencies and notes that “aristocratic nations are naturally led to compress the limits of human perfectibility too much, and democratic nations to extend them sometimes beyond measure” (DA III, 762). Based on this observations, Manent notes that

...aristocratic convention is more visibly distant from nature, more manifestly conventional. The dullest of minds can easily see that going through the trouble of being born is not a very great exploit. But sanctioning the legitimacy of power of one over another confirms the reality of nature. (Manent 1996,79)

Manent juxtaposes thus defined aristocracy with the Tocquevillian all-encompassing drive towards democracy and concludes that the democratic principle creates a curious paradox.

Because the democratic convention is less conventional than the aristocratic convention, its recognition requires endlessly working upon nature itself. Looking

⁷¹ Because of the extreme nature of West's dissenting voice and his rather ideological attack on Tocqueville, his argument will not be discussed here at length.

to what is equal, the same or similar in men, it penetrates nature and acts upon nature itself. (ibid., 80)

In Manent's view, every aristocratic social convention in its assertion that men are not made equal tries to mirror what aristocrats perceive as "natural" inequalities in the possession of various laudable qualities like intelligence, beauty, wisdom etc. Any aristocracy of convention is thus making a vociferous claim to being the aristocracy of "nature." However, the claim is always highly disputable since the social mirroring of natural inequality is always imperfect. Aristocrats, for instance, typically assume that the most important political virtues are inherited by members of certain families, which, as history⁷² instructs us, is a gross exaggeration.

One must also note that in his exegesis Manent moves away from the philosophical, Platonic vision of aristocracy of merit construed as simply the best men and women that can be found in the polity. He uses a more doxological notion of a historical aristocracy that for all intents and purposes is indistinguishable from a hereditary oligarchy, which defends its particular interests with the help of (a vacuous) social convention. As a result, in accordance with Plato's predictions, Manent concludes that if the aristocratic principle is used only as a form of legitimization and not as a criterion of selection, it soon becomes perceived as an inadmissible deformation of "nature" rather than its fulfillment and thus provokes a democratic retaliation.

This retaliation, however, leads democracy to enter into a conflict with the conventional understanding of "nature" on the opposite flank. Once democracy dismisses the aristocratic conventional insistence on the importance of trivial differences it is immediately apt to undermine the existence of even those differences that seemed obvious and "natural" to many previous

⁷² Since the ancient times there have been many examples of prominent political leaders of very modest background. Of course there is evidence that genes do have an influence on the strength of group identification, which in turn correlates with the likelihood of political involvement (Weber, Johnson and Arceneaux, 2011). Genetics, however, is not destiny and other factors also influence the political acumen of various politicians. The very existence of revolutions seems to attest to this fact.

generations. Contemporary western, democratic convention, for instance, forbids one to speak simply of masculine and feminine qualities and substitutes those terms with the concepts of gendered ideas that one freely assumes or rejects.⁷³ As for differences between particular individuals manifested in qualities such as intelligence, beauty, strength etc., the democratic convention makes it a *faux pas* to overtly state the arguments that favor nature over nurture even when dealing with apparently inborn features or deficiencies.

The problem with this new convention is that no matter how tolerant and open minded the democratic *mores* become, many are still compelled to observe that there is a point at which the general political equality inevitably loses its sway and the concrete “natural” inequalities between individuals become too visible to be ignored. This extremely embarrassing fact leaves a society that has already deeply internalized the democratic ideals with two difficult alternatives. Firstly it, can strive to construct a utopian/dystopian reality, similar that depicted in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Harrison Bergeron* (Vonnegut 1961/ 2011) and thus make a conscious attempt to mask the unfairly distributed beauty, dumb down those who are unfairly intelligent and weaken the unfair strength. Secondly, and more realistically, a democratic society can construct a transcendental promise of infinite perfectibility accessible to all and consciously direct the development of biological and technical sciences towards the attainment of this elusive goal.

Tocqueville, in spite of writing long before the advent of modern biotechnology, plastic or gender-change surgery and “life-enhancing” pharmacology, clearly predicted that the belief in

⁷³ The rise of the notion of gender that effectively substitutes the biological notion of sex is a development that is clearly possible within Tocqueville’s general framework, but that he himself never openly anticipated. Indeed, by contemporary standards Tocqueville’s understanding of those matters was deeply sexist (see Welch 2006, 190-207). On the other hand, his irrational fear of the more “masculine” women intimates that he saw the new phenomenon, but chose not to embrace it because of his own prejudice, which without a doubt impairs his moral authority. This problem is visible, for instance, in the remark Tocqueville makes about George Sand by writing: “I detest women who write, especially those who systematically disguise the weakness of her sex, instead of interesting us by displaying them in their true colors” (R 134).

infinite perfectibility will become the cornerstone of the unique *mores* produced by democracy.

Indeed, according to Peter Augustine Lawler, one of the most pertinent observations of

Tocqueville is to be found in the following passage:

As castes disappear, as classes come closer together, as common practices, customs, and laws vary because men are mixed tumultuously together, as new facts arise, as new truths come to light, as old opinions disappear and as other take their place, the image of an ideal and fleeing perfection presents itself to the human mind. (DA III, 761)

Based on the fragment, Lawler concludes that Tocqueville was one of the first to see the predicaments of “our biotechnological future” (2005, 133) and the development of the “science of happiness”.

The idea of the particular social anxiety inspired by the will to become perfect is, of course, not completely new. Tocqueville remained indebted to Pascal.⁷⁴ He borrowed from him especially the crucial teaching on the singular restlessness that results from the “struggle against accidents” (ibid., 120). In his exegesis of this category, Lawler is quick to point out that as medicine develops we perceive death more and more as an avoidable accident in our march towards the ideal outlined already by Condorcet (2012, 145-147) and less as an inherent part of human life. Paradoxically, however, stripping death of its inevitability increases our fear of passing away.

Lawler also interprets Tocqueville’s teaching on democratic individualism as an important contribution to our understanding of socio-biological and demographical problems. As Tocqueville predicted, the democratic individual is overpowered by the opinion of the majority in the public sphere and takes his power back only through radically separating his private life from any other considerations even those that, like raising children, quite recently were still viewed as

⁷⁴ The similarities and differences between Tocqueville’s and Pascal’s approach to religion will be further elaborated on in Chapter 4.

simple biological necessity. Thus “our sophisticated classes” (Lawler 2011, 31) and little by little the rest of the developed societies at the same time refuse to acknowledge the fact of their aging and decide to abandon the necessity of procreating displaying in consequence something of a “birth dearth” (ibid). As Lawler facetiously puts it: “Nature may intend me to be replaced by my children, but we Lockeans are more concerned with living for ourselves – and so, among other things with thwarting nature’s intention by staying around as long as possible, however great the health- care costs” (ibid.).

One solution to Lawler’s paradox would be to speed up the process of perfection of human biological “hardware.” Achieving the natural replacement of generations already seems impossible in some of the developed societies. Moreover, migrations seem to be only a short-lived strategy since it seems that with the spreading of modern *mores* and education global demographic growth is already slowing down and by the end of this century we may well see a decline in population and mass aging not just in Europe but on the global scale (see United Nations 2004). Therefore, with a looming collapse of the aging societies, creating post-human beings that would be able to infinitely perfect their bodies (and die only by sheer accident) seems to be a logical solution. However, biotechnology as any other technology does not selectively change only one sphere of life. It bundles many new possibilities with new threats, many of which are consistent with Tocqueville warning about the future tyrannies. For instance, it is still difficult to determine how to prevent humans from losing their liberty in the course of being engineered and bred according to specific, socially constructed concepts of beauty, wisdom and happiness? How to prevent *homo sapiens*, which developed as unique natural species from becoming just another domesticated animal (compare DA IV, 1252) raised to fulfill specific needs that are external to its normal, organic development? The indications that the new bio-engineering will not be as heavy handed as the earlier totalitarian eugenics is hardly uplifting.

Democratic beliefs, after all, do not need to be shaped by a central planning authority in order to be coercive and dogmatic. As Tocqueville puts it: “in centuries of equality faith in common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet is the majority” (DA III, 724).

Pierre Manent voices a similar concern by noting that in its rebellion against the inept aristocratic imitation of natural inequalities “democracy wishes to fulfill” what it sees as the true nature of human beings, the nature of equality of humans hopes and desires, however, paradoxically to achieve this democracy “takes upon itself to domesticate and subject nature” (Manent 1996, 81). The problem is that...

...the moment this domestication was complete, man would be dehumanized. On the one hand, democracy’s project is unrealizable, because it is contrary to nature. On the other, it is impossible to stop short of this democracy and go back to aristocracy....It follows that we can only moderate democracy; we cannot stop short of democracy, because it fulfills nature. We cannot attain the end of this movement, for it would mean subjecting nature completely and dehumanizing man. We cannot escape democracy. We can never make democracy completely ‘real,’ and we must not try. (ibid.)

In the above quote, Manent, who is a rare example of a European Straussian, clearly makes his peace with Tocqueville’s “inevitability hypothesis” that troubled Zetterbaum so much. At the same time, however, he does not abandon Zetterbaum’s fundamental thought on the opposition between the democratic ideal and classical, aristocratic virtue. Lawler seems to follow the same path. Ceaser is reluctant, but, he too sees some “mild historicism” in Tocqueville.

Some Weaknesses of the Straussian Reading

While extremely insightful, all the Straussian readings of Tocqueville, fall short of explaining one pivotal element of Tocqueville’s thought. They do not inform the readers how Tocqueville manages to construct such insightful general theories of history without accepting the Kojevian vision of the end of history. To put it simply, how can one describe history in motion without claiming that it stops in the moment of description? To provide an explanation one needs

to synthetically describe the Tocquevillian model of political and social change and compare it to other general models of political and social change that have been used before. And since as we have established in the previous chapter Tocqueville gives the name revolution to both the great social and political changes, the explanation will take on a form of a description of Tocquville's theory of revolutions. As for the comparison, as I have already stated, both the insightfulness of Tocquville's theories and his rejection of determinism can be explained by acknowledging that apart from history in motion and the fulfilled, completed history, there exists a third historical category that Tocqueville embraces. The nature of this category consists in the assumption that although history never stops it seems to "slow down" following revolutionary changes. The theoretical image of an era created at those rare, "slow" moments is not a deterministic model; it is, however, far less distorted than theories that appear during history's normal course and that necessarily carry the weight of numerous prejudices and superfluous assumptions. The authors of such images are far more conscious of the finite nature of every paradigm of human understanding. They also strike the future generations as more philosophically developed than the "normal" inhabitants of respective paradigms. As the last section of this chapter will show, this theory of revolutions in the perceptions of political history bears a striking similarity to Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigmatic revolutions in science.

As for the Straussian approach to Tocqueville, its proponents clearly fear substituting the philosophical truth with the musings of the historical mind, even if that mind is as sophisticated as Tocqueville's. Interestingly, Tocqueville, himself, displays similar fears in his discussion of the mistakes committed by the democratic and the aristocratic historians. He, however, differs from the Straussian school in that he doubts, whether political thought without context can still be meaningful to any human being. As a result Tocqueville becomes very weary of the ancients and

their political philosophy.⁷⁵ Following Benjamin Constant's (2002) teaching on the ancient and the modern republicanism Tocqueville writes somewhat condescendingly about the political ideas inspired directly by the classical examples:

You⁷⁶ speak about the small democracies of antiquity, whose citizens came to the public square with crowns of roses, and who spent nearly all their time in dances and in spectacles. I do not believe in such republics any more than [in] that of Plato; or, if things happened there as we are told, I am not afraid to assert that these so-called democracies were formed out of elements very different from ours, and that they had with the latter only the name in common. (DA IV, 1082)

The above quotation strikes at the very heart of the Straussian approach to Tocqueville and makes the Neo-Aristotelian interpretation of Tocqueville far more problematic than some authors would have us think. This is of course not to say that Tocqueville is not inspired by Aristotle, but as the remainder of this chapter will suggest, he significantly modifies the Aristotelian science of politics by blending it with modern historicist elements which the Straussian school has to reject focusing on the ancients as the only original fountain of true political ideas.

Ironically, this uncompromisingly classicist approach to the study of politics in revolutionary France (1789-1848) was the domain of republican radicals, while in contemporary USA and Europe it is often seen as a hallmark of being conservative. Whatever labels we use, it is, however, clear that the political thought of Tocqueville demonstrably fails both tests: it is neither radically republican in the French Rousseauian sense, nor is it philosophically conservative in Straussian sense. At the same time, however, Tocqueville also rejected progressive historicism, famously comparing it to Gobineau's racism owing to its deterministic

⁷⁵ I am of the opinion that in the case of Tocqueville himself, this rejection is clearer and more uncompromising than the philosophical position represented by the more moderate Straussians.

⁷⁶ Schleifer translates the French unspecified pronoun "*on*" not as the English "one" that seems to him a bit archaic but as "you." Hence "*On parle des petites démocraties de l'Antiquité,...*" is translated as: "You [unspecified reader] speak about the small democracies of antiquity,...," rather than "One speaks about the small...."

and dehumanizing nature. Finally, Tocqueville unlike Kojève's Hegel did not believe that history has "ended" in his times. In *R* he writes for instance that "in matters of social constitutions the field of possibilities is much wider than people living within each society imagine" (*R*, 76).

As far as the modern approaches to history are concerned, Tocqueville had already witnessed the first clashes between historicism and its aristocratic or classicistic opponents. Of course, the historicism he was acquainted with was predominantly based on Guizot's liberal historiography and Burkean historicistic conservatism. When working on *AR*, Tocqueville noted, for instance, that one of his goals was to "turn G[uizot] against himself" (Gannet 2003, 2). Tocqueville could not have known Marx, and he never mentioned Hegel, although, this did not prevent him from anticipating the predicaments of their historicist arguments. As for Tocqueville's ideas on the classicist rejection of historicism, they were with all probability based on Rousseau and his call to reverse political progress by reviving the classical ideal of the small republic. The second set of Tocqueville's anti-historicist readings must have consisted of royalists such as Bonald or De Maistre both of whom were known for their juxtaposition of the Christian historicism with the godless idea of progress. All those early strains of anti-historicism are naturally far removed from the nuanced teaching on the ancient and the moderns presented by Leo Strauss. Nevertheless, Tocqueville was already able to anticipate that one of the great debates in the political theory will take place between the proponents of the great vision of progressing history and the last remaining champions of the particular histories of individuals, law makers and philosophers. He calls the two sides of this debate the "democratic and the "aristocratic" historians" and quite openly reveals that he himself rejects both approaches. He writes that:

Historians who write in aristocratic centuries ordinarily make all events depend on the particular will and the mood of certain men, and they readily link the most important revolutions to the slightest accidents. They wisely make the smallest causes stand out, and often do not see the greatest ones.

Historians who live in democratic centuries show completely opposite tendencies. Most of them attribute to the individual almost no influence on the destiny of the species, or to the citizen on the fate of the people. But, in return, they give general causes to all small particular facts [In their eyes, all events are linked together by a tight and necessary chain, and therefore they sometimes end up by denying nations control over themselves and by contesting the liberty of having been able to do what they did]. (DA, 854)

Tocqueville's description of the two types of historians is an insight that is true especially in the field of the history of political thought. The modern democratic historians learn their iron-clad dialectic from Hegel or Marx and conclude that the history is driven either by class struggle or by the master-slave dialectic. Opposing the historicists, we find the modern aristocratic historians; that is mainly the Christian and the Straussian academics, who see the history⁷⁷ of political thought as an affair of great individuals and whose research hypotheses are often easily summarized by uttering the phrase "if it wasn't for....." and inserting various names like Luther, Calvin, Machiavelli, Hobbes or Abraham Lincoln in the blank spot. Having established the key name in line with Tocqueville's insight, the aristocratic historians proceed to use all their wisdom to dissect the thinker in question. Strauss himself did not shy away even from the analysis of such "smallest causes" like the particular numerical arrangements of chapters and their length in the works of Machiavelli (see Strauss 1958). To pick a more recent example, James Hankins

⁷⁷ There is an insoluble problem associated with using the term "aristocratic historian" with reference to Leo Strauss and the Straussians. Of course, anyone who tries to methodically make sense of the past can be called a historian. Orthodox Straussians, however, may insist that a political thinker like Strauss taps into the non-temporal knowledge, the very nature of political things. This creates a problem. If Leo Strauss writes about the works Aristotle or Maimonides does, he merely use them as disposable exemplifications of pure philosophy, or does he actually engage in an inquiry into the history of political thought? I am not able to conclusively solve this paradox, since engaging in the true philosophy seems to come close to a metaphysical experience that cannot be proven or disproven just like one's faith in God. Let us merely note that if we assume that by writing about the past of political thought the Straussians do engage in history, then the type of history they pursue is close to the "aristocratic history" that tends to view historical events and momentous changes as results of the conscious efforts of concrete great men and women (in the history of political thought those would include Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli etc.) rather than an inevitable result of some impersonal social forces.

(Hankins 2012) in his newly published book, paints the picture of modern political thought and economy as a miserable child of Luther and Calvin in which he repeats in an almost verbatim fashion the arguments made two centuries earlier by Joseph de Maistre.

Tocqueville witnessed the beginning of this strife following the attempts to establish the root-causes of the French revolutions. He heard both de Maistre's (2004) unapologetic slogan that reads "it's all the Protestants' fault" and he heard the famous French protestant – Francois Guizot, who with equal zeal argued that it was all a historical necessity (see 2002). As in many other things, he has made it his ambition to remain objective and thus steer clear of both extremes. This, however, meant that he had to construct his own, independent theory of history and revolutions.

Tocqueville's Spiral of Revolutions

As I have already stated in the previous chapter, Tocqueville equates political change with revolution and uses the word "revolution" in two meanings. Both those meanings are tied to Tocqueville's dual usage of the word "democracy." This section will argue that Tocqueville takes one of his meanings from the ancient aristocratic historians and the other from the modern historicists.

The word revolution comes from a Late Latin term *revolutio* – "to turn around," which is a literal translation of the Greek term *anakuklesis*⁷⁸ and a derivative of the classical Latin word *revolvere* – "roll back, revolve."⁷⁹ Therefore, the original term contains a postulate of bringing

⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt (2006, 12) claims that the Greek term *anakuklesis* later translated into Latin as *revolutio* was first used by Polybius and originally came from astronomy. However, a simple research with the use of the Perseus database proves that she was wrong, and the term was used already by Plato in his *Statesman* (269e).

⁷⁹ See *Online Etymological Dictionary* at <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=revolution>. This original meaning is, for instance, preserved in the title of the groundbreaking astronomical treaty by Nicolaus Copernicus (1543/2012) in his *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* [*On the Revolutions, i.e. "turns" or "orbits," of Heavenly Spheres*].

order to political chaos. This is hardly surprising, as for the ancient classics writing on politics and revolutions (Plato, Polybius, Cicero, etc.) the aim of any science worthy of the name was to establish an ordered explanation of a seemingly dynamic reality.

Mutability, dynamism, and change were seen as base traits of the *doxa* [opinion] that the true science had to overcome. Visible changes for the ancients were not guided by a slowly disclosing divine plan or the universal progress, but by immutable nature of the cosmos that even the deities had to obey. In order to reconcile apparent changes with the assumption of immutable causes and the ordered cosmic reason, one had to classify all possible metamorphoses and order them into closed cycles. In the case of politics, the most important doxological changes were naturally those of regimes. They were assumed to be guided by human nature and thus contingent on the limited set of characteristics of the people and their rulers. As Tocqueville observes:

It seems, while reading the historians of the aristocratic ages and particularly those of antiquity, that, in order to become master of his fate and to govern his fellows, man has only to know how to control himself. (DA III, 853)

The above quote is de Tocqueville's version of the anthropological principle according to which the political community is an analogue of an individual man. Thus, the structure of polis reflects the structure of the human soul and the condition of a particular polis reflects the virtues and vices of its citizen. From the point of view of the analysis of the notion of revolution it is, also, important to note that based on the ancient assumption of the immutability of human nature, the anthropological principle states that there is a limited range of regimes the lawmakers and communities can choose from just as there is only a limited range of virtues and vices the human nature is capable of. Interestingly, according to Tocqueville, democracy in its own way preserves this anthropological principle since assuming the existence of infinite political progress it also assumes the perspective of the infinite perfectibility of man.

For Tocqueville, this old notion of revolution understood as a cyclical or semi-cyclical change within a limited number of possibilities is akin to the notion of revolution as a concrete, violent events e.g. a regime switch from the July Monarchy to the Second Republic and then to the Second Empire. Nevertheless, he significantly modifies the insights of the ancients by combining them with a distinctively modern perspective.⁸⁰ The modern notion of revolution, whose mature theoretical rendition can be found in the writings of Karl Marx,⁸¹ does not denote a cycle. A revolution for moderns is a step towards a concrete *telos*. According to Tocqueville, an example of a revolution with a clear aim (the equality of conditions) is “the great democratic revolution.” On the other hand, however, when one carefully examines Tocqueville’s writings, it becomes apparent that his vision of political changes also contains cyclical elements – the shifts from autocratic to republican forms of governments.

When one combines the two models, it becomes apparent that according to Tocqueville, in modernity a certain vectorial development occurs with each regime change and moves politics in a new, but not necessarily fortunate, direction. Thus, one may figuratively call the entire, large model of political change presented in Tocqueville’s main writings a “Tocquevillian spiral.” I call the metaphoric shape of the model a spiral rather than a spring, since with each turn the modern wheel of regimes approaches the “soft despotism,” thus the scope of the regime change in each cycle becomes smaller and the administrative power increases. At the “soft despotism” point the turns of the wheel of regimes stops and only a complete change of the political paradigm can reestablish the movement of history.

⁸⁰ Tocqueville read both Plato and Aristotle while working on AR. He attests to this in his 1852 “Speech Given to the French Academy of Political and Moral Sciences on April 3, 1852” (Tocqueville 2011). The English text of the speech can be found in (Danoff and Herbert 2011, 17-31).

⁸¹ See especially Marx 1970.

The basis of this spiral consists of a model of a revolution as a continuation of the former government. However, the twist of the old wheel of regimes has a new democratic spin to it. According to Tocqueville, in France, for instance, the population over time becomes more affluent but not politically independent. All significant problems are assumed to be the responsibility of the central government. If, for some reason, the reaction of the authorities is tardy, violence breaks out. If the revolution is successful, the revolutionaries replace the old regime with a republic or some form of autocracy (depending on the period) and initiate reforms through increasing the overall power of the state without significantly changing the methods of exerting it. For instance, in 1793 the Committee on Public Safety effectively substituted the rule of absolutist *intendants* but retained the old, centralized structure of administrative control and immensely expanded the prerogatives of the bureaucrats. This surge in power, however, became possible because the new regime could claim to possess democratic legitimacy and reinforce this claim with the ideological assertion of the rationality and universality of the new concepts of social life.

Those new concepts are decidedly illiberal for Tocqueville, since he firmly believes that European political liberties are rooted in pre-modern, medieval law that he calls the "Old European Constitution" (AR, 31). Importantly, in this respect Tocqueville stresses the uniqueness of the Anglo-American heritage that is capable of connecting the pre-modern relative liberty with robust economic growth and political efficiency. Tocqueville writes about the French intellectual elites that unlike the English they were unable "to change their ethos gradually in a practical

way...without destroying their former institution” (AR., 143). He also notes that England,⁸² in spite of becoming a “fully developed Modern nation as soon as in the seventeenth century,” conserved “within its center, as if embalmed, a few medieval relics” (AR, 32).

Tocqueville’s praise of the Anglo-American solutions to the antinomies of modernity is, however, not unconditional. He reveals his misgivings in his discussion of “general ideas” in politics, which is very similar to his teaching on the democratic and aristocratic historians. Indeed, Tocqueville seems to assume that through shared political consciousness, all citizens are historians of their own polity and thus general ideas are for people what democratic history is for historians. In DA, Tocqueville observes that both the English and Americans displayed less of the typically French preference for political generalizations. Nevertheless, elsewhere in DA, he writes that one can “assert that the taste for general ideas is developing there [in England] as the ancient constitution of the country is becoming weaker” (DA III, 731). Furthermore, Americans, according to Tocqueville, already display a deeper taste for general ideas than their “fathers” – the British (DA III, 726). Perhaps that is why in AR Tocqueville writes about ancient English liberties as “embalmed relics” rather than a living tradition.

Ultimately, for Tocqueville, the contemporary history of both France and America are just the most prominent examples of a larger phenomenon. According to him, a paradoxical tension that cannot be resolved dominates all modern politics. Democracy needs the old “aristocratic liberalism” (see Kahan 1992) in order to avoid new forms of despotism. “Aristocratic liberalism,” however, relies on non-democratic values of unconditional property rights, and unmitigated

⁸² Tocqueville’s views on England often seem inconsistent. Seymour Drescher (1964) suggests that there is a cyclical pattern to Tocqueville’s favorable and critical descriptions of Great Britain. However, in his chief published writings Tocqueville seems to consistently assert that England compares favorably with France, although, not necessary with America, which according to Tocqueville managed to combine the English aristocratic liberty with the French democratic equality.

personal sovereignty. Thus, democracy has a perpetual tendency to sap its own foundations. At a certain point, even the English bulwarks of liberty may give in to the extreme form of equalizing. At least when writing the first volume of DA, Tocqueville seems to hope that the drive away from liberty can be stopped or significantly slowed down. In the second volume of the DA and in the AR, he, however, becomes more somber.

In general, Tocqueville describes the results of three revolutions that exemplify the modalities open to various polities globally. DA deals with the “great revolution” and the American way of coping with it through cautious changes. AR is a tale of the French revolutionary pursuit of the democratic ideal of equal conditions, which, paradoxically, necessitates a radicalization of the old form of ruling. R describes one more scenario: the formation of the bourgeois, liberal democracy threatened by the specter of socialism and ultimately developing into an authoritarian reign of a man (Louis Napoleon), who with Tocqueville’s words combined the “abstract adoration of the people” with a lack of a “taste for liberty” (R, 204).⁸³ According to the general pattern proposed by Tocqueville, the “normal” revolutions are an unfortunate by-product of the one “great” democratizing revolution. Typically, the particular revolutions try to quickly eradicate all vestiges of the former regimes, and while some succeed very often they eventually return to political forms derived from the previous rule and characterized by a despotic destruction of intermediary powers; at the same time, the actual development of well-institutionalized liberal democracy seems to be a much slower, gradual process. This discovery of a spiraling revolutionary pattern of modernity is clearly one of the most important insights of Tocqueville’s science of politics. Moreover, it is not an accidental *ad*

⁸³ Contemporarily, developing Tocqueville’s models Kurt Weyland (2009) describes the whole 1848 Spring of the Nations as an exemplification of the pattern of revolutions that is applicable to a whole range of events; most notably to the recent developments in the Arab World (See Weyland 2012).

hoc observation. Tocqueville's remarks in R reveal a consistent implementation of the general model that he first introduced in 1840 when he included the following passage in DA:

The citizens fall under the control of the public administration at every instant; they are carried imperceptibly and as if without their knowledge to sacrifice to the public administration some new parts of their individual independence, and these same men who from time to time overturn a throne and trample kings underfoot, bow more and more, without resistance, to the slightest will of a clerk.

So therefore, two revolutions seem to be taking place today in opposite directions: one continually weakens power, and the other constantly reinforces it. In no other period of our history has it appeared either so weak or so strong.

But when you finally come to consider the state of the world more closely, you see that these two revolutions are intimately linked to each other that they come from the same source, and that, after having had a different course, they finally lead men to the same place. (DA IV, 1243)

On reading this passage and bearing in mind all the previous observations, one may venture to propose a more detailed description of the Tocquevillian model of revolutions and the resulting regimes. Firstly, for Tocqueville, as for Guizot (see 2001) and Marx (See especially 1998) modernity is born out of the rejection of political particularism of medieval politics. Therefore, modern politics in its equalizing and unifying zeal runs the risk of destroying any form of independence of local communities, corporations and associations. In AR, Tocqueville especially mourns the loss of independence of the European townships and local governments of rural parishes. Nevertheless, he also notes that because of its insularity England is exceptionally good at preserving the local liberty of medieval life. Similarly, in the USA the equalizing influence of the frontier combined with the English legal tradition leads to the creation of a relatively stable democratic republic. In Europe equality first asserts itself through the leveling power of absolutism. Soon, however, it becomes apparent that absolutist institutions and symbols cannot indefinitely accommodate themselves to the growing social push towards equality. As the democratic spirit becomes political flesh, it disposes of the last vestiges of mediaeval past and for that very reason runs the risk of creating a distinctively modern, administrative despotism. In

certain conditions of a particularly great internal turmoil, this despotism can be further modified by being subjugated to the will of a strong peacemaker – a military despot (DA IV, 1247 *n d*). Ultimately, all modern despotisms reach their perfection in the ultimate form of modern government, which Tocqueville calls the soft or mild despotism. Interestingly, Tocqueville, also assumed that the faith in the “perfectibility of man” will progressively grow on the path to soft despotism. However, it will not create a desire to perfect the features that make humans independent. It will promote characteristics that make them socially agreeable and economically successful. In the course of this modern perfection through a peculiar “domestication,” the sovereign power, as Tocqueville notoriously puts it, “reduces each nation to being nothing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd” (DA IV, 1252).

As I have already mentioned, Tocqueville did not go as far as to envision eugenics or genetic engineering; for him soft-despotism was more of a political than an anthropological notion. However, the Tocquevillian inspired theorist of post-human history such as the Straussian Peter Lawler (2005) and the famous historicist Francis Fukuyama⁸⁴ (2002, 147) see a clear connection between soft-despotism and engineering human nature and note that such engineering, indeed, does not have to be the result of a direct coercion. As in Tocqueville’s vision, men may simply choose to instill certain features into their offspring based only on the opinions coming from the majority and gentle nudges coming from the authorities. The “timid animals” of the future are according to Tocqueville a product of a “network of small, complicated, minute, and uniform rules, which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot break through

⁸⁴ Fukuyama has a Straussian biography but in his mature works he clearly strayed away from the main current of the school.

to go beyond the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them and directs them” (DA IV, 1252).⁸⁵

In spite of his strong criticism of political modernity, Tocqueville is, however, adamant in his assertion that in order to slow down the march towards the soft despotism one may never try to simply reverse its course. In his vision of history, there is no return to the feudal liberty of aristocrats. Aristocratic institutions have to be substituted by something decidedly new. Tocqueville says, for instance, that the political associations of the USA “must take the place of the powerful individuals that equality of conditions has made disappear” (DA III, 901). He therefore describes political associations as modern, collective aristocrats, who would keep the new despotism in check. Nevertheless, the risk (albeit smaller) of arriving at despotism exists also in a democratic republic established on a solid foundation of local liberties and free associations. Therefore, the general revolutionary process leading to soft despotism may be slowed down or paused, but not definitively terminated. As a result, the general Tocquevillian model of political change is a vicious spiral in which the social power – tantamount to Rousseau’s general will constantly increase and constantly threaten liberty.

As I have already noted, the final point of Tocqueville’s spiral of modern regimes is the soft despotism; along with democratic republic, the administrative and the military despotism we thus arrive at five regimes that constitute the modern spectrum of democratic forms of government.⁸⁶ Out of those, only the republic, however, manages to preserve some liberties, hence Tocqueville’s cautious praise of America and England, which mixes old symbols with

⁸⁵ In a crossed out, unpublished passage he, however, notes that “in certain moments of great passions and great dangers, the sovereign power becomes suddenly violent and arbitrary. Habitually it is moderate, benevolent, regular and humane” (ibid.).

⁸⁶ Compare James T. Schleifer (2000, 241-305). Schleifer also mentions the tyranny of majority. It is, however, more of a process than a regime.

modern republicanism. The old regimes that preceded the great democratic revolution are all located closer to the aristocratic extreme on the democracy-aristocracy social continuum but not all are equally aristocratic. Tocqueville differentiates three main types of old regimes: aristocratic republics (e.g. Classical Athens), medieval monarchies (with their local governments);⁸⁷ and early modern absolutisms (e.g. *Ancien Régime*). Absolutisms significantly differ from the remaining two old regimes; in social terms they are the most decadent, proto-democratic political form of aristocracy and, according to Tocqueville in Europe they serve as aristocracies' undertakers. Absolutism is also the least liberal old regime. The overall Tocquevillian typology of regimes is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Tocqueville's Typology of Regimes

Regimes	Despotic	Liberal
Democratic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - administrative despotism; - military despotism; - soft despotism (ultimate form into which the previous two evolve); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - democratic republic (e.g. USA); - "republican" monarchies (in Great Britain);
Aristocratic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> absolutism; - "Asiatic" despotism; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feudal monarchies, (with old - townships, parishes etc.); aristocratic republics (e.g. Athens).

Tocqueville's Paradigmatic Revolutions and Polybian Moments

My analysis of Tocqueville's theory of history left one more crucial issue unanswered. It might be still unclear whether Tocqueville, while constructing his theory of history, manages to

⁸⁷ Both feudal states and aristocratic republics, according to Tocqueville seem to be equally aristocratic.

avoid the dual trap of ending history and constructing a deterministic closed model. As far as his method is concerned, Tocqueville, as Eduardo Nolla observed, “does not like philosophy” (DA, Editors Preface, cxxi) and in a letter to Stoffels calls it the “essence of gibberish” (quoted *ibid.*). Naturally, elsewhere in DA, Tocqueville praises the philosophic contemplation (DA III 775-779). What he seems to fear, however, is that in modern societies philosophy will be divorced from the rapidly developing practical sciences and as a result both will take on new savage forms. He vividly paints the Scylla of the practical sciences eagerly developed by “industrious animals” (DA IV, 1252) and the Charybdis of general ideas which enchant democratic historians and politicians turning them into “real madmen” (R, 122). Eduardo Nolla connects these two threats with historical periods that will “pass from the total predominance of action, which is characteristic of barbaric peoples who know only the practice of politics, to the triumph of theory separated from all forms of practice” (DA, Editor’s Introduction, cxxv). However, Tocqueville himself does not indicate any such periodization; on the contrary, he seems to suggest that both tendencies will coexist at the same time within the same society. In Tocqueville’s thought, both the dehumanized technology that turns men into machines and the technologized humanities that yearn for one great theory capable of explaining all the elements of social life fuel each other, leading to a situation in which political theories are at once less constrained by common rationality and more able to affect reality with the technological tools left at their disposal.

This passivity of modern men in service of general ideas could, however, be justified and indeed salutary if there truly existed one definite theory explaining the nature of human societies and the mechanics of human history. This end-goal of political science would finally put an end to philosophizing about politics, which as Tocqueville admits is “a voluntary torment men inflicts upon himself” (quoted as in DA, Editors preface, cxxi). Indeed, such a theory would end political history, and in accordance with Kojève’s observations we would be left with a choice between

returning to the state of nature and becoming innocent savages occupied with their everyday pleasures or turning into snobs who busy themselves with formulaic exercises in order to gain a fleeting sensation of the bygone era in which ideas and judgments still mattered (Kojève 161-162). Tocqueville, however, clearly rejects the very possibility of the existence of the ultimate theory of politics and blatantly exorcises the Hegelian *Geist* from history by writing that:

There is no man in the world who has ever found, and it is nearly certain that none will ever be met who will find the central ending point for, I am not saying all the beams of general truth, which are united only in God alone, but even for all the beams of a particular truth. Men grasp fragments of truth, but never truth itself. This admitted, the result would be that every man who presents a complete and absolute system, by the sole fact that his system is complete and absolute, is almost certainly in a state of error or falsehood, and that every man who wants to impose such a system on his fellows by force must *ipso facto* and without preliminary examination of his ideas be considered as a tyrant and enemy of the human species. (DA III, 715 *n f*)

Eduardo Nolla comments on the above fragment by saying:

If absolute truth existed, the constant, complex interconnections of the elements of the motor of history would cease. The consequence of this provisional nature of all intellectual study is doubt, which Tocqueville considers characteristic of man and in particular philosophy. (DA, "Editor's Preface," cxxii)

Reference to God as the truly ahistorical mind that grasps all truths and thus moves beyond history naturally brings Tocqueville close to Bossuet's (see Bonald 2004, 43-71) or Pascal's providentialism. The way Tocqueville's philosophy relates to religion will be, however, examined in more detail in Chapter Six. At this point, in order to better comprehend the contemporary aspect of Tocqueville's political science, it is only important to note that one does not need to make a direct reference to God to think about history of politics in terms of probabilistic models. In a letter to Stoffels Tocqueville for instance writes:

I ended by convincing myself that the search for absolute, *demonstrable* truth, like the search for perfect happiness, was an effort toward the impossible. Not that there are no such truths that merit the entire conviction of man, but be assured they are very few in number. For the immense majority of points that are important for us to know, we have only probabilities, only approximations. To

despair about this is to despair about being a man; for that is one of the most inflexible laws of nature. (DA, quoted in Editor's Introduction, cxxiii)

Interestingly, Tocqueville's methodological insights resonate extremely well with the methodological trends that became prominent in political science fairly recently, that is after 1990 and resonate very poorly with the methodological trends that reigned the field of both descriptive political science and political theory for over a century that immediately followed Tocqueville's lifetime. Of course, the waning of academic Marxism following the fall of the Berlin Wall was what immediately preceded the Tocquevillian revival in political philosophy; but at the same time a deeper methodological shift had already been slowly taking place in all social sciences. Marx, after all, came from a great school of thinkers who were convinced that it is possible to achieve a law-like level of certainty in studying human societies and thus predict their future development with near certainty or at any case avoiding the explicit use of probabilities. Twenty years ago however, this dominance of the Comtean positivistic paradigm in academia ended, and even the descriptive, analytical social sciences were ready to return to the more common-sensical, probabilistic approach; to do so, they however, needed more than Tocquevillian intuition or Aristotelian prudence. Descriptive social sciences had by that time amassed gigabytes (and later terabytes) of very specific data the scientists could analyze only with models formulated in an unambiguous formal language rather with discursively formulated hypotheses. Fortunately, for descriptive political science math itself turned out to be less "mathematical" than Comte suspected and provided statisticians, sociologists and political scientists with formal models that instead of creating universal, positivistic laws of social life gave the researchers an ability to formulate useful "approximations" of the trends present in different societies. At the same time, the new way of looking at politics provided the politicians and social activists with a better

knowledge of the outer limits of what Tocqueville calls a “fatal circle out of which [they] cannot go” and thus made them understand how to effectively make the differences they can make.

In a way, the social sciences took a step back and rather than follow the spirit of Durkheim, Comte and Marx returned to some of the methods proposed by Tocqueville. Unfortunately, although Tocqueville was praised for his insightful prediction, he rarely received the deserved credit for his methodological innovativeness. One of the few works that attempted to change this was a breakthrough study of Tocqueville’s methodology by Saguiv A. Hadari (1989). Sadly, Hadari passed away at young age, shortly after receiving his Ph.D. from Stanford and his research program was not continued, nor did it receive the full recognition it deserved.

Hadari’s work is of course still partly enshrouded in the old paradigm of the positivistic social science, however, it tries to break free from its confines and at the same time avoid plunging into obscure jargon or presenting mathematical formulas without any discursive comment. What Hadari sets out to do is to find a pioneer of formal modeling in political science, who is free from the prejudices of modern scientism and progressivism. The profound discovery Hadari made was that if we are to find a thinker whose political science demonstrably worked thanks to probabilistic thinking and whose models predated the contemporary formal modeling and avoided its unnecessary jargon, we need to turn to Tocqueville.

Hadari justifies the importance of reviving some of Tocqueville’s methods by claiming that political science cannot confine itself in the extremely complex formal languages, since it deals with political reality of human life and as such needs to provide results that can be understood, recognized as significant and translated into the language of normal politics. As Hadari notes, “beyond a certain threshold in the system studied precision and significance become almost mutually exclusive.” One of the great advantages of Tocqueville’s science of politics is that its “methodological discourse” does not adopt a stance of “superiority towards

practice” (ibid, 33). In other words, rather than assuming that facts will always eventually conform with the philosophically established ideas, Tocqueville mines the facts for models that will provide the researcher with range of probabilities, that history can ultimately put to the test. The applicability of his models as Tocqueville himself admits has, however, a limited lifespan that is measured by the coming and going of the “great revolutions” that enable “new worlds” to appear and thus necessitate “new political sciences” (DA I, 6-16). And unfortunately the beginning of those revolutions is shrouded behind the veil of ignorance similar to the one present in the Rawlsian (2003) “original position.”⁸⁸

How does Tocqueville arrive at his models without being a seer, one might ask? The answer is fairly simple. Tocqueville never writes about the exact form of great revolutions that are to come, he only describes the revolution that with his words “is taking place” (DA I, 6-16) and the two events that he treats as his main case studies, i.e. the French revolution and the rise of the American republic, had already taken place during the life of the previous generation. It is thus little wonder that, as Lucien Jaume notes, Tocqueville was not as original as one would expect. On the contrary, he “continually reworked themes that were circulating in the political, religious, and literary culture of his time yet drew from those themes a work that overshadowed much of the writing of his contemporaries and that stands with that of the best of them...” (Jaume 2008, 8). Indeed, Tocqueville quite frankly admits that his originality does not rest in the fact that he too saw the changes that “everyone sees” (DA I, 6) but in judging it better and using a perspective that later would be very hard to obtain.

⁸⁸ I am, however, speaking of historical and not a hypothetical phenomenon.

Saguiv Hadari notes that the Tocquevillian vision of the development of political science in incoherent, sudden jumps is very much in line with Max Weber's observation that "there are sciences to which eternal youth is granted, and the historical disciplines are among them – all those to which the eternally onward flowing stream of culture perpetually brings new problems" (quoted in Hadari 1989, 55). At the same time, we must remember that, as I have noted in the previous chapter, for Tocqueville, actual revolutions cannot be separate from the revolutions in the perception of science, history and politics. All actors who engage in politics do so based on certain general theories about the main political dilemmas they face and thus all relevant political actors and in democracies, indeed, the whole societies are to a certain extent engaged in the science of politics. Hence Tocqueville's constant admonitions to prepare various nations for the advent of democracy by educating them in "the schools of local liberties" (DA III, 914). Democracy for Tocqueville is, as I have established in the previous chapter, a perception of what we want social life to become, rather than a description of what it actually is. Therefore, de Tocqueville's notion of "great revolutions" anticipates not only Weber's insights but also the concept of paradigm shifting scientific revolutions developed by Thomas S. Kuhn (1996/1962).

The Tocquevillian element in Kuhn rests in his observation that the vision of a linear, cumulative development of natural sciences as opposed to historical sciences is a misperception. The error results from the fact that students of natural sciences pay precious little attention to studying the history of their disciplines. As Kuhn puts it:

In history, philosophy, and the social sciences, textbook literature has a greater significance. But even in these fields the elementary college course includes parallel readings in original sources, some of them the "classics" of the field, other the contemporary research reports that practitioners write to each other. As a result, the student in any one of these disciplines is constantly made aware of the immense variety of problems that the members of his future group have, in the course of time attempted to solve...

Contrast this situation with that in, at least contemporary, natural sciences. In these fields the student relies mainly on textbooks until, in his third or fourth year of graduate work, he begins his own research. (Kuhn 1996/1962, 165)

Kuhn later proceeds to challenge Weber's claim and show that in fact the development of natural sciences and humanities is far more similar than one might expect. Most strikingly, however, although Kuhn retains the belief in evolutionary progress of science, which Tocqueville abandons, in general terms the similarities between his theory of great revolutions in science and Tocqueville's theory of the great revolutions in history is more than clear. Kuhn, for instance, writes about the "normal science" that accumulates evidence supporting a given paradigm and at the same time also slowly gathers small inconsistencies. When the weight of inconsistencies within the old paradigm becomes too apparent for it to hold, the time is ripe for paradigm shifting research conducted by an individual or a group whose work will "include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together" and thus "provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions" (ibid., 10). Tocqueville describes the historical development of democracy and his mission as a social scientists in almost identical terms. On the one hand he notes that "for seven hundred years there is not a single event among Christians⁸⁹ that would not turn to the profit of democracy" (DA, 10), which resonates with the Kuhnian notion of the slow build-up of minor cracks on the surface of the old aristocratic paradigm. On the other hand, Tocqueville makes no secret of the fact that only recently "everyone" (DA I, 6) saw the great revolution which he now describes. Only in this rare moment when the old paradigm of thinking about the society no longer holds and the new one is still underdeveloped does Tocqueville's new science step in and along with the ideas of other more or less talented authors immensely contributes to

⁸⁹ As noted earlier, Tocqueville writes about the history of Christian nations as the history, which he knows best. However, elsewhere, he noted that the democratic revolution is by no means limited exclusively to societies with a Christian tradition (see Chapter 5).

finalizing the paradigm shift. At the same time the Kuhnian logic explains why, although, humans may harbor hopes of progress or fears of decline, ultimately, one can only see the future as far as it is permitted by the current paradigm and its major contenders. The future paradigms remain a mystery while the new one is still young because the normal science has not yet amassed evidence to challenge them. On rare occasions when a paradigm shift does occur certain minds can peek into the relatively near future but they can never conceive a complete theory of progress in terms other than purely wishful thinking.

It seems that progress for Kuhn occurs only with reference to the range of different phenomena a paradigm can explain or otherwise account for. Tocqueville is even more pessimistic, especially about social sciences, which are his main area of interest, he assumes that focusing on certain aspects of political life and human nature always creates a partial blindness to others. Hence, he bemoans that there will be no more “Pascals” in democratic societies (see the previous chapter). Perhaps Tocqueville’s pessimism stems from the fact that he treats human liberty as an immanently positive quality that, however, cannot be progressively increased without disturbing certain social equilibria.

To the chagrin of his extremely conservative and the extremely progressive readers Tocqueville never conclusively settles the philosophical issue of human nature or the ultimate human good. At the same time he, however, insists on one immanently positive quality that not so much brings happiness to humans as enables them to return to their nature; it makes them organic or God’s creatures as opposed to “industrious animals.” Tocqueville calls this quality “liberty.” The strange nature of liberty in Tocqueville’s thought is, however, such that it cannot be mechanically produced and increased indiscriminately in all spheres of life at the same time. It can, however, be indiscriminately reduced. For instance, increasing individual liberty in the family life and within local communities may mean that the central state will have to be more

coercive in establishing political order; and vice versa. At the same time a state we would now call totalitarian can reduce liberties both at the local and the central level of social life. That is why Tocqueville dismissed Whig historicism and sees no liberal progress. Instead in his works he assumes the existence of the three equilibria of liberty: 1) personal liberty versus the liberty of associations, churches, families and local communities⁹⁰; 2) great liberty of the few versus the small liberties of the many⁹¹ and, 3) liberty⁹² from the influence of other humans versus the liberty from the influence of natural phenomena.⁹³ In all three cases losing the balance means that citizens will lose some of the ability to influence political power they otherwise could have had. Perfect balance is, however, impossible and various polities in different times differ both in the scope of imbalance and in types of imbalance they are more willing to accept. An overall, progressive increase in liberty, where all humans would become beings that are similar to the twelve Olympians for Tocqueville is simply not an option. Needless to say that those equilibria of liberty are as close as Tocqueville comes to creating his own theory of the political nature of human beings and they form the axiomatic framework for all possible regimes and their historical changes.

⁹⁰ According to Tocqueville in modern democracies individualism has to be tempered by local communities but at the same time the tyranny of families and associations and localities can produce the type of a fundamentally inhuman slavery-based society Tocqueville sees in the South of the USA and very much despises.

⁹¹ Tocqueville assumes that a society either has a small number of aristocrats whose actions are limited by few economic and legal factors or it preserves a number of “smaller” liberties of the members middle class. The members of middle class in turn need to form an association in order to achieve the same amount of liberty that previously was the privilege of an aristocrat (see DA III, 901) but in order to form associations the individual liberties need to be diminished.

⁹² Just like Tocqueville I assume that liberty and freedom are synonymous.

⁹³ The aim of technological progress is to free human beings from the despotic reign of the natural phenomena. But at the same time the development of industry, as Tocqueville observes, also gives many opportunities for greater control and greater centralization of power. See the previous chapter for details.

One more question, however, remains unanswered. What circumstances led Tocqueville to a conclusion that the paradigm shift in the study of revolutions and regime cycles was necessary? It would seem trivial to remark that paradigm shifters are not supernatural beings; they are merely extremely gifted researchers who happen to have the opportunity and the resources to write and publish the right works at the right time. This simplistic conclusion, however, seems not very far from the truth. As for the time one might venture to only very vaguely characterize the moments of history when it offers the student of politics an opportunity to see the new paradigm with clarity that will not be granted to the future generation toiling in the ordinary science. Indeed determinism so typical of, for instance, mature Marxism is a typical ailment of “normal” science that becomes unconscious of its own origin. In response to Kuhn one must remark that even if philosophers and historians still read classical texts, very often they interpret them in a quite uniform and paradigmatic way up until some great events force them to change their perspective.

The first Western political science was of course that of the Greek polis and it did not have a predecessor in the existing written records. From the point of view of the development of the science of politics, Plato and Aristotle were thus not so much ahistorical as ante-historical. Human nature, of course, did not change considerably since that time, but as Pierre Manent (2010) observed the city went through several metamorphoses. Those metamorphoses are, however, confusing to those who witness them in their adulthood and become transparent for those born long after they occurred. It seems that political change is best visible to the generations that come early enough to feel it but not so late as to take it for granted. Tocqueville writes, for instance, that since the democratic majority rests “in perpetual self-adoration..., only foreigners and experience can bring certain truths to the ears of Americans” (DA II, 419). If Tocqueville in the above passage speaks about himself one has to, however, wonder what kind of

foreigners does he actually mean given that he writes about America as a case study of democracy in general and elsewhere admits that he “did not write a page [of DA] without thinking of France” (quoted in Jaume 2008, 174). Perhaps Tocqueville suggests that to write well about democracy and democratic opinions one needs to be at least in part an intellectual foreigner? In the same sense Kuhn would agree that once a paradigm becomes established, it becomes the invisible, default mode of thinking for those who produce normal science within it. It is only the creator or the creators of the paradigm that see it in its full glory precisely because it differs so greatly from what not so long ago was universally accepted in their milieu.

Understanding the paradigm shifters as they understood themselves once the new paradigm (they helped to create) comfortably sets in becomes difficult, if not impossible. The originality of the thought of the previous paradigmatic thinkers to a certain extent becomes more visible only as their paradigm begins to age and decompose. Perhaps that is why it is a good moment to reread Tocqueville, after so many of his predictions became corroborated by history, we finally see his democratic science of politics both in full glory and in its waning. As Paul Rahe notes, “liberal’s democracy’s sudden and unexpected achievement of seemingly unchallenged hegemony” was greeted with “at best a cautious optimism and at the worst a sense of resignation” (2009, xi-xii). The resignation Rahe speaks of is simply an early sign of the appearance of a different approach to politics and focusing on different issues. As to the next great revolution, Tocqueville was, however, also the first to express a fear that this time the period of resignation may be prolonged and the political mind, as well as political aspiration, may be ultimately imprisoned in ennui mixed with self-satisfaction and the dangerous illusion of the end of history. Thus Tocqueville described the preoccupation of the ordinary politicians and “normal” political science with the following words:

I do not think that men who live in democratic societies are naturally immobile, I think on the contrary, that within such a society eternal movement reigns and that no one knows rest; but I believe that men there become agitated within certain limits beyond which they hardly ever go. They vary, alter, or renew secondary things every day; they take great care not to touch principal ones. (DA IV, 1140)

He also expresses his fears that a very long time may elapse before the new paradigm of thinking about politics will emerge:

You [it is said, Fr. *On croit*] believe the new societies will change face every day, and as for me, I fear that they will end by being too invariably fixed in the same institutions, the same prejudices, the same *mores*; so that humanity comes to a stop and becomes limited; that the mind eternally turn back on itself without producing new ideas; that man becomes exhausted in small solitary and sterile movements, and that, even while constantly moving, humanity no longer advances. (DA IV, 1151)

The title of the chapter from which the above quote comes reads: “Why Great Revolutions will become rare” (DA IV, 1133); interestingly, however, in spite of his fears, Tocqueville does not preclude the possibility of new, great, paradigmatic revolutions. Polybius, who similarly to Tocqueville was in his time an old-world aristocrat who witnessed the birth of a new type of republic (and created an astonishing treatise inspired by this experience), wrote that “just as rust eats away iron, and woodworm or shipworm eats away timber, and these substances even if they escape any external damage are destroyed by the processes which are generated within themselves, so each constitution processes its own inescapable vice” (Polybius 1979, 310). If this observation is true, there is already a post-democratic or at the very least post-liberal-democratic society in the making. Of course, given the rareness of what Tocqueville calls “great revolutions” it is still too early to adumbrate its shape. One may, however, venture to make certain educated guesses based on the problem we see. In the same way physicists can often easily describe the paradoxes a new theory has to solve well before the solutions appears. And similarly the famous *Times* article which in 1894 predicted that in 50 years the street of London will be covered in nine

feet of horse-manure (See Davies 2004) could have suggested to an innovative mind that with all probability some new, more efficient method of transportation will soon appear.

As far as non-democratic regime are concerned, the so-called authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century on closer inspection turned out to be just the extremely pernicious form of the one and same phenomenon to which de Tocqueville gave the name “democracy.” At the philosophical level, even Nietzsche’s vociferously anti-democratic thought did not move beyond stylized fairy tales in its description of the post-democratic future. Similarly, Marx’s visions of the ultimate form of socialism were all notoriously vague. Therefore, it would be a mistake to claim that then 20th century totalitarian and authoritarian ideologies are a true philosophical alternative to democracy. If a post-democratic society is to emerge, it would have to resemble what Tocqueville calls “aristocracy”⁹⁴, and at the same time logically follow from what we accept as modern democracy. For instance, it is not inconceivable that the democratic urge for infinite perfectibility will ultimately be able to gain a near-perfect mastery over human biological nature. Naturally, such a bio-revolution would realize the ultimate postulate of the democratic revolution in general; that is to eradicate all accidental and therefore “unjust” differences in social status. The old democracy did swiftly away with the aristocracies of convention, the future one could go further and finally do away with aristocracy of nature. The very same change may, however, also give birth to a newly manufactured post-human class of *aristoi* that unlike the old aristocratic classes will be able to truly select both its nature and nurture and thus separate itself from the rest of humanity as different species. All those things are, however, for now merely conjectures, since according to Tocqueville’s own theory a new paradigm can be described only after the great revolution that creates them has already taken

⁹⁴ For a discussion of Tocqueville's industrial aristocracy, turn to Chapter 6 (DA III, 985).

place. The smaller revolutions naturally also constitute crucial elements of Tocqueville's model, but the great one is the single cause that enables all the motion.

Conclusions

Tocqueville's insights on the theory of history make him one of the most important authors contributing to creating new paradigms in political science. His general theoretical model owes its unique flexibility and predictive power to describing revolution both as a development and a cycle and thus finding a middle ground between the two great theories of revolutionary change in politics. That is also why, contrary to the initial assertion of the anti-historicistic Straussian school of interpretation of Tocqueville's political philosophy, Tocqueville did have a grand theory of history and the development of political thought. Nevertheless, contrary to the historicist description, Tocqueville's vision was not deterministic. Determinism is typically an ailment of what Kuhn calls "normal science," a science that cannot see past the paradigm in which it is so submerged that it forbids the researchers to even imagine an alternative. In this context Tocqueville indeed seems to be one the most important paradigm shifters in political science.

CHAPTER 4

APPLYING THE THEORIES: TOCQUEVILLE'S FRANCE VERSUS CUSTINE'S AND PIPES'S RUSSIA

The previous chapters have presented Tocqueville's dual theory of regime change and revolution. All the elements of those theories had been adumbrated in their general form already in *Democracy in America*. In stating this, I assume a clear theoretical continuity between the main writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and argue against those researchers who stress the discontinuity between both parts of DA or DA as whole and AR.⁹⁵ Having sketched Tocqueville's theoretical framework of regime change one must, however, note that any political theory is only as useful as its possible applications to actual political phenomena. Obviously, Tocqueville makes America his first case study. However, in line with the findings of the previous chapters, it immediately becomes apparent that he can only present half of his theory's possible applications on this comparative canvas. In order to present the other half, he had to leave the relatively stable America and focus on the "fearful symmetry" (Blake 1794/2012) of the more violent side of regime change. Such research forced Tocqueville to write about French history and inspired one of Tocqueville's more careful students to travel to the tsarist Russia.

Before focusing on this part of the Tocquevillian legacy, I will, however, once again return to the starting point, to America. Tocqueville, as I have noted, points out that the USA is an example of the kind of statecraft that adjusts the society to the grand democratic change and

⁹⁵ Some of the examples of works whose authors are sympathetic to Tocqueville but, nevertheless, accuse him of theoretical inconsistency, especially between the first part of *Democracy in America* and the second one or the *Old Regime and the Revolution* include pieces by Jon Elster (2009); Cheryl Welch, (2001); Roger Boesche (1987); Robert Nisbet (1977) and Seymour Drescher (1964b). Similar arguments are used by Tocqueville's critics, see for example Sheldon Wolin (2001) and Garry Wills (2004). James T. Schleifer agrees that there are many differences in the general tone of Tocqueville's earlier and later works, but proposes a more evolutionary model of Tocqueville's intellectual development (Schleifer 1993, 193-207). For pieces that point out how certain idiosyncrasies in Tocqueville's oeuvre resulted in the distinctive European and American readings of his works see Jean-Louis Benoît (2007) and Françoise Mélonio (1998).

thus avoids a “small-r” revolution. Naturally, as noted by Craiutu and Jennings (2009), over time Tocqueville becomes weary of America’s imperialism and the morally despicable practices of both the southern society and the northern politicians (See *ibid*, 50, 136, 182-3, 195, 286, 319, 336, 346). Nevertheless, Tocquevillian statecraft is a strategy of avoiding the pitfalls of modernity rather than that of active social engineering. His general observation that America is unique in arriving at democracy without going through a revolution that in one violent sweep would shatter all previous social institutions still holds true in 1856 when AR is published.

The fact that in the 1850’s (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 321, 336) Tocqueville more and more often describes America as *puer robustus* only testifies to the fact that Tocquevillian theory rejects the prejudice of progress and is based on commonsensical notions of psychology and probability. Both of those notions, in turn, suggest that avoiding past errors actually increases the likelihood of committing future ones in similarly threatening circumstances, all other things being equal.⁹⁶ The above rule is by no means a revelation for a mathematician or for that matter a skilled grade school teacher. Certain modern political theorists, however, have been so enthralled by the progressive mysticism that they reject any possibility of basing political philosophy on probabilistic models and discarding the deterministic visions of forward-marching humanity. Czesław Miłosz facetiously calls this state of mind being “bitten by Hegel” (Miłosz 1991, 120). As I have noted a clear case of a seriously “bitten” reading of Tocqueville can be found in the work of Sheldon Wolin, who proclaims that Tocqueville when working on AR was “close to being a broken man” whose main focus was on “re-creation of an archaic world located somewhere between the late Middle Ages and the first half of the eighteenth century” (Wolin 2001, 498-502).

⁹⁶ One might call that vision pessimistic. Any person dealing with high risks will, however, with all probability find it fairly rational.

In spite of the worries about America that accompanied Tocqueville as he worked on AR, he ultimately did not live long enough to write a “third democracy” (Craiutu Jennings 2004) or witness the atrocities of the American Civil War. Thus to depict the darker side of the grand democratic history, Tocqueville turns to the history of France. He also briefly adumbrates the possibility of taking his theories to Russia and reads a lot on the subject (Malia 2006, 181). However, the Russian intellectual trip is never completed by Tocqueville himself. This project is realized by Astolphe de Custine and, a century later, Richard Pipes both of whom read and admired Tocqueville’s works. Tocqueville also studies extensively the slowly reuniting German states, and those studies are clearly visible in his the notes to the unpublished second part of AR, they however are never turned into a separate work. The revolutionary and Napoleonic France thus remained the main counterpoint to Tocqueville’s description of America.

Still, the special attention Tocqueville paid to Russia from the very start of his grand project is very telling. Tocqueville famously wrote:

Today there are two great peoples on earth who, starting from different points, seem to advance toward the same goal: these are the Russians and the Anglo-Americans. Both grew up in obscurity; and while the attention of men was occupied elsewhere, they suddenly took their place in the first rank of nations, and the world learned of their birth and their greatness nearly at the same time. All other peoples seem to have almost reached the limits drawn by nature, and have nothing more to do except maintain themselves; but these two are growing. All the others have stopped or move ahead only with a thousand efforts; these two alone walk with an easy and rapid stride along a path whose limit cannot yet be seen. The American struggles against obstacles that nature opposes to him; the Russian is grappling with men. (...) To each his goals first relies on personal interests, and, without directing them, allows the strength and reason of individuals to operate. The second one concentrates all the power of society in one man. The one has as principal means of action liberty; the other servitude (DA II, 655-656).

Based on the above passage, this chapter will try to put forward a hypothesis that Tocqueville’s theory of the origins of a new forms of despotism is an explanatory theory with reference to France and a predictive theory with reference to Russia. Naturally, it is fairly easy to

construct explanatory theories of political change and nearly impossible to create predictive ones. In his predictive mode, in DA Tocqueville realizes that the greatness of France will soon become *passé* and sees the next century predominantly as a time of the coming struggle between two other nations – Americans and Russians. He seems to suggest that the USA is the great democratic republic of the present and France is a great democratic despotism in decline. Russia would according to this logic be the great democratic despotism of the future. Tocqueville writes this openly in his comments on Baron von Haxthausen's (London 1856⁹⁷) study of Russia,

....What makes our author [Haxthausen] so boring is not only the faculty – with which he is blessed – of writing in a diffuse, prolix and tiring manner, but also the natural and inevitable tedium that cannot not arise from looking at the lower levels of Russian society, where everything is perfectly uniform in terms of ideas, laws, habits, down to the most minute details of the exterior appearance of objects. It makes one think of America without enlightenment and liberty. A democratic society to be feared of (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 329).

His notes on Russia become even more extensive as he works on the second part of AR.

Tocqueville concludes his Russian studies in that work by saying that, although, “it is impossible to maintain serfdom in its present form for very long” it will be very difficult for Russians to abandon it without “producing a revolution” (Tocqueville 2001, 288, Haxthausen 1856, 145).

At the same time, however, falling into the Tocquevillian spiral of revolutions remains a perennial threat for all modern regimes; even the democratic republic of America and the English liberal kingdom are not safe. This is because the possibility of becoming a new despotism, according to Tocqueville, is embedded in the very logic of modern democracy. Nevertheless, the threat is far greater in the case of states whose “habits” and “laws” already at the onset of democratization are formed by administrative centralization (DA II, 376). In those cases, democratization is bound to create despotism that “would become more intolerable than in any of

⁹⁷ Tocqueville consulted the French edition published in series between 1847 and 1853.

the absolute monarchies of Europe” (DA II, 429). Indeed, according to Tocqueville, “it would be necessary to look to Asia in order to find something comparable” (ibid.). In short, Tocqueville left us with a test of his own theory. He has no desire for his readers to believe him simply based on his knowledge of French history and the few observations he made in America. If his theory is truly right, he vouches that his students will see in the next century two large phenomena: a global competition between Russia and America and possibly a major revolution in Russia; one creating a powerful democratic despotism. And, although, Tocqueville does not explicitly state the second half of the above prediction, Astolphe de Custine based on Tocqueville’s theories does this for him in the clearest possible terms. Describing this Custinian reading of the Tocqueville’s grand predictions will be the second major topic of this chapter.

History corroborated Tocqueville’s and Custine’s insights, which creates a sharp contrast between them and Marx, whose basic theory did not accurately predict a single, successful revolutionary political change. This comparison will be further explored in the following chapter. For now, let just note that unlike in the case of Tocqueville, Marx’s theories remained solely an explanatory tool that with various effects can be applied to historical analysis. The conspicuous lack of large, successful socialistic revolutions in England and Germany, however, deemed Marxian theory of revolution problematic or, at the very least, disputable.

Tocqueville’s France

Unlike Marx, Tocqueville realized that while the drive towards the equality of conditions may be universal, the methods of equalizing are not. He observes this already when he juxtaposes France and USA. Above all, the French thinker fears the pursuit of administrative centralization when it precedes political centralization. The first entails coercion, the second one consent. Political centralization enables the community to voice its identity and diversity rather than become arbitrarily curbed and molded by the central authority. As I have already noted in the

previous chapter, political centralization conscientiously prepares the state for the great democratic revolution. A history of administrative centralization with few political elements, on the other hand, habituates both the society and its elites to pursue heavy-handed bureaucratic and coercive methods as the only solutions to all new challenges. When applied in a democratic republic, those methods soon transform the whole regime into a new kind of “democratic despotism” which can later evolve into “soft despotism” (DA IV, 1230-60). This last type of despotic governance, according to Tocqueville, is the most advanced form of arbitrary rule, since it endows the state administration with such a preponderance of power that it can fully manipulate the citizens without recourse to ostensive violence.

Tocqueville applied his insights on the nature of democratic despotism to French history and thus he wrote, "I wish to gather together some of the features already portrayed separately and to observe the Revolution springing naturally, as it was, from the Ancien Régime ..." (AR, 199). In the already mentioned note from AR, Tocqueville also expressed his fear that the German states divided and weak will ultimately pursue an administrative centralization before they give political republicanism a chance (Tocqueville 2001, 170- 179, 221). Another remark he makes about German states suggest that to him centralization and decentralization have little to do with the geographic size of the polity. While still working on AR, Tocqueville writes from Bonn to Theodore Sedgwick: “What I have observed of the private *mores* of Germany has seemed to me very interesting and even engaging. But, as far as public *mores* are concerned, it is best not to speak of them. They are what two centuries of absolute government, sixty years of centralization and a very long habit of administrative dependence, both as bureaucrats and administered individuals, have made them; that is say, they lend themselves very well only to servitude or revolution” (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 161).

His view of France is, however, also hardly favorable. In the French scenario, the developing administrative centralization, which advances towards soft despotism, is visible in the very type of primary sources Tocqueville chose for the examination of the society under the old regime, just before the passage into the revolutionary period. In early 1850's, Tocqueville patiently waded through hundreds of pages of "books of grievances" – *cahiers de doléances*, which were obviously a tool an already centralized power employed to probe the citizens in an effort to prevent them from organizing themselves locally and building a free civil society. The concept of *cahiers* points towards a future possibility of an ideal tutelary regime that does not include the citizens in any of the real political processes. It merely keeps surveying their needs in order to take some of them into account to the extent that it is necessary to avoid protests. The grievance under the old regime was, in short, a prosthetic substitution for political liberties. In a similar fashion in certain communist states books of grievances were introduced in all state-owned commercial establishments such as stores and restaurants and served as a prosthetic substitution for the free market entrepreneurship.⁹⁸

It is with all probability the reading of *cahiers* that inspired Tocqueville to see not the sheer oppressiveness of the regime, but the creation of certain habits of political participation (or lack thereof) as a foundations of future despotism. In his discussion of individualism in DA, Tocqueville's main worry is that democratic societies in general promote evasion of the political in favor of the private (DA III, 887-894). An individualistic, or as we put it contemporarily, atomized society can function fairly effectively for some time. It is, however, hollowed out. Its democratic, instructional skeleton has no marrow of *mores*, therefore, any sudden ideological infection can fully disclose the vulnerability of the whole system and lead to disastrous effects.

⁹⁸ See for instance Blazejewski (2011).

Tocqueville is effective at foreseeing institutional changes precisely because he does not see institutions as stand-alone structures, but as constructs that are animated only by what he, in accordance with Montesquieu's philosophy, calls "*mores*."

Mores for Tocqueville are the "spirit of the law", they are not codified, they do not take on the form of institutions yet when they change so does the rest of politics. They establish the way in which the society in its majority perceives intuitions, politics and rules of propriety. They are the collective philosophy of the citizens and thus for better and for worse they are as Tocqueville puts it "the only resistant and enduring power among a people" (DA II, 447).

The interaction between the *mores* and the intuitions operates, however, in both ways. Montesquieu (2008, 8-9, 324-333) sees a lawmaker's duty as a twofold obligation which consists in guarding the *salus populi* by adjusting the institutions to the *mores* as well as slightly modifying the *mores* with the help of institutions. The second task is accomplished mainly through "laws of education" (ibid., 31) that are tied with an umbilical cord to the principle of each government: republic, monarchy and despotism. The difficulty of finding a fragile equilibrium between the *mores* and the laws leads Montesquieu to note the following conclusion: "I say it, and it seems to me that I have written this work only to prove it: the spirit of moderation should be that of the legislator; the political good like the moral good, is always found between two limits" (2008, 602). Tocqueville returns to the Montesquieu's conclusion when he writes about the authors of the French revolution, "If like the English, they had been able, without destroying their former institutions, to change their ethos gradually in a practical way, perhaps they would not have been so willing to invent totally new ones" (AR., 143).

However, when Tocqueville writes in DA about the general, default,⁹⁹ so to say, *mores* of the democratic men (DA III, 872 – 895) the picture he paints is uncannily similar to Nietzsche's depiction of the last man. Tocqueville unlike Nietzsche, however, is not a prophet of a new anti-religion, but a believer in a possibility of modifying *mores* through persuasion, education and intermediary institutions. At the same time, he rejects changing them with the help of bodies created by central administration. In America Tocqueville sees the default *mores* of democratic man saved by social and political institution such as churches, town councils and associations. Again, as in Montesquieu's philosophy, the object of those institutions is to educate the citizens in the "great free schools" (DA III, 914) of liberty.

At the same time, in France and to a certain extent in Russia, Tocqueville sees the opposite tendency. In those states the new democratic *mores* are not only individualistic and myopic but also unmitigated by the old institutions and education; indeed, the former legacy reinforces their influence. All of Tocqueville's discussions of the administratively centralized absolutism attest to this observation. Centralization in Tocqueville's view extinguishes liberal thinking whereas the *mores* instilled in free associations and local councils educate citizens for freedom. Naturally, such an education is impossible without proper teachers, that is locally and evenly distributed members of intellectual elites. Unfortunately, in a state like France, according to Tocqueville's account, the great administrative revolution that precedes the political one resulted in making Paris "the sole instructor of France" (AR, 88). One city is thus the seat of both the government and "the entire upper class" as well as a "significant part of middle class" (ibid., 124). Thus, in Tocqueville's eyes, Paris became far more than a capital: it was "the master of the country" (ibid., 124). Tocqueville attributed the unprecedented revolutionary violence towards

⁹⁹ Tocqueville often seems to be engaged in constructing ideal types only loosely based on actual observations. He thus seems to be a precursor of a method later popularized by Max Weber.

the provinces and the lack of political prudence in handling of the affairs of the whole country¹⁰⁰ specifically to the immense centralization of all political and intellectual life in Paris, which in 1789 became “France itself” (ibid., 81). This creates a sharp contrast between Tocqueville’s homeland and America. Tocqueville opens his discussion of administrative centralization in AR by stating that “no American citizen imagines that the people of New York could decide the fate of the union” (ibid. 80). And already in DA he clearly states that one of the chief conditions conducive to the preservation of a democratic republic in the USA is the fact that the country has “no large [administrative] capital” (DA II, 295, 305, 451 – 465).

In France, the centralized power helped to do away with political freedom since it made the society inactive by simultaneously promoting two opposite tendencies. It sedated the political ambitions of the citizens in provinces and at the same time created a peculiar state of myopic, idealistic mania among the intellectuals inhabiting the capital. Tocqueville writes that the Parisian writers,

...had no idea of the dangers which always accompany the most necessary revolutions. They did not even have the slightest inkling of them because the complete absence of all political freedom made the world of [political] business not only unknown to them but also invisible. They had no connection with that world nor could they see what others were doing in it. They, therefore lacked that obvious education which the sight of a free society and the news of what is happening give even to those who have the least contact with government. Thus they grew much bolder in their novel suggestions, more addicted to universal ideas and still more contemptuous of ancient wisdom..... (AR, 143)

Having examined Tocqueville’s depiction of the misery of the political *mores* of French people and their elites, one must however acknowledge a basic practical problem. It is notoriously difficult to make the political *mores* more conducive to political freedom since any attempt to change them with the help of direct administrative methods is (according to Tocqueville) a move

¹⁰⁰ Tocqueville seems to philosophically anticipate Hayek’s famous thesis on the paramount importance of knowledge found at the lower levels of the administrative ladders (1945).

that automatically defies the purpose. The means in this case can never be exonerated by the ends. Administrative centralization once utilized sends a tacit message of such power that it will mute even the loftiest declarations. Liberty in Tocqueville's eyes can never be forced down the throat of an unwilling patient, and as I have noted in Chapter 2, his chief accusation against the radical reactionaries was that by trying to forcefully reverse what they view as despotism they only diminish the sphere of true liberty. If administrative coercion cannot teach men to be free, then a patriotically disposed intellectual has only old-fashioned suasion at his disposal. It thus comes as no surprise that after his spectacular, but ultimately short-lived political career, Tocqueville resolved to fight the cause of liberty using only his pen. This element of his statecraft is without a doubt furthest away from the modern paradigm and closest to the old Socratic, maieutic method of educating the polity through persuasion rather than resolving to use coercion and manipulation. Tocqueville describes this difference in the task of a political theorist and that of an active politician in his speech to the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences. Importantly, the speech was given just as Tocqueville prepared the material for AR, in 1852. Having received a bitter lesson on practical politics from none else but Zachary Taylor and his secretary of state John M. Clayton (see Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 409-455), Tocqueville in a self-effacing manner remarks,

I permit myself, . . . , to believe and to think that these eminent writers who showed themselves to be at the same time statesmen have shone in [political] affairs not because they were illustrious authors, but despite being so. Indeed, the art of writing suggests, to those who have practice it for long time, habits of mind hardly favorable to the conduct of [political] affairs. (Danoff and Hebert 2011, loc. 467)

Still, as noted by Paul A. Rahe "Tocqueville went beyond Aristotle in his estimation of the practical importance of what he calls 'the political sciences'" (Rahe 2009, 158). Indeed in his speech Tocqueville names the five great *publicistes*, who changed both the politics and political science. He lists Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Rousseau as members of the elite

group of those thinkers who “had a considerably greater influence on politics than its actual practitioners” (ibid., 159). One must, however, add to Rahe’s account that according to Tocqueville, the influence of *publicistes* is indirect and indeed often significantly differs from their own intentions. Tocqueville sees political theory and practice as entities that are separated as if by a permeable membrane which allows them to influence each other but never to mix completely. This amicable separation facilitates education but at the same time precludes acts of “immanentization” (see Voegelin 1952/1987, 166) of the general ideas in the political reality. Therefore, when writing for the French Tocqueville engages in what Rahe aptly calls “philosophical statesmanship” (ibid., 160).

The notes Tocqueville made in preparation to publishing the first part of the AR, indeed, testify that he read the five classics interchangeably with the famous *cahiers*. From Plato and Aristotle, he borrowed the method of describing politics as a moral and practical whole and proceeding though idealization from the most particular observations upwards, towards the ultimate and general ones. From Machiavelli, he learned that some necessary differences between theory and practice are inevitable. From Montesquieu, he borrowed the teaching on the *mores* as an intermediary between high political philosophy and institutions as well as his teaching on the importance of virtue for ancient republics and ultimately the warning that new commercial republics that have abandoned the virtue of the small, ancient polities are drifting in the direction of soft despotism. Rahe also points out that Tocqueville was clearly influenced by Rousseau, whom he did not mention too often for fear of alienating his more conservative readers (ibid. 169). Indeed Tocqueville chose not to provide us with his official critique of Rousseau. One must remember, however, that he could not quote Rousseau approvingly not merely because of practical consideration. In his works, Tocqueville reversed the main theory of Rousseau. As in a photographic negative, the solutions of the author of *Contract Social* became Tocqueville’s main

problems. Rousseau notoriously writes about the indivisibility of the “general will” (1997, 57-59) and seems to advocate its further concentration for political action. Tocqueville in direct contradiction stresses that the common will needs to be divided, if it is not create an oppressive despotism.¹⁰¹ Unlike Montesquieu, Tocqueville, however, does not write about dividing sovereignty along the neat, institutional fault-lines of the branches of government. As I have noted in the previous chapter, he does not want to create the impression that institutional changes without a more fundamental change of *mores* can have a lasting influence on politics.

And here again one returns to the practical question of how to change *mores* into those that are conducive to the preservation of liberty in an administratively centralized country like France without employing administrative centralization? This Tocquevillian puzzle, indeed, becomes a part of the great set of fundamental problems pertaining to translating various political theories into political practice. Let us add that the history of political thought is strewned with various failed attempts of such translations. And indeed in accordance with the insights of Tocqueville especially, his philosophical masters were perennially afflicted by the inability to turn their writings into policies without some unintended consequence or even to educate their fellow citizens in a Socratic fashion. Socrates himself never convinced his judges. Plato after his attempts at reforming politics in Syracuse was sold into slavery. Aristotle was ultimately banished from Athens. Machiavelli underwent torture, had to abandon active politics and never managed to divert the river Arno (see Masters 1999). Montesquieu’s works were initially put on the index by the French church and later his concepts became abandoned by the French revolutionaries in favor of Rousseau. Rousseau, finally, died before the revolutionaries put his political ideas into practice. Had he lived, however, he would with all probability have shared the

¹⁰¹ In short, Tocqueville acknowledges the rise of Rousseau’s common will in democratic societies, but he treats this a major normative as the problem, not the solution.

fate of Condorcet, who while perishing in prison, in his final hours, still continued to argue against placing any checks on the political powers unleashed by a popular revolution (Condorcet 2012, 104-105). Of course, all those thinkers in a fundamental way influenced the way we view politics. Medieval European culture would not have developed the way it did without Plato. Modern theory and practice of international relations would not be the same without Machiavelli. The American founding fathers were all enthralled by Montesquieu; and modern liberalism can hardly be understood without reading Rousseau. Nevertheless, great thinkers rarely make great political changes personally and they rarely do so in their homeland. Even Rousseau was notoriously shunned by the Genevans. In this company, Tocqueville, contrary to Wolin's accusations, is no exception to the rules governing the world of political philosophy; he too had his Arno and his Syracuse.

It would appear that his biggest personal failure, the one that led to one of his most violent outbursts in a private letter (See Brogan 2006, 381), was connected with the collapse of his newspaper and had little to do with diplomatic or political mishaps. If something truly embittered Tocqueville during in his various attempts to modify French *mores* it was his failure as a popular political writer. The ruin of his newspaper – *Le Commerce*, deeply hurt his pride and put an end to his hopes to educate the wider French public rather than remain confined to “salons or the academies” (Jardin 1989, 383). Tocqueville, after all, was never considered a great speaker and remained painfully aware of this fact. Still, he quite reasonably considered himself a great writer. In R he writes about his performance in the chamber of deputies “I wrongly assumed that as a speaker I should have the same success that my book had had (R, 82). He is, therefore, forced to admit that “skill as a writer is more hindrance than help to a speaker, and vice versa” (ibid). This account is later confirmed by Tocqueville's contemporaries (Jardin 1989, 383-385).

The issue with *Le Commerce* was, however, different. Tocqueville believed that he could make a change. In the heyday of Parisian press he was initially collaborating with *Le Siècle*. That newspaper, however, soon became too partisan for Tocqueville's tastes, hence his desire to be an editor of his own journal. Tocqueville immediately applied himself to the task "writing frequently (if anonymously) and playing a full part on the board of management, which usually followed his lead" (Brogan 2006, 380). "I exercise considerable influence over an important Parisian newspaper called *Le Commerce*, and I am extremely interested that this newspaper, which is the principal organ of my friends and myself, should acquire real worth in the eyes of serious people" (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 67) he wrote to Francis Lieber on September 18th 1844. Nevertheless as Brogan wryly notes, ultimately "the paper's somewhat equivocal line, which accurately reflected Tocqueville's political ambiguities, failed to please the readers" (2006, 380).

One event during the work at *Le Commerce* was particularly embittering. In line with his American fascination, Tocqueville wanted the French state to cease to control secondary education and believed that private as well as religious schools should be officially recognized. At the time other members of the so called liberal camp were, however, busy employing the administrative machine of the French state in the war against the legitimists. In the process they were, naturally, increasing state control, blatantly defying any classically liberal principles. In this political situation Tocqueville's admonitions were interpreted as a partisan voice in support of Catholic schools. *Le Siècle* soon accused Tocqueville of being a secret legitimist dreaming of reintroducing the *Ancien Régime*. Even Beaumont, although he left *Le Siècle* over the slanders aimed at Tocqueville, did not support him and claimed that the Napoleonic system of full state control over education should be maintained. This led Alexis to an outright explosion of anger that almost ended his friendship with Beaumont. "My birth and my family's opinions make it easy to believe that I am allied to the legitimist and the clergy, and as I have not married a grand-

daughter of General La Fayette, unlike you, this *point de départ* naturally leads my enemies to attack not only my acts but my intentions, not only my conduct but my honor,” (quoted in Brogan 380) he wrote to Beaumont.

Witnessing self-defined French liberals opting for more state control merely to reduce the social influence of their opponents led to some of Tocqueville’s most bitter reflections about France, which are mainly to be found in the unpublished notes to the projected second part of AR. Tocqueville, making an obvious reference to Montesquieu’s work on ancient Rome (1965) remarks that “at Rome freedom was the habit; in France it was despotism” (2001, 248). Later he notes:

Back-and-forth marching of our Revolutions, which creates an illusion, if one does not look closely. At the beginning, invariably a push towards decentralization, 1787, 1828, 1848. At the end an extension of centralization. (2001, 261)

It would, however, be a grave mistake to think that Tocqueville in his analysis glorifies provinces at the expense of Paris. According to his account, a tutelary regime creates in the province *mores* that can be metaphorically compared to bad eating habits or an addiction. After many years of habituation choosing an alternative becomes merely a theoretical option. In AR Tocqueville grimly describes how Louis XVI attempted to create a newspaper that would specialize in local affairs, but the project was never realized because the *intendants* were unable to come up with any worthwhile examples of local activity. In response, Tocqueville suggested that outright tyranny would actually better serve liberty because at the very least it would create some resistance (Gannett 2003, 86-87). The topic of self-perpetuating provincial apathy and dependence on central government for all actual political actions is further explored in PR when Tocqueville reflects on his compatriots with the following words: “French provincials have the same feelings about Paris and the central government of which it is the seat as the English have

about their aristocracy, sometimes impatiently complaining about it and often regarding it with jealousy, but fundamentally liking it because they always hope to make its power serve their particular interests” (R, 87).

Already during Tocqueville’s term of office in the assembly, one of the parliamentarians flatly observed that “French people had not only accepted but invited the very despotism that Tocqueville disparaged” (quotes in Gannett 2003, 16). In our time, Paul Rahe notes that in spite of academic interest in the writings of Tocqueville, both France and the European Union have developed in direct contradiction to his vision of statesmanship. Even the regulations of education that led to Tocqueville’s quarrel with Beaumont are still in place. France is a centralized regime, where private schooling is almost non-existent and the few chartered schools have absolutely no right to create their own curricula. Rahe explicitly calls modern day France an “oligarchy” that is only “formally democratic” (Rahe 2009, 232) but, in fact, remains run by a tightly knit caste of the *enarques* – the modern day counterparts of the absolutist intendants.

The EU project, which now is in a state of political agony, in its heyday had a similar ambition of becoming the kind of despotism that “covers the surface of society with a network of small, complicated, minute, and uniform rules” (DA IV, 1252). This coupled with a Rousseausque desire to build an alternative statist and agrarian economy meant the EU strived to become Tocqueville’s France writ larger. Unlike the USA, the European Union (See Fransen 2009, 173) was a project designed explicitly to pursue administrative centralization before the political one. This is because the postwar objective of the elites of the Old Continent was not to start a new ambitious project but to lock the political demons of old Europe in an administrative cage guarded by professional bureaucrats. As a result, instead of building a constructional spine, the EU tried to bins the European quasi-state with miles of red tape. Some of the most notorious

legalistic attempts ranged from regulating the proper shape of bananas¹⁰² sold in stores to demanding that the authors of web-logs publicly disclose their real names.¹⁰³

The European project, however, is apparently failing not because it was too centralized or oppressive. On the contrary, the Tocquevillian logic of France's development suggests that in constructing an administrative state one cannot immediately jump into the stage of soft despotism, which was clearly EU's original attempt. In other words, if a modern state rejects the prudent, republican statecraft, it must start with legalistic, oppressive centralization, then go through a period of conflict that destroys those who oppose it¹⁰⁴ and only in the final stage can it hope to arrive at the mild, tutelary regime that all the *intendants* of this world desire. EU's problem was that it had neither the will to create a US-style federal republic nor the strength to drop the charade and openly suppress the independence of member states. The comparison of the history of Western Europe, the USA and Russia/USSR is very revealing in this respect. Tocqueville predicted the Russian will be as successful as the USA, successful precisely because it was extremely oppressive in its formative years.

Custine's Russia

Tocqueville notes that arriving at equality through very brutal suppression of all localities and civilities was always something that was typical of Asia and Eastern Europe. In DA he makes the already mentioned comparison between two states that according to him have the greatest

¹⁰² "When is Banana a Banana", *Online learning center*, http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/007248179x/student_view0/chapter7/a_further_note_2.html (Accessed June 3 2008).

¹⁰³ "Parlament Europejski chce kontrolować blogi", *PC Format Website*, <http://www.pcformat.pl/index.php/news/nid/1366> (Accessed June 3 2008).

¹⁰⁴ I mean the general pattern of the development of modern states visible for instance in the creation of modern Germany or the civil war from which the USA as we know it emerged. In acknowledging this I follow Charles Tilly's lead and acknowledge that "war makes states" (1985, 170) and states make war.

potential for shaping the future of the increasingly democratic world – Russia and the USA. The Tocquevillian juxtaposition of Russia and the USA focuses on the points summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Tocqueville’s Comparison between Russia and the USA

	object of conquest	symbolic tool	regime	political tool
the USA	wilderness ¹⁰⁵	farmer’s plow	democratic republic	liberty
Russia	people	soldier’s sword	autocracy	servitude

Tocqueville’s observations that a revolution can be a singular continuation of absolutism, and that Russia has a great role to play in the future were soon combined and further developed by Astolphe de Custine (2002), a renowned French author, who traveled to Russia shortly after DA was published, but long before the publication of AR. Therefore, not surprisingly, Astolphe de Custine is sometimes called Russia's Tocqueville. In fact, in comparison to the author of DA, he is not an original thinker. This work will, however, argue that Custine was the first comparativist who in his fieldwork independently tested the basic elements of Tocquevillian theories of regime change and revolution and attested to their validity. The only reason why Custine’s ingenious comparative research¹⁰⁶ is not recognized as fully fledged political science seems to be his flamboyant, digressive and semi-novelistic writing style, which does not resemble the style employed by the more recent political scientists.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ It seems that the fate of Native American is omitted in this passage (the table is based on the analysis from DA II, 655-656). However, Tocqueville elaborates on the topic elsewhere; see Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁶ Those include elite interviews, folklore studies, and small “n” cross-state comparisons.

¹⁰⁷ With the notable exception of James C. Scott (2009).

According to Anka Muhlstein (See Custine 2002, ix), Custine's project was partly sparked by ambitions awoken by the publication of the first volume of Tocqueville's DA in 1835 and its huge success. To make a name for himself, Custine initially, in 1836 and 1837 traveled through Spain and as a result published *L'Espagne sous Ferdinand VII* (Custine 2010; Kennan 1971, 136). Interestingly, the book on Spain opens with a motto that is a quotation from Tocqueville's introduction to *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, it reads: "*Mon but n'a pas été de préconiser telle forme de gouvernement en général; car je suis du nombre de ceux qui crient qu'il n'y a presque jamais de bonté absolue dans le lois*" ["It was not my goal to advocate any particular form of government in general for I am among those who believe there is hardly ever absolute good in laws."] (Custine 2010, 4; DA I, 28-29).

Custine clearly admired Tocqueville, but he also earnestly if unsuccessfully tried to disprove his theories. The Marquis initially thought Tocqueville was too deterministic and uncritical in his embrace of democracy. In comparison to the author of DA Custine wanted to be perceived as a more conservative and independent thinker. That is why he looked for conservative counterexamples to de Tocqueville's description of America; first in Carlist, patrimonial Spain, and later in the autocratic Russia. As I will later demonstrate the Russian experience apparently made Custine reject the royalist self-deception and ultimately side with the Tocquevillian side of the argument; or at least that is what the author of *Russie* claims. When writing *Espagne*, however, Custine still did his best to contrast his insights with those of Tocqueville. The Marquis for instance rejected what he saw as a Tocquevillian truce between Catholicism and democracy. "*Le moment est arrivé de reconnaître que Jésus-Christ n'est venu au monde pour fonder une démocratie catholique,*" [A time has arrived to realize that Jesus did not come to the world to found a catholic democracy – translation mine, MK] he writes (Custine 2010, 266). However, in line with Tocqueville, he supports the classical argument that democracy

easily turns into new forms despotism. He was, however, less subtle in his argumentation. Thus, according to Custine, republics that are liberal paradoxically cannot be democratic; they have to maintain an illusion of democracy just as functional, non-despotic monarchies maintain an illusion of a one-man-rule. Custine writes: "*Sous la république, c'est la démocratie qui est l'illusion; sous la monarchie, c'est despotism!*" [Under republican rule democracy is an illusion, under a monarchy it is the despotism that is illusionary] (Custine 2010, 267).

In spite of its wit, Custine's *L'Espagne sous Ferdinand VII* did not provide the readers with a sensation of novelty comparable to that felt after Tocqueville's work was published. That is why Custine decided to embark on another journey, this time to Russia. Again the inspiration may have been Tocquevillian. Custine and Tocqueville, however, met only briefly and did not maintain contact afterward. It is unlikely that Tocqueville, who enjoyed a far higher social position at the time, wanted to associate himself with Custine, whose private matters¹⁰⁸ made him something of social outcast among the Parisian elites. Of course, owing its immense popularity Tocqueville must have heard of Custine's book in the early 1850's and realized that Custine made use of his theories. Tocqueville, however, preferred to quote Hauxthausen (1853) *Russian Empire* in his own notes on the empire of the Czar. This is hardly surprising as Tocqueville generally gave short shrift to authors who tried to follow his footsteps too closely. His dislike of imitators is, for instance, clearly visible in the review of Antoine-Élysée Cherbuliez's work entitled *De la Démocratie en Suisse* (in Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 254-370). As for Haxthausen's work, Tocqueville not only found it boring, but blatantly disagreed with its hypotheses and treated the

¹⁰⁸ Custine was widely known to be a homosexual implicated in a sexual scandal involving a certain army officer.

thick volume only as a source of relatively reliable data.¹⁰⁹ Custine in turn, after the encounter with Tocqueville made just a couple of insignificant and very invidious remarks in his letters (Kennan 1971, 21-22; Muhlstein 1996, 272-273). Nevertheless, to a large extent both French authors were intellectually much closer than they both were willing to admit. Together they described the mechanisms of the two great revolutions of modernity, and astonishingly they did so long before one of those revolutions took place.

In July 1839, Custine set out on a trip to Russia, which one of the English translators of his work called the "Journey for Our Time..." (Custine, 1987). Considering the physical space and time it was, however, just a trip. It lasted from the 10th of July, when Custine's ship from Ems arrived in Petersburg, till the 26th of September 1839, when Custine crossed the Prussian border in Tilsit (Kennan 1971, 55-68). Custine during that period visited Petersburg, Moscow, Yaroslav, Nizny Novogrod, Veliky Novogrod and returned to France through East Prussia. In spite of the brevity of the trip, the result was remarkable. The French writer published in 1843 a four volume work that within two years of publication sold in 200, 000 copies in France, Belgium and

¹⁰⁹ Tocqueville clearly preferred to explore those whom he could creatively criticize. August Baron von Haxthausen, for instance, an early, romantic member of the *völkische Bewegung*. He clearly precludes the possibility of a social revolution in Russia and is the first thinker in long line of the glorifiers of the Russian peasant commune – *obshchina*. He writes "In all the other countries of Europe the originators of social revolution rise up in rebellion against wealth and property. Destruction of the right of property and equal division of land, are their shibboleth. In Russia such a revolution is impossible, as this Utopia of European revolutionists already exists there, fully incorporated in national life" (Haxthausen 1853, xvi). In fact, it was only through Haxthausen that the detached Russian aristocrats learned about the socialism of the communes of their own subjects (Billington 1966, 374). Tocqueville, however, did not believe this romantic tale for a moment and wrote that Russian politics worry him precisely because the society is "still in the infancy of serfdom and communal property" and at the same time shares in some respect the "mentality of democratic and civilized times in which we live" (Letter to Beaumont, November 3 1853 in Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 329). As I will show on the following pages Custine, although not as careful in gathering documentation as Haxthausen, is even more skeptical about the redeeming qualities of communal property and saw the specter of a mass revolution in Russia quite clearly.

Germany alone (Kennan 1971, 95). The Russian intellectuals and the Tsar, who cordially received Custine thinking he was another De Maistre, were utterly furious because of the slanting criticism of their society and the political system the book offered. *La Russie en 1839* was soon banned by Petersburg. The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, criticized Custine for the want of pragmatically useful facts (Kennan 1971, 70-95). Nevertheless, in the French speaking world Astolphe de Custine became a classic of the genre of travel journal. Nevertheless, in the French speaking world Astolphe de Custine became a classic of the genre of travel journal.

Compared to Tocqueville, his style is immensely private containing a lot of intimate details, seemingly subjective reflections, associations, allusions and digressions. His writing seems a bit antiquarian, reminiscent the older generation of political authors such as Benjamin Constant. Tocqueville always writes about people in general, his informants are not only anonymous but utterly depersonalized. For Custine, the persons he talks to are always concrete women and men, he even describes their physical appearance as well as the time and place of each conversation. He also quotes the names, but only if the informant allowed him to do so. This subjective style of writing reflected Custine's character. He was a sensitive individualist and an outsider among the French polite society of the time (Grudzinska Gross 1991). Although known to be a relatively wealthy aristocrat, he never held any public office or officially belonged to a political group. Authors writing on Custine (Kennan 1971; Grudzinska Gross 1991) also, never fail to mention that he was reproached for his homosexual inclinations and the scandal they caused at a certain point in his life. Homoeroticism was, however, absent from his political writings. Interestingly, he did, however, often express his devout and with all probability genuine attachment to Catholicism.

The literary precision in the description of minute details displayed in *Letters from Russia*¹¹⁰ can create an impression that the whole work is an unregulated flow of a stream of consciousness. The four volume work is very liberally edited¹¹¹ precisely because it has a loose structure that at times seems to be just a collection of various impressions. This is, however, a false impression. There are themes that keep recurring in the book and there is a clear, opening motive that reappears in the conclusion. Custine constantly elaborates on the topics of the French Revolution and the Russian despotism that may give rise to a similar eruption of violence. The opening idea is the author's attempt to undertake an intellectual journey, with a goal to find a suitable alternative to liberal democracy. Custine admits that he sets off in 1839 as a monarchist trying to find a political system that would be an alternative to what he finds in France. To do this, he decides to examine what he thought to be the most effective monarchic government of his era – the Tsarist Empire (Custine 2002, 6). He, however, ends his journey fully reconciled with the "representative form of government" (Custine 2002, 605, 625).

Although Custine initially proclaimed himself a royalist, he was obviously deeply influenced by French liberalism. He admits that both his father and grandfather were Girondist (Custine 2002, 27), who served in the revolutionary France's army as officers, and refused to leave the country even when they faced a mock trial at the height of Robespierre's terror. Ultimately, they were both executed. We do not know a lot about Custine's life before the publication of *La Russie en 1839*. It is not inconceivable that Custine had always had strong

¹¹⁰ The Title of the English translation of *La Russie en 1839* that most of the quotations come from.

¹¹¹ There is no complete English translation of *La Russi  en 1839. The Journey For Our Time* (Custine 1987) contains only a brief selection from the original, *The Letters from Russia* (Custine 2002) about 80%, *The Empire of the Tsar* (Custine 1989) – 85%.

liberal convictions and only claimed that he was a reactionary who changed his mind in Russia to achieve a stronger literary effect and avoid being viewed just as an apologist of Tocqueville.

Nevertheless, it is precisely the attempt to counter representative government and the return to it that forms the arch which marks the beginning and the end of the book on Russia. This, coupled with constant references to the French revolution and pondering on political change, suggests that, although Custine's book in its form resembles *Democracy in America*, it is actually closer to the *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution* as far as the intellectual content is concerned.

As a matter of fact, the whole second chapter of the book is not a description of Russia, but an account of the memories concerning the French revolution, which were handed down to Custine by his mother, her friends, family and servants. The word Russia is not used even once. Instead, Custine describes the trial and execution of his father and grandfather and later the imprisonment of Madame de Custine. He also focuses on the fact that Marchioness was miraculously saved from the execution because of a mere whim of one the Jacobins. Still, she remained in prison. According to Custine's recollections, later under the Directory she was pardoned only as a result of a pun performed by young drunken men, who made an official, whom they were friends with, sign the plea of the beautiful, young widow (Custine 2002, 40-41).

Putting such digressive recollection of the French Revolution at the beginning of a book about Russia must have seemed, at best, eccentric to Custine's contemporaries. It was only after many decades that the utter ingenuity of this writer became apparent and appreciated by professional diplomats and political scientists such as George Kennan (1971) and General Walter Wendell Smith (Custine 1987). Grudzinska Gross in her book (1991) perceptively remarks that both Custine and Tocqueville bore the "scar of the Revolution." But it was more than just a scar; thanks to the memories of the French Revolution Custine actually reached a level of sensitivity

that enabled him to see beyond anything that could be imagined about Russia at his time. He writes about his early upbringing, "The servants scarcely spoke to me of anything but the misfortunes of my parents; and never shall I forget the consequent impression of terror which I experienced in my earliest intercourse with the world" (Custine 2002, 25).

It is this terror that according to Custine's report made him a reactionary. Thus, as I have already mentioned, he writes, "I went to Russia to seek arguments against representative government..." and adds "...I return a partisan of constitutions" (Custine 2002, 6). Towards the very end of the book he returns to the idea and claims:

I left France scared by the abuses of false liberty; I return to my country persuaded that if logically speaking, the representative government is not the most moral form of government, it is, practically, the most wise and moderate; preserving the people on one side from democratic license, and on the other from the most glaring abuses of despotism: I therefore ask myself if we [aristocrats] ought not to impose silence upon our antipathies...Perhaps the final [republican] usurpations have been rendered inevitable by preceding errors. (Custine 2002, 621)

He also openly reproaches his "fellow" aristocratic, royalists in a way that is again reminiscent of some of the remarks Tocqueville makes in DA:

Unfortunately, the partisans of a moderating aristocracy in Europe are now blinded, and lend their arms to their adversaries: in their false prudence they seek aid among the enemies of all political and religious liberty, as though danger could only come from the side of the new revolutionaries: they forget that arbitrary sovereigns were anciently as much usurpers as modern Jacobins. (Custine 2002, 638)

The above quotations clearly paint Custine as more of what Alan S. Kahan calls an "aristocratic liberal" (1992) than a converted royalist. Moreover, both excerpts could easily become a part of Tocqueville's AR, which, let us not forget, was written almost a decade after Custine's book.¹¹² However, let us for a moment assume that Custine's account of a conversion to liberalism on a

¹¹² There is no conclusive evidence that Tocqueville read Custine.

road to Petersburg is truthful. A question immediately arises, what exactly in Russia led to this allegedly dramatic change of Custine's views? Again, it is almost the same list of internal flaws of absolutism that Tocqueville compiles. And while Custine sees that there were alternatives to this state of affairs – he, for instance, mentions the history of the medieval republic of Wielki Novogrod (Custine 2002, 613) – according to his account the Russia that he sees on its way to a political disaster. Trying to explain this Custine remains partly indebted to Montesquieu's political science and suggests that many factors such as the climate, history, lack of education and lack of middle class coupled with economic and military prowess made the Russian imperialism far more despotic and potent than the French absolutism. Importantly, he also adds to the list the fact the church in France remained an autonomous structure while in Russia since the times of Peter the Great the state has been the undisputed master of the church. All the above factors, in Custine's opinion, would necessarily lead to an even more violent revolution than the one experienced in France.

Custine, unlike Tocqueville, rarely reproaches the French *Ancien Régime* openly. At same time, after examining the already quoted conclusion of Custine's book as well as conducting a comparative reading of AR and *Letters from Russia* it is easy to conclude that Custine is actually making frequent, indirect allusions to France. For instance, just like Tocqueville, but maybe with a greater dollop of reluctance, he acknowledges the superiority of the English model of adaptive political change comparing it tacitly to his homeland. "In England, chivalry has ceded to industry, which has readily consented to take up its abode in a baronial constitution, on condition that the ancient privileges attached to names should be placed within reach of newly founded families" – he writes describing a conversation that takes place aboard the ship from Ems, still before actually landing in Petersburg (Custine 2002, 54).

Only much later in the book, the nobilitation of lower classes is contrasted with the Russian practice of pauperizing the nobility, which bears a striking similarity to Tocqueville's description of the incapacitated French nobility under the absolutist kings. Custine writes in that passage about the forced "civilizing" of nobles conducted by Peter the Great and the fact that the Tsar is often in possession of the debts of the politically neutered nobles; he concludes with a rhetorical question: "What are the duties of the Russian *noblesse*?" (Custine 2002, 137) and quickly finds an answer, "To adore the Emperor, and to render themselves accomplices in the abuse of sovereign power" (ibid). With a hidden praise of political liberties he also claims: "The Emperor is the only man in the Empire who lives; for eating and drinking is not living" (Custine 2002, 177).

As for the centralization in Russia, for Custine, it is even greater than in France. The Tsar is according to him the "moving capital;" Petersburg becomes a deserted place once devoid of Nicolas's presence. Custine describes the capital as an artificial creation instantaneously raised from mud at the order of one man (Custine 2002, 101). When writing about the Tsarist regime, he also points to the ineffectiveness of despotism that puts only one head in charge of "so vast a multitude of arms and legs" (Custine 2002, 105) and describes the system as a mixture of discipline, "impatience" and "indolence" (Custine 2002, 105). He constantly reminds the reader that all civilizational feats of Russia are very expensive in every sense. "With a little more forbearance on the part of the governing power, and of activity on the part of the people, equal results might be obtained at a far cheaper cost" (Custine 2002, 106). He also presents evidence of sending false reports to please the Tsar and hiding the practice of abusing the natural resources – the major source of wealth of the country (Custine 2002, 593).

Clearly, like Tocqueville, Custine sees a general difference between what the writers of the era called civilization and barbarism, nevertheless, again just like Tocqueville throughout the

book Custine vehemently opposes the possibility of copying the blueprints for being civilized and instilling development by a central authority. With all audacious harshness he writes:

Civilization is not a fashion or an artificial device, it is a power which has its results – a root which sends forth its stalk, produces its flowers, and bears its fruit. "At least you will not call us barbarians of the North as your countrymen do." This is said to me every time I appear pleased by any interesting recital, national melody, or noble or poetic sentiment ascribed to Russians. I reply to these fears by some unimportant compliment; but I think in my own mind that I could better love the barbarians of the North than the apes who are ever imitating the south (Custine 2002, 77).

Of all the Russian traits, the Frenchmen is most critical of the lack of authenticity of the elites and the passivity of the general society, into which its leaders try to administratively instill what they deem progressiveness. As in the case of Tocqueville's "philosophic statesmanship" outlined in his speech to the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, Custine sees culture as organic development that can be modified only through education and suasion. Forcing anyone to be free is for him a contradiction in terms. Drawing from Montesquieu, Custine also claims that "the manners of people are gradually formed by the reciprocal action of the laws upon the customs, and of the customs upon the laws; they do not change as by the stroke of a wand" (Custine 2002, 280). He warns that not obeying this principle leads to creating a "barbarism plastered over, nothing more" (Custine 2002, 280) and advises that "if a people would rear a monument to their own power and greatness, they must not copy foreigners –they must study to develop the national genius instead of thwarting it" (Custine 2002, 281).

The administration, however, had its own methods of "civilizing." When describing the fate of the revolted villages that are collectively sent to Siberia, Custine writes: "it would be necessary gradually to change the ideas of the people; instead they find it more convenient to change their location...by an infernal combination, they are made movable without being free" (Custine 2002, 288). As for the attempts to amend the system the Frenchman makes several brief

references to the Decembrist movement and its attempt to introduce constitutional reforms in Russia, which, nevertheless, fell through because of the passivity of the wider society. As a result, the conspirators were, of course, dispatched to Siberia. This solidified the Tsarist autocracy and embittered the intellectuals, who from now on came under strict scrutiny and had to either (more or less) openly praise despotism or face the dire consequences (Kennan 1971, 120).

But was Russia despotic, absolutist or tyrannical? Custine tries to differentiate between the Russian autocratic system and the classical French absolutism. Still, he sees the similarities all too well. According to his account of Russian politics, there is too much unchecked power that the freshly modernized administration gives to traditional despotism, which initially maintains some form of legitimacy. This makes the regime liable to change into a violent, revolutionary tyranny, which is based on usurpation. Like Tocqueville, Custine points to the atomization of the society (Custine 2002, 538) and absence of intermediary institutions. He even describes the rising class of administrative clerks that will soon evolve into the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia with all its violent ambitions and autocratic inclinations. He writes:

There is in Russia a class of people which corresponds to the middle class among us, though without possessing the firmness of character derived from an independent position, and the experience obtained by means of liberty of thought and cultivation of mind: this is the class of subaltern employees, or secondary nobility. The ideas of these men are generally turned towards innovations, whilst their acts are the most despotic that are committed under despotism...These are enemies created by the Emperors themselves, in their distrust of the old nobility. (Custine 2002, 579)

As for the old, high nobles, Custine describes the cases of Sergei Petrovich Trubetskoy¹¹³ and the individual identified by George Kennan (1971, 42-50) as Prince Pyotr Borisovich Kozlovky without failing to mention that both men are liberals. The Russian liberal aristocrats are, however,

¹¹³ Leader of the Decembrist revolt of 1825.

according to Custine, too few and too weak to avert the pending revolution that would "purify" the imperfect despotism, dispose of redundant social elements and turn Russia into a new form of tyranny (or administrative despotism)¹¹⁴ as suggested by the Tocquevillian model.

Custine's descriptions of the coming revolution in Russia have the quality of perceptiveness that makes it almost impossible to believe that they were really created in 1839.

Marquis, for instance writes:

As everything is alike, the immense extent of the territory does not prevent things being executed from one end of Russia to the other, with a punctuality, and simultaneous correspondence, which is magical. If ever they should succeed in creating a real revolution [*sic* !] among the Russian people, massacre would be performed with the regularity that marks the evolution of a regiment. Villages would change into barracks, and organized murder would stalk forth armed from the cottages, form in line, and advance in order; in short, the Russians would prepare for pillage from Smolensk to Irkutsk, as they march to parade in Petersburg. (Custine 2002, 298)

Similarly to Tocqueville's analysis of France,¹¹⁵ Custine's vision of Russia's future traces the ideological roots of the coming revolution to a distortion of the Russian civic religion:

But in a nation governed like this, passions boil a long time before they explode; the peril may be increasing, yet the crisis is still distant, and the evil meanwhile continues: perhaps our grandchildren [*sic* !] will not see the explosion, which, notwithstanding, we can now prognosticate as inevitable, though we cannot predict the time and the season. We may not cease to repeat that the Russian revolution, [*sic* !] when it does come, will be the more terrible, because it will be proclaimed in the name of religion. The Russian policy has melted their church into the state, and confounded heaven and earth: a man who sees a God in his master, scarcely hopes for paradise, except through the favor of the Emperor. (Custine 2002, 378)

¹¹⁴ The administrative despotism that, however, still falls short of the soft despotism, which is reserved only for older politically fossilized and technologically advanced regimes.

¹¹⁵ This aspect of Tocqueville's thought will be explored in depth in Chapter 7.

Custine, naturally, did not predict the rise of anti-Christian, Leninist *Ersatz Religion*¹¹⁶ in all its intricate details. When he writes about the religious nature of the coming Russian revolution, he, however, means a certain, general type of religiosity that was not far removed from the ideology that eventually appeared in the former empire of the Tsar. As in many of his Russian impressions, Custine's approach to the Orthodox faith is, perhaps, a caricaturization. However, Custine saw into the future of certain processes precisely because of the ability to extrapolate their most prominent tendencies. And as far as the Russian official creed is concerned, Custine is above all, suspicious of its genuinely Christian character. According to him under the influence of Eastern political religions Orthodoxy did not preserve the division between the domain of God and of the Caesar; or at the very least preserved it to a far lesser extent than the other Christian creeds Custine knew of. The Marquis writes explicitly that the "politics and religion are identical in Russia" (2002, 53) and claimed that only "sovereign power is respected as religion" (ibid., 163). He also points out that religion in Russia is often reduced to pure dogma because because it is not "taught¹¹⁷ publicly" (ibid., 458); peasants rarely learn prayers and even the members of the clergy often remain illiterate. Therefore, when Custine wrote about the revolution in the name of religion he did not clearly determine the exact nature of this religion he, however, did suggest that will be some form of the Russian sacro-statism.

Custine also views the fact that French absolutism never turned into a full theocracy with the head of the state becoming the "saint" leader¹¹⁸ as a major mitigating element in the logic of the French spirit of the laws. Mentioning religion, as Custine does throughout the book and always criticizing Russian seemingly mild theocracy may seem to be a flaw of the prediction. On

¹¹⁶ For an explanation of *Ersatz Religion* see (Voegelin 1968).

the surface, the Russian revolution of 1917 was of course ardently atheistic. Nevertheless, the ideology that sprang from that revolution can be easily described as a curious case of a new religion of modernity. The genuinely theistic element, which was already a sad remnant in the eyes of Custine, was simply cleansed by revolution just as the remnants of old, aristocratic elites; what remained was the worship of the state that superseded both the God and his church. The French revolutionaries, who attempted to instill a new religion using very similar means were the forerunners of this new trend. Tocqueville famously (AR, 17-28) makes a point of comparing the French Revolution to a religious movement and devotes a whole chapter to explaining that it was not anti-religious but alternatively religious (AR, 140-150). Apparently, however, the French attempts were less successful than the Russian, according to Custine it may well be that this was because of the Franco-Catholic tradition of greater separation between religion and politics.

As to the element that would spark the revolution in Russia, here also the ideas of Tocqueville and Custine match. They believe that great revolutions build up for a long time, but

¹¹⁷ There is a clear contrast between Custine and Dostoevsky in this respect. In *A Writer's Diary* Dostoevsky writes: "...although our People may not know their prayers, the essence of Christianity, its spirit and its truth, has been preserved and reinforced more firmly, perhaps, than within any of the other peoples of this world – and this despite all their flaws" (Dostoevsky 2000, 894). Preserving the essence without any knowledge of tradition and combining this essence with messianic ambitions is, however, a dangerous combination. That is why Eric Voegelin sees a clear continuity between Dostoevsky and his vision of Orthodoxy and the kind of the twentieth century state-religion that eventually appeared in Russia professed.

Therefore, Voegelin wrote:

"In Dostoevsky this superimposition of messianism crystalized in the curiously ambivalent vision of an autocratic, orthodox Russia that somehow would conquer the world and in this conquest blossom out into the free society of all Christians in the truest faith. It is the ambivalent vision which, in its secularized form, inspires a Russian dictatorship of the proletariat that in its conquest of the world will blossom out into the Marxian realm of freedom" (1952/1987, 117).

There is actually a Voegelinian problem connected with Dostoevsky. Eric Voegelin openly criticized the moral and political implications of Dostoevsky's approach. Ellis Sandoz, Voegelin's most famous student and editor of Voegelin's writings, however, disagreed with his teacher and published a book that, essentially, focuses on the affinities between the literary vision of Dostoevsky and the philosophy of Eric Voegelin. This motif was later picked up by younger Voegelinians. For the more recent neo-Voegelinian approach embracing Dostoevsky as a conscientious conservative and the defender of traditional religion see Ellis Sandoz (2000); Lee Trepanier (2009) and Joseph Alulis (2009).

¹¹⁸ Being "protectors of the faith" within their kingdom was, naturally, also the ambition of the English Kings. However, their theocratic ambitions remained a title with just a relatively weak entitlement. According to Custine, this was because the English monarchs remained limited by the economic and political independence of the gentry.

are ultimately instigated by government's attempts to drastically reform the old system through centralized micromanagement. Custine sees the model for this in the descriptions of the peasant revolts he heard about in Russia; however, he acknowledges that unrest among peasantry is not enough to start a whole revolution. To create a revolutionary situation the grievances of peasants need to be combined with a rebellion of the custodians of the administrative apparatus itself. Interestingly, the Frenchman notes that Russian peasants do not desire to be untied from the land, but to be owned by the Emperor, as opposed to being owned by the already degenerated aristocracy. He notes:

To emancipate suddenly such men would be to set the country on fire. The moment the serfs, separated from the land to which they are attached, were to see it sold, let, or cultivated without them, they would rise in a mass, crying that they were despoiled of their property. (Custine 2002, 132)

Later Custine gives an example of a large revolt that started with the peasants petitioning the Tsar to buy them from their owners with their land and the Emperor replying: "I cannot... purchase all Russia, but a time will come, I hope, when each peasant in this Empire will be free: if it depended only upon me, the Russians should enjoy, from this day forth, the independence which I wish for them" (Custine 2002, 287). According to Custine's record, the result was a vicious carnage, which the peasants performed to fulfill what they conceived to be the true will of the Czar. Reportedly, whole villages were deported to Siberia. As matter of fact, the French traveler was so struck by those stories that along with his factual recollections he published a piece of fiction.¹¹⁹ It was entitled the "History of Telenef" (Custine 2002, 333) – a rather ineptly written short story set in a village that is overcome by the already mentioned revolt.

¹¹⁹ Custine claims he heard the story and only slightly corrected the style - which at the time was a standard euphemism for "this is a piece of fiction loosely based on historical facts." Nevertheless, he dully separated the story from other records.

Custine, naturally, euphemistically mentions that in the “History of Telenef” he changed the details and amended the style of a real story. He, however, quotes no conversations with eyewitnesses and the piece is extremely mannerist, which gives away that it was either completely rewritten or simply invented by Custine. Fortunately, the author separates this piece from his more factual records. Nevertheless, the other chapters of *La Russie en 1839* were also routinely reproached for factual mistakes. Custine defends himself with a famous line that is perhaps most accurately translated in the 1989 edition of the book: “*Trois*¹²⁰ *mois de voyage, il a mal vu.*’ *Il est vrai, j ’ai mal vu, mais j’ai bien deviné*” [“A journey of four¹²¹ months! –he cannot have fully seen things.’ It is true I have not fully seen, but I have fully devined] (Custine 1989, 617; Custine 2002, 650¹²²; Custine 2008). Custine, thus, “admitted to inaccuracies but took refuge behind insights” (Kennan 1971, 112). George Kennan (1971, 125) agrees that Custine's record is a very bad history book about the Russia of Nicholas I, but for some reason, which the American diplomat himself does not fully comprehend, it was one of the best books about Russia of 1917 and the Russia of Joseph Stalin (Kennan 1971, 124). Kennan dramatically asks: “What are we to make of this strange anomaly: that the nightmare of 1839 should become reality in 1939 and semi reality in 1969?” The answer he puts forward is that due to his sensitivity Custine simply saw a possibility that for a long time remained very remote.

As a matter of fact, according to Kennan, in the late 19th century it seemed that Custine was totally wrong and that a new generation of Russian intelligentsia, which was still in its

¹²⁰ This is an inconsistency of Kennan's translation, Custine clearly writes “three months” (“*trois mois*”), Kennan apparently counts his prolonged stay in Germany as a part of the journey and changes the figure into “four.”

¹²¹ See note number 8 (above).

¹²² Anka Muhlstein (Custine 2002, 650) in her translation uses the expression: “...but I have well penetrated.” This in my opinion is an inaccurate rendition, that is why here I turned to an earlier translation by George Kennan (Custine 1989). Nevertheless, Muhlstein's latest edition is used in the work for all other intents and purposes. Certain mishaps do not undermine the fact that it the most popular and linguistically modernized version of Custine's greatest work.

teething period in 1839, would peacefully change the Empire into a prosperous and relatively liberal state. Interestingly, however, all the examples Kennan can give of what he calls "moral earnestness" (1971, 122) are taken from the world of literature – Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky. Tellingly, the American diplomat also quotes his Russian friends (Kennan 1917, 118) who in the 1960s reproached him for lecturing on Custine and in spite of the temporal distance actually criticized Custine himself for not taking into account the feats of Russian culture. Kennan thus tries to be appeasing, as a diplomat often should, and in his book criticizes Custine for foreseeing only Stalin's atrocities and not Tolstoy's novels. This naturally borders on a belief in Custine's supernatural powers – one could just as easily reproach the French author for not foreseeing the Korean War. The weakness of this criticism, is more than obvious, and George F. Kennan does not even try to conceal that fact; he clearly hints that he wrote those lines only for the sake of some, apparently important, relations.

However, the message that Kennan does convey is that the finest minds of Russia in the period immediately following Custine's travels were preoccupied primarily with art and not politics. The political undercurrent was, on the other hand, swiftly fulfilling the Frenchman's Tocquevillian insights. Custine, in a sense, understood Russia far better than the Russians themselves. Perhaps that is why in a critically acclaimed 2002 film, *The Russian Arc*, Alexander Sokurov depicted Astolphe de Custine as the authoritative guide, who takes the viewer for a picturesque tour into the depths of Russian history. Finally, one must not forget that Custine was by no means obsessed with a neurotic hatred of Russia. His travels and experience compelled him to draw many universal conclusions. Towards the end of his book, in line with Montesquieu's differentiation between political theory and the *mores* of the society, Custine is compelled to admit that: "Whenever the public machine is rigorously exact, there is despotism, whatever be the fiction, monarchical or democratical, which covers it" (Custine 2002, 628).

Pipe's Vision of Russian History

The *post factum* depiction of what Custine “guessed” about Russian politics with the simultaneous application of the Tocquevillian model was perhaps best performed by Richard Pipes, one of the most renowned American historians specializing in Russia. And, although, Pipes is more inclined to quote Tocqueville than Custine, he is deeply Custinian in his analysis and just like the two French authors rejects the *volkish* sentimentalism of Haxthausen. In the introduction to his *Russian Revolution* (1990), Pipes makes three important points. Firstly, from the very beginning he starts to draw analogies between the Russian and the French revolution and he continues this line of argumentation in the subsequent chapters. Secondly, he states that revolution is not a purely natural phenomenon, but a work of men, and as such it is subject to value judgments (Pipes 1990, xiii). Finally, in accordance with Custine's conviction that the revolution will be "proclaimed in the name of religion," and following the Tocquevillian approach Pipes writes in 1989 that:

Post-1789 revolutions have raised the most fundamental ethical questions: whether it is proper to destroy institutions built over centuries by trial and error, for the sake of ideal system; whether one has the right to sacrifice the well-being and even the lives of one's own generation for the sake of generations yet unborn; whether man can be refashioned into a perfectly virtuous being. To ignore these questions, raised already by Edmund Burke two centuries ago, is to turn a blind eye to the passions that inspired those who made and who resisted great revolutions. For post-1789 revolutionary struggles, in the final analysis, are not over politics but over theology [*sic!*]" (Pipes 1990, xiii).

After such an introduction, Pipes continues to follow Tocqueville's and Custine's footsteps in tracing back the origins of the Russian Revolution and naming the factors that shaped its ultimate form. Firstly, like Tocqueville, he acknowledges the instability of the old regime especially at a time when the society is economically developing and the regime tries to reform itself. Like Custine, Pipes also notices the compulsive desire to be Westernized coupled with political brutality in instilling the reforms. Following Tocquevillian admonitions to look to Asia

to find a good example of new despotism (DA II, 429), Pipes also acknowledges that the Russian regime resembled an "oriental despotism." (Pipes 1990, 53).

Moreover, in describing the Russian old regime Pipes, just as I have done when comparing the works of Tocqueville and Custine, sees the similarities between the Russian system and the Western, French absolutism. But he also sees the differences, again in accordance with Custine, who at a certain point acknowledges that for instance Prussia¹²³ is on the surface just as absolutist as Russia, nevertheless, the Russian legal customs are radically different than anything one can encounter in the West (Custine 2002, 622). Pipes, however, is more specific. He writes: "The peculiar features of Russian absolutism in its early form, which lasted from the fourteenth until the late eighteenth century, were marked by the virtual absence of the institution of private property, which in the West confronted royal power with effective limits to its authority" (Pipes 1990, 54). In consequence, up till the times of Katherine the Great, all of Russia was "run like a private estate, its inhabitants and territories with everything they contained, being treated as the property of the crown"(Pipes 1990, 54). The traces of this state of affairs were obviously still visible to Custine.

Later, when describing the social condition of Russian peasants, Pipes notices that they were actually more content with the Pre-Katherinian establishment. Belonging to the crown meant a less oppressive supervision. Thus the peasants equated private property in general with the lack of freedom. Moreover, they held the concept of "political rights" in contempt and interpreted lack of serfdom as "anarchy" (Pipes 1990, 56). In response, the administration ruthlessly disciplined the villages. Allowing for slower, but more authentic grass-root developments was out of the question. In line with all Custine's somewhat slanting remarks on

¹²³ As it later turned out, the latent tyrannical element in the Prussian tradition can create revolutionary movements that are equally dangerous to the society.

"the false order" (Custine 2002, 638) and "drilled Tartars"(Custine 2002, 145) Pipes using slightly more cultured expressions remarks that "in many respects, the bureaucracy treated its population as the European powers treated their colonials" (Pipes 1990, 56). In short," it was the state that made Russia a country not vice versa" (Pipes 1990, 26).

As for the higher strata of the society, Pipes, again agreeing with Custine, notices the ubiquitous spirit of serfdom. He, for instance, mentions the frequent practice of not accepting the resignations of ministers by the Tsar (Pipes 1990, 62). The American historian also points out that Russia never had a chief of the cabinet, all the power was reserved exclusively for the monarch. As for administration, as in Custine's case, we read about an apparatus that is brutal, unforgiving and, because of this grossly inefficient in comparison to other political models. For example, the office workers had no official mechanism of redress of the administrative or personal decisions made by their supervisors (Pipes 1990, 62). The Crown of course could dismiss high officials but it did so only in extreme situations. This was because the officials' status was tied to the majesty of Tsar – and majesty could not be undermined by creating an impression that it is fallible.

Pipes also notes that the administration was centralized, nevertheless, badly centralized. It was unchecked and “top-heavy,” which left the province both politically deprived and badly governed. One province of Sweden taken over by Peter the Great spent more on administration than the whole Empire, and matters did not significantly improve with time (Pipes 1990, 66-69). Still, the fact that officials were answerable to no judicial authority already paved the way for Custine's revolution, which would promptly provide the bureaucratic apparatus with greater manpower.

In accordance with the Tocquevillian model, Pipes, furthermore, notes three tendencies: over-development of the capital, stagnation of the provinces and the political ineptness of the

educated middle class. According to Pipes, before the revolution university graduates, who formed the new group of intelligentsia were growing in number and obviously not gaining any political experience, for administering is not politics. Actually, in accordance with Custine's, remarks there was only one real politician in Russia. Naturally, the intelligentsia wanted to reform the country, but at the same time it knew only of the despotic means of instilling changes (Pipes 1990, 100-129). Nevertheless, the Russian old regime desperately tried to meet some of the demands of the society. One of the most interesting examples of this was the state-sponsored trade unions. At the same time, the society was passive as far as grassroots civic engagement is concerned and more and more demanding in its expectations of the central authorities. This is a situation in which the revolutionary force can act in one direction only – that of extreme tyranny.

Pipes also draws a parallel between Bolsheviks and the French *sociétés de pensée*, and remarks: "For intellectuals of this kind, the criterion of truth was not life: they created their own reality, or rather, surreality, subject to verification only with reference to opinions of which they approved" (Pipes 1990, 129). Even more interestingly, he shows that both the left and the right-wing intelligentsia was actually proto-Bolshevik. Pipes writes: "the extreme reactionaries much sooner and better grasped the driving forces and the social content of [the] coming revolution" (Pipes 1990, 69). They simply wanted a police state – *Polizeistaat*. In describing this group Pipes quotes Tocqueville's *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution* on the difference between the British and the French elites. Pipes also claims that the French freethinkers bear a striking similarity to the Russian officials. He concludes that "in countries which excluded intellectuals from participation in public life – of which old regime France and Russia were prime examples – intellectuals were prone to form castes committed to extreme ideologies" (Pipes 1990, 129).

In short, Pipes fully confirms Custine's analysis and notes that by 1905 everything was ready for the first act of Revolution – a moderately earnest attempt to democratize Russia. But the efforts of 1905, so reminiscent of the Decembrist revolt of 1820 and the Girondists' postulates in France, were doomed to failure. Russia was ready for the second act – the Bolshevik *coup d'état* of 1917. Later came the third act – the Stalinist institutionalized terror that as Custine wrote was essentially a massacre "performed with the regularity that marks the evolutions of a regiment" (Custine 2002, 289).

Finally, before describing the Revolution itself Pipes suggestively compares Robespierre to Lenin, finding many common traits in their personalities and ambitions. One was a disillusioned lawyer the other a brilliant student, who's career at the university was broken as a result of his brother's ill-fated political involvement. Both became unscrupulous ideologues with a prophet-like sense of theocratic mission (Pipes 1990, 349).

Conclusions

In spite of the decidedly heavy handed methods of administrative centralization, contemporary Russia is not a totalitarian regime. However, in line with Tocqueville's teaching on the softening of despotism, this does not imply republicanism. Russia evolved into what Levitsky and Way (2010) call "competitive authoritarianism." The Kremlin has full control over the oligarchical economy and the media. It does not tamper with the ballot box, since it can easily influence the preference of the citizens beforehand. The political forces supported by the "family" of Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev have virtually no competitors in the public sphere. The system is thus far more air tight than the *enarque*-run France where political cooptation is still something the officials try not to reveal publicly. One might conclude, however, that the soft despotism has to be more conspicuous in a society in which the actual Tocquevillian intermediary bodies never

developed due to a lack of feudal past and feeble private property rights. France, in comparison, according to the Tocquevillian vision of history, is a state where powerful intermediaries between the government and the people did exist at a time. They were, however, slowly smoldered by absolutism and, arguably,¹²⁴ never fully substituted by the structures of the civil society. The above assessment of modern Russia is confirmed by the research of Peter Ruthan (2009, 199-225) who notes that while the living standards, education and equality of social life increased under the Putin's governance, the performance of all republican institutions, political parties and free civil associations is in deep decline. Therefore, contrary to the modernization hypothesis, as Russia becomes more prosperous it at the same time becomes less liberal.

Tocqueville, Custine and Pipes all agree that both in France and in Russia the legacy of the past will heavily weigh on the contemporary politics. The conclusion they offer is that, simply focusing on economic performance and hoping for the liberties to follow prosperity is an error in judgment. Tocqueville's theory again proves to be a marvelous tool as it anticipates the futility of the hopes for automatic liberalization. The French thinker was convinced that liberal values do not simply spring up from the objective social and economic mechanics. Classical liberalism, in his views, is not a natural result of democracy; it is, in fact, antithetical to the default tendencies of what one might call the democratic political mind. At the same time instilling a new liberal civil virtue that would act as the successor of the old aristocratic liberality is necessary to ensure the existence democratic republics and prevent history from slipping into the new dark ages (see Schleifer 2000, 279-290). However the philosophical statecraft for Tocqueville implies active

¹²⁴ Pierre Rosanvallon (2007), for instance, is generally sympathetic to the Tocquevillian theoretical framework, but accuses Tocqueville of being too selective in his study of the French history. Rosanvallon sees many examples of intermediary bodies in France such as political clubs, associations and trade unions.

nurturing of freedom without the use of administrative coercion. It is, therefore, more akin to the old-fashioned Socratic persuasion than the modern reformism.

CHAPTER 5

TOCQUEVILLE'S NOBLE LIES AND MACHIAVELLIAN NECESSITIES: HIS TEACHING ON RELIGION, ISLAM AND COLONIALISM

In his discussion of democracy and revolutions Tocqueville very often returns to the notion of religion and indeed in AR he compares modern revolutionary movements to new religions and revolutionaries to proselytes. This underlines the Tocquevillian nature of similar concepts of revolutions in the works Pipes and Custine.¹²⁵ Moreover, as far the great democratic revolution is concerned; Tocqueville sees its root in Christianity. In fact, the rise of Christianity for Tocqueville seems to be the first great revolution that at a time shattered both ancient slavery and polytheism. But even though Tocqueville grants this unique status to Christianity, in some of his writings, he also entertains the possibility of democratic revolutions in Islam and in general the spreading of such revolutions from the Christians states on to the rest of the world. It seems that to fully understand those Tocquevillian concepts it is necessary to analyze his ideas about religion in more detail. Moreover, those ideas need to be analyzed in connections with Tocqueville's concepts pertaining to cultural and religious identities in the era of colonization. As a result, this chapter examines Tocqueville's thoughts on religion, colonialism and empire. All three topics have been heavily explored by many researchers. The dominant interpretations, however, either try to selectively read Tocqueville or underline only the apparent inconsistencies. My analysis suggests that Tocqueville's ambiguities are not inconsistencies, they are merely parts of his grand theory that he does not resolve completely, but he also does not contradict himself as often as some interpretations suggest. Indeed, he sometimes conceals his deep thoughts, but he is also amply open about this concealment and sometimes in certain private writings, he even intimates the reason that made him misrepresent his true thoughts in other works. Moreover, this

¹²⁵ I have analyzed those concepts in the previous chapter.

chapter puts forward the hypothesis that elements of Tocquevillian thoughts on colonialism and Islam seem to be useful in understanding what constitutes a successful democratic transition of a post-colonial state. The chapter in its final section juxtaposes that teaching with some of the hypotheses put forward by modern students of comparative politics and post-colonial development.

Alexis de Tocqueville is a modern liberal with a strong affinity to the ancients, indeed, a rather “strange liberal” (Boesche 1987). He is, however, also one of the few major political theorists who like Machiavelli (Wolin 2003, 7) had substantial practical experience in the executive. Moreover, his experience was probably one of the most comprehensive among the modern political thinkers since at the culminating point of his career he was in charge of the diplomacy of one of the major European powers. As every effective politician should, Tocqueville very clearly sees the difference between pure political thought and prudent politics. The best examples of this distinction can be seen in his teaching on role of religion in the society and in his writings on colonialism. In the first case, he conceals some of his fears, misgivings and general thoughts about the relations between religion and the democratic society, constructing a peculiar “noble lie” (see also Strauss 1964, 102). In the second case, he is more clearly a modern, when writing on Algeria and French colonialism he employs a method of choosing good when possible but settling for the lesser evil when necessary. Nevertheless, unlike Machiavelli, Tocqueville will never suggest that the good itself is a matter of convention, he will merely agree that its application is at times an extremely complex issue.

Religion and Politics

Tocqueville’s more conservative readers invariably praise him for seeing religious faith as a “necessary foundation of society” (Lively 1962, 181; see also Mansfield 2010 and Agnès Antoine 2007). Nevertheless, Ralph Raico (2010) observes that this religious foundation

understood as a necessary inhibitor of democratic restlessness is a superfluous element in Tocqueville's theory since its relation to others similar elements such as "self-interest well understood" (DA III, 918) and "free associations" are not fully explained. Tocqueville himself intimates to his father that although, "religion can sway political opinion no doubt about it...one's material interests are what hold ultimate sway" (Tocqueville 2010b, 255).

The French thinker says that he sees religion as natural and inevitable in organic, free associations, but the conclusions thus reached become tautological. If religion in the general sense is a natural need, then why and how should it be preserved? And if it is preserved not by free associations alone but by some form of the power of the state then how does this differ from a general civic ideology that is present in nearly every polity? Marvin Zetterbaum openly (1967) says that Tocqueville is actually inconsistent since a "genuine" (ibid., 19) religion will require a source of sovereignty that is external to both the people's will and Rousseau's civil myths entertained by the lawmakers. One might, naturally, argue that the government gives form to the way natural needs such as sex and self-preservation are satisfied. Nevertheless, as I have noted in Chapter 5, Tocqueville is very skeptical about modifying the *mores* with the use of administrative and legislative methods.

Indeed, Tocqueville up to a point agrees with Zetterbaum, but he prudently does not disclose his full teaching on religion in the works he publishes. In DA, he ostensibly says that democratic societies can choose between the hierarchically, structured religion, i.e., Catholicism, and deism/pantheism, and, he foresees that Catholicism may "suddenly make great conquests" (DA III, 755). He even goes as far as to say that the Catholic creed is not only compatible with democracy, but that the two can actually exist in mutually symbiosis thanks to the Church's ability to maintain the democratic society in a healthy spiritual balance. However, Tocqueville's correspondence paints a slightly different picture according to which Catholicism is in fact

antithetical to democracy and deism or pantheism seems to be the actual tendency of democratic societies in general and the natural tendency of Protestantism in particular.¹²⁶

Naturally, one may ask whether it appropriate to assume that Tocqueville's letters indeed accurately convey his thought. On this matter I follow the lead of Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings, both of whom are established authorities¹²⁷ on Tocqueville's epistolary work. The editors of one of the largest English compilation of Tocqueville's letters conclude that "one might even go as far as to argue that, in some respects, Tocqueville's letters are as important as his published writings" (2009, 4). The literary elaborateness of his letters suggests that the author was aware that at least some of them may be posthumously published. One must also acknowledge the topical integrity of his correspondence and the huge amount of the crucial pieces of information he harvested from his correspondents. Craiutu and Jennings note, however, that "unlike his published writings, Tocqueville's letters allow us to trace closely his hopes, fears, and, ultimately his disillusionment with politics," (ibid., 4) which is to say that the author seems to be more direct in his epistolary pieces. At the same time there is little probability that Tocqueville's thoughts expressed in the letters, although, more frank and evolving over time are just accidental remarks. As Craiutu and Jennings observe, "Tocqueville's correspondence remained substantially the same during the twenty-eight years period from 1831 to 1859" (ibid.).

As far as the frankness of Tocqueville's correspondence on religion is concerned, already while in America he secretly writes to Corcelle:

Catholicism, I am very afraid, will never adopt the new society. It will never forget the position that it had in the old one and every time that [it] is given some powers, it will hasten to abuse them. I will say that only to you (quoted in DA, 755, *n e*).

¹²⁶ Tocqueville, however, seems to suggest that the Protestant road to pantheism is longer and characterized by a more gradual movement in comparison to the route taken by the French enlightenment.

¹²⁷ See Craiutu and Jennings (2009) and (2004).

This insight is further confirmed in a letter to Ernest de Chambrol where Tocqueville admits that he is convinced “more than ever... that the Catholic religion inherently favors absolute monarchy, or anyway aristocratic republic” (Tocqueville 2010b, 225) and adds that he has “conversed with many priests” (ibid.) and senses “that just beneath the surface of their democratic sentiments is great contempt for popular rule” (ibid.). In short, Tocqueville seems to suggest that Catholicism is bound to turn into a fighting sect that will be more and more at odds with the democratic society and may indeed eventually rebel against it; but it is unlikely that it will win the clash. Moreover, he admits that he deliberately obscures this issue in his published works. In this work, I conclude that he does so in order not to antagonize his more conservative readers. My reasons for reaching this conclusion will be demonstrated further in the chapter.

As for the description of Protestants’ slow drift towards irreligion, this too is revealed in Tocqueville’s letters more directly than in the actual text of *DA*. In an epistle to Louis Kergoulay he writes:

Enter any church (I refer to the Protestant kind) and you will hear sermons about morals; not one word about dogma – nothing at all likely to fluster one’s neighbor or awaken an idea of dissent. But the mind gripped by a belief thrives on dogmatic abstractions, on discussions that fall in with some religious doctrine. From what I can see, this alleged tolerance amounts to good old indifference.... (ibid., 89)

Later in the same letter, he paints an interesting conceptual map of different American denominations and says that

...protestantism is astonishingly fissiparous: sects have divided into an infinite number of subsects. Picture if you will concentric circles around a fixed point, which is the Catholic faith; with each successive circle, religion draws that much closer to pure deism... The reformed religion is clearly a species of compromise, the religious equivalent of ‘representative monarchy’; it may span one era or bridge two, but it is only transitional and is nearing its end. (ibid., 90)

In his experience in France Tocqueville also finds confirmation of some of his early fears concerning Catholics and becomes very critical of the approach the French Church adopts with reference to the authoritarian regime of Louis Napoleon.

Every day the pastor of our village upholds from the pulpit the Christian virtues of the Emperor, his faith, his charity and the rest...At the time when we are more exclusively preoccupied with the material goods of this earth, we advance every day along this road of sanctimoniousness. (Tocqueville 1959, 293; quoted in Raico 2010, loc. 2402-12)

Given that anti-clericalism was by no means frowned upon in the nineteenth century France and Tocqueville was actually accused by his political colleagues of being too pro-clerical, one wonders why Tocqueville goes to such great lengths to reconcile the traditionalistic faith with democracy in his official teaching? Why does he not become more radical? It is my contention that with reference to this issue three factors seem to come into play: Tocqueville's notion of responsibilities of the statesmen in the face of a revolution; his desire to appease French reactionaries; and the perceived lack of socially viable alternatives.

Firstly, although, Tocqueville is conscious of the fact that every traditional religion, Catholic, Protestant or Muslim alike, will be undermined in the democratic society, he will never uncritically give advice to simply follow a perceived historical trend. He remains a heroic fatalist, who believes that, although, certain outcomes seem unavoidable, one is often duty bound to act as if they could be avoided in hope (or fear) of new, unforeseen developments. He is, indeed, what I call a Pascalian¹²⁸ statesmen; a politician who is pessimistic about the future but at the same time views it as his crucial responsibility to strive for the preservation of certain institutions against all the odds that the historical reality offers. Let us add that this way of perceiving politics is by no

¹²⁸ When exploring Tocqueville's own uneasy religiousness, one must remember that a pessimistic view of the worldly history and acknowledging the need to preserve certain values in spite of their apparent decline is very much a part of the historical legacy of Christianity, although, nowadays apocalyptic Christianity is probably not gaining a lot of new ground.

means Tocqueville's invention, as a matter of fact it goes back to saint Augustine with an intermediary of the tradition of French Jansenism.¹²⁹

When Tocqueville opens DA by saying that the grand democratic revolution is something that "Providence"¹³⁰ (DA I 14) imposes upon nations and that to want to stop democracy "would then seem to be struggling against God himself [*contre Dieu même*]" (ibid.), one should take him with all seriousness. One should also remember that providentialism implies a peculiar type of historicism, which assumes that history has an internal logic of development; the ultimate outcomes of that development are, however, not something a human mind can be privy to. Humans can only make accurate prediction within a limited time-span of "normal" events. For Tocqueville, this timeline is marked by the grand revolutions, of which he names two – the rise of Christianity and the rise of democracy. Since a statesmen can never foresee the nature of the next great revolution, rather than trying to fuel the current trend, he should focus on preserving the *salus populi* and salvage those elements of social life that seem to be frail but hold some intrinsic value that might render them useful in the future. Like a masterful stock-exchange investor, Tocqueville is ingenious and creative in describing trends, but at the same time strongly advises against blindly following the trend that is already apparent to all. Paradoxically, the fact that Tocqueville does not want to speed up the coming of complete equality and irreligion testifies to the fact that he is far more convinced of the strength of those tendencies than some of the revolutionary political actors of the era. Tocqueville, in contrast to Marx, assumes if the *Zeitgeist*

¹²⁹ Tocqueville's teacher, friend and indeed a father-figure in his life— Abbe Lesueur was a Jansenistic priest. Jansenists were a loosely defined catholic group Pascal himself sympathized with, they opposed the Jesuistic opportunism and embraced saint Augustine, especially his teaching on predestination. For Tocqueville's relations with Lesueur see Jardin (1984, 40-60). For a description of Jansenism and its relation to the philosophy of Blaise Pascal and its role in history of Political thought see Kolakowski (1995).

¹³⁰ Capitalized as in the original.

exists, it surely will not be in need of a wet-nurse, but perhaps it could benefit from employing an old-fashioned teacher of etiquette.

The second reason for the defense of religion is that Tocqueville wrote mainly for the French audience and knew well the sentiments and resentments of the De Maistrean, theocratic reactionaries. Louis Kergolay, Tocqueville's long-time friend, whom Tocqueville defended in court, barely evaded execution for joining Marie Caroline Duchesse de Berry in an ultra-reactionary plot aimed against Louis Philippe (see DA I, lxxv). People like Kergolay according to Tocqueville's account, knew "very bad the port towards which they are heading" (DA II, 506) and could easily confuse the new overpowering despotism with their idealized version of the old regime. Tocqueville was, in short, of the opinion that if such people openly oppose democracy they will only endanger France, liberty and finally the very religion they want to defend. In line with his own notion of double revolution that constantly increases administrative power while feeding both on revolutionary actions and corresponding reactions (DA IV, 1243), Tocqueville, thus, had no desire to inspire the reactionary ire.

As for the third reason of defending traditional religions – Tocqueville may see their decline but he also finds the alternatives unacceptable and the general need for some metaphysical consolation unquenchable. He not so much believes in the strength of old religions as fears the possible substitutes; he warns of the viciousness of political ideologies that according to him were new more radical and barbaric cults in disguise. Just like Eric Voegelin (1952), Tocqueville sees the political ideology of the French revolutionaries as a distinctively modern type of religious fanaticism that abandons the forms of spirituality that were partly open to free inquiry in favor of a blind faith in progress. He writes that "the French Revolution evolved in reference to this world in exactly the same manner as religious revolution acted in relation to

world beyond the grave” (AR¹³¹, 27). He also draws an analogy between the revolution and violent religious movements by saying that the Revolution...

...became itself a species of new religion barely formed, it is true. Godless, without ritual or an afterlife but which, nevertheless, like Islam, has flooded all the earth with its soldiers, apostles and martyrs (ibid.).

The modern radicalization and immanentization of spiritual convictions Tocqueville witnessed creates for him a political need for embracing the more moderate forms of religiosity. As for metaphysical doubt and pantheistic philosophy, according to Tocqueville, most people will eventually reject both of those types of spiritual nourishment and turn to base ideologies in the absence of the more traditional creeds. Interestingly, however, Tocqueville seems to count himself among the chosen few, who are capable of embracing the unstable and doubt-ridden but more “genuine” spirituality and, thus, reject the sugar coating of the palatable, social myth or “noble lie.” In DA he curiously writes that “there have always been and will always be men who, after submitting a few of their religious beliefs to an authority, will want some other religious beliefs to elude it, and will allow their minds to float haphazardly between obedience and liberty” (DA III, 756). He reveals that in this passage he was describing his own spirituality, only much later when terminally sick, he addresses one of his last letters to a Russian mystic, Madame Swetchine:

The problem of human existence constantly preoccupies me and constantly overwhelms me. I can neither penetrate this mystery, nor detach my eyes from it. It alternately excites me and disheartens me. In this world I find human existence inexplicable and in the other world frightening. I believe firmly in another life, since God who is supremely just has given us the idea of it; in this other life, I believe in remuneration of good and evil, since God has allowed us to distinguish between them and given us freedom to choose; but beyond these clear ideas, everything beyond the bounds of this world seems to me to be surrounded by shadows which terrify me. (Tocqueville 2002, 335)

¹³¹ I.e. the *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution* (2008).

Complicated as Tocqueville's personal beliefs were,¹³² he, however, had a strong conviction about the utility of religion in general; shrouded in his not completely sincere eulogies of Catholicism one finds a surprising dry, almost Hobbesian (2012) confession, "society has nothing either to fear or to hope concerning the other life; what is most important for society is not so much that all citizens profess the true religion, but that they profess a religion" (DA II, 473). We thus see an interesting split between what we would now describe as Tocqueville's existential *angst* regarding his faith in "the religion" and the pragmatism of his support for "a religion." One must, however, remember that this split does not imply a sinister agenda. Tocqueville does not seem to be a seller of the "opium of the people" (Marx 1970, online); he seems to allow for different kinds and modes of religious experience and speaks against treating the doubts an intellectual has as the basis of morality or political order.

The description of the place of religion within a democracy seems to be for Tocqueville a *gennaion pseudos* – noble lie (See Plato, *Republic* 414e-15c). Plato's story describes the history of the difference between men and the salutary tale of their brotherhood. Tocqueville in turn describes two spiritual responses to religion. One is that of simple devotion and the resulting communitarian sentiment; the other is an intimate solitary experience of doubt and the finite,

¹³² One must note, however, that from a purely theological standpoint it would be a grave mistake to call Tocqueville a closeted atheist. His existential troubles seem to reiterate the evangelical prayer „God heal my unbelief" (Mark 9, 24). Based on an interpretation of Tocqueville's writings Peter Lawler notes dryly that "Tocqueville was unfortunate not to have faith in personal God hidden from view" (Lawler 1993, 93). Lawler later went as far as to say that Tocqueville's spiritual "restlessness approached what Pascal calls the despair of atheism" At the same time, however, Tocqueville lived his life in full sacramental communion with the Catholic Church. As a matter of fact, his then-fiancée Mary Mottley converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1835. She did so in preparation for their marriage and apparently on Tocqueville's own advice (see Brogan 2007, 296 and Jardin 1989, 232). Mary, who went on to marry Tocqueville, remained a devout catholic throughout all her life, including the period of widowhood. She was even known to censure some of Tocqueville more doubt ridden writings and threatened to take the publisher of his works to court if he dared to print the famous correspondence between Tocqueville and Swetchine (Hadari 1989, 135). The Swetchine's letters were published only after Mary's death.

historical limitations of the religious experience. In line with his existential vision of the statesmen's mission, Tocqueville saw silencing some of his thoughts on the interaction between religion and society as part of his moral duty. His mind may have instructed him that religion and democracy will never be completely compatible. His sense of duty, however, pointed out that this element of his thought should not be openly revealed ahead of time. There is an element of the Sisyphean (Camus 1991) absurdity to it. Like Sisyphus in Camus's essay, Tocqueville refuses to succumb to the logic of the events that surround him. He declines to simply give in to the "despair of atheism" even if he "approaches" it (Lawler 1993, 93).

Islam and Colonialism

Tocqueville firmly holds on to that teaching also in his discussion of Islam. On the one hand, he finds Islam deplorable and writes to Gobineau that after his studies of Koran he "came to the conviction that there are few religions in the world as deadly to men as that of Mohammed" (Tocqueville 2002, 229). On the other hand, for all his personal dislike of the Islamic religion, in his "First Report on Algeria" he consistently rejects any attempts at secularizing or Christianizing the Muslims in the French colonies. With a truly astonishing insight he writes that

The religious passions that the Koran inspires are hostile, people say, and it is good to let them die out in superstition and ignorance, for want of jurists and priests. It would be committing a great imprudence to attempt this. When religious passion exists among a people, men are always found who take it upon themselves to make use of these and to lead them. Allow the natural and regular interpretation of religion to disappear, and you do not suppress religious passions, you merely cede control to fanatics or impostors (Tocqueville 2001, 143).

He, however, fears that his advice will not be followed and thus warns Corecelle in another letter that "whatever happens, one can be sure that our close proximity will bring about a social revolution among the Arabs that will be extremely difficult for them to work through" (quoted in Jardin 1984, 336).

Tocqueville has recently been severely criticized for the inconsistency of his liberal ideas with his support of French colonialism (See Pitts 2007, Boesche 2005, Welch 2003). Boesche for instance writes about “the dark side” of Tocqueville, and quotes approvingly Mill’s criticism of Tocquville’s reportedly puerile notions concerning fighting a war in defense of honor and similar justifications of colonial expansion. And although Boesche acknowledges that criticizing different thinkers for their inability to transcend the prevalent opinion of their times may not be the most productive intellectual pursuit, he notes with a derisive *Schadenfreude* that he “would hope the brilliant Tocqueville, who indeed believed he had risen above his century's prejudices, could find enough critical distance to condemn a war on behalf of the opium trade” (2005, 739). Boesche, however, omits to mention that Mill himself was not opposed to war and colonialism in the name of progress, he simply thought that justifying them with the notion of national pride is intellectually inferior (see Pitts 2001, xxxiii).

Cheryl B. Welch offers a more complex explanation as to why Tocqueville held opinions that modern liberals may find reprehensible and embraces the tools of historical psychology. However, after sifting through all the rich footnotes and references the readers of her article are prompted to arrive at a conclusion that in his heart of hearts Tocquville must have been a benevolent, pacifist and that he began finding justification for war and colonization only to silence his feeling of guilt for not living up to his own standards and submitting to tacit peer pressure and careerism. Unfortunately, however, Welch fails to find solid evidence of Tocqueville’s guilt complex. A Freudian would say that this is precisely because it is a denied and hidden guilt. A historian of political thought would, however, remain suspicious and could easily find more evidence suggesting that Prof. Welch simply ascribes guilt to Tocqueville for not living up to her own standards of a contemporary, edified intellectual.

Jennifer Pitts (2001, 2007) is more Machiavellian in her reading of Tocqueville's writings on imperialism. According to her, the French author is well aware that the modernizing force of democratic revolution cannot be easily contained; it will eventually lead to an overflow or a series of internal eruptive revolutions. The overflow is of course a euphemism for colonization that, although morally undesirable, to a statesperson, may seem preferable to internal unrest. Tocqueville is in this respect a Machiavellian; he rejects the Platonic model of the polis that is relatively small, immutable in its non-temporal stability and rejects aggressive expansion.

According to the author of this essay, it is indeed beneficial to keep in mind that Tocqueville was writing on colonialism from a perspective of political prudence. However, it is not the simple Machiavellian prudence that is undiluted with elements of classical political philosophy.

Looking at the political map of the world in the mid nineteenth century, Tocqueville does not believe that North Africa can be free from interference of any of the great powers. Indeed, he believes France may be the lesser evil in comparison to Turkey or England, provided that French policymakers adhere to his proposals. And although Tocqueville is by no means a contemporary, multiculturalist, progressive liberal, he is vehemently opposed to slavery and unnecessary violence. In general, as Paul Carrese puts it in his comment on Tocqueville's proposal of colonial policies, "given the multiplicity of competing actors, principles, and interests in international affairs and the omnipresent threat of war, the statesmanlike task is to achieve the least worst outcome among options that range from bad to awful" (Herbert and Danoff 2011, loc. 7727-34).

As in all things, Tocqueville does not wish to divert the political trends of his times, he only wishes to moderate them. He primarily caters to the French interests, and indeed one needs to agree with James Ceaser who notes that, "for Tocqueville, the stopping point of effective attachment in our age should be the nation. It remains the only unit that is still capable of great action and that can uphold a meaningful standard of honor. In other words, if the identification of

man is mankind, the notion of greatness must grow dimmer and dimmer” (Rahe, Ceaser and West 2009, 10). It is, however, a mistake to assume as Boesche seems to do that Tocqueville had nothing to say about the future democratization of the colonies. Naturally, one may focus on the anachronistic elements of his approach to colonialism, but this will only obscure a more substantial teaching that pertains to the latest wave of revolutions in the postcolonial regions, especially in the Arab world.

As I have already noted, Tocqueville never openly precludes the possibility of the French and British colonies in Asia and Africa becoming independent. He, however, stresses that even liberated colonies seem to be a continuation of the *esprit* of their colonizers. He often writes about the British as the “fathers” of the Americans, and he seems to be an early anticipator of the geopolitical notion of the “anglosphere” defined as “a network civilization without a corresponding political form” (Bennet 2004, 80), a community characterized by similar institutions and close cooperation in all international affairs but by no means a single empire. As a patriotic Frenchman, Tocqueville, however, cannot help but envy the Anglo-Saxons and fear that they will own the future condemning all that he finds unique and valuable about the French culture to oblivion. This sentiment, which is by no means foreign to the modern Frenchmen and numerous Francophones, is clearly visible in the following passage from DA:

I think that nations, like men, almost always show from their youth the principal features of their destiny. When I see in what spirit the Anglo-Americans manage commerce, the opportunities that they find for doing it, the successes that they achieve, I cannot keep myself from believing that one day they will become the premier maritime power of the globe....There was a time when we too were able to create in the American wilderness a great French nation and balance the destinies of the New World with the English....But a combination of circumstances that would be too long to enumerate deprived us of this magnificent heritage. (DA II, 648-650)

The use of the word “nation” could suggest that Tocqueville means simply the nation-state with its colonies. However, I believe that this is not the case. Somewhat disturbingly Tocqueville in

the same chapter uses the category of “race” interchangeably with the category of the “nation.” He speaks, for instance, about the competition between the Spanish and English race over dominance in America rather than about the competition between England/USA and Spain (ibid., 651).

It is, however, widely understood that Tocqueville does not use the category of race in the same way as the early quasi-biological and pseudoscientific racists. This becomes clear to any student of the correspondence between Tocqueville and his former secretary from the Foreign Ministry – Arthur de Gobineau. When Gobineau publishes his manifesto of scientific racism in 1853 (1915), Tocqueville writes the author telling him that he believes that his doctrines are “quite false” and knows that they are “very pernicious” (Tocqueville 1959, 227). Along with socialism, which he examines in R, Tocqueville sees racism as part of the “group of materialistic theories” and, indeed, “one of its most dangerous members, for it applies fatalism not merely to individuals but to those perennial conglomerations of individuals called races” (ibid. 224). Tocqueville, as I noted in Chapter 5, is himself often accused of fatalism. Interestingly, however, when criticizing Gobineau Tocqueville carefully differentiates Gobineau’s materialistic and reductionistic fatalism and the Augustinian tradition that he feels a strong affinity to. He writes:

You may, nonetheless, be right in defending yourself from the charge of materialism. Your doctrine is rather a sort of fatalism, of predestination, if you wish but, at any rate, very different from that of St. Augustine, from the Jansenists, and from the Calvinists (the very last are closest to your doctrines), since you tie predestination and matter closely together. (ibid. 227)

In a letter to Beaumont, Tocqueville is less considerate and writes that Gobineau’s thoughts are “more appropriate to a horse dealer than a statesmen” (Craiutu and Jennings 2009, 328) and he does not believe in anything Gobineau writes “at all” (ibid.). Nevertheless, in the very same letter Tocqueville also describes his own approach to “race” and nationality as a cultural category:

I think that there is in each nation, whether it comes from race or rather the education of the centuries, something very tenacious, perhaps of a permanent character, which combines itself with all the episodes of a nation's destiny and which can be perceived through all its fortunes and all epochs of its history (ibid.).

In the above fragment, Tocqueville clearly acknowledges that the civilizational identity of a given society is something that does not change as easily as its political institutions. As I have already noted, in DA Tocqueville often writes about the English and Spanish global competition in America. However, being a well-informed person and writing in 1830's he has to be aware of the liberation of some of the former colonies in those regions. Tocqueville had surely heard and read about new countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Equator and Peru. However, people like Simon Bolivar or Francisco de Paula Santander for Tocqueville did not cease to be Spanish in sense of their civilizational identity. In short, Tocqueville seems to suggest that nations defined as cultural communities can beget political offspring that with time become more independent but which will always retain some features of their antecedents. For brevity's sake, Tocqueville, however, still calls the relatively young political children using their parent's name. When he writes about "Spain" or about "England," he, however, seems to mean "the global house of the English" or "the global house of the Spanish." Such musings and subdivisions can seem very foreign to our modern sensibilities but in the nineteenth century they were very much self-explanatory.

As for the main reason for the French ineptness in establishing colonies, Tocqueville does mention one crucial problem. Interestingly, it is a variation of same problem that according to him is often faced by new republics and consists in pursuing stern "administrative centralization" (DA II, 429) while disregarding the need for a slower development of political identity, i.e. "political centralization." The only difference is that in the case of republics the early administrative centralization will lead to despotism and in the case of colonial enterprises it will

simply lead to the failure of governance. Tocqueville, as we have already noted, fears above all democratization in a state where old regime had already introduced strong administrative centralization. Let us now compare this insight with what he has to say about the failure of French colonies in Canada:

The French carried to America the tradition of absolute monarchy; the English came there with the customs of a free people.¹³³ When the French arrived in Canada they first founded a city that they called Québec. From this city the population spread little by little by degrees, like a tree that spreads its roots in a circle. Québec has remained the central point, and the French of Canada are still today only one and the same people, submitted in most cases to one and the same government. ≠ {It was not this way in the United States, above all in the part of the country that was called New England.} We have seen, furthermore, how the colonies were founded. Each province and each district so to speak was populated separately by men strangers to one another, or associated for different ends. So the English of the United States found themselves from the beginning divided into a great number of small distinct societies that were attached to no common center, and it was necessary for each one of these small societies to take care of its own affairs, since nowhere did you see a central authority that naturally had to and easily could provide for them (DA II, 632).

In his several writings on French colonies in Africa, Tocqueville's attitude (as Jennifer Pitts rightly observes) clearly evolves. He starts in 1833 with an almost Pollyannaic vision of harmonious coexistence between the Arabs and the French. He even seems to believe that the French will be able to improve on the Anglo-Saxon model and become more benevolent towards the Arabic people than the English towards the Native Americans. This motive is visible when he writes about the affinity between French colonists and Canadian Native Americans, which is a repetition of similar argument found in DA (525-547). In his later (between 1841-1847) reports on Algeria addressed to the French assembly Tocqueville, however, becomes more somber and goes as far as to allow scorched earth tactics in quenching rebellions. This is also the moment in

¹³³ ≠ - crossed out vertically or diagonally in the manuscript, but included in the 2010 edition of DA.

Tocqueville's diplomatic and political career at which Cheryl Welch is most apt to see him tormented by guilt and engaged in self-deception to justify the violence exacted against people whom he saw as the African counterparts of Native Americans.

However, both in his early and in late writings on empire Tocqueville persistently repeats the argument concerning a grassroots development of colonial local liberty and the possibility of building future development on this basis. In his early essay on "Some Ideas about what prevents the French from having Good Colonies" (Tocqueville 2010b, 3-15) Tocqueville writes:

Nearby, on the ocean coast, the English come to settle. Some are sent by the mother country; others are fleeing from her. Once they have set foot on American soil, they become foreigners to England, so speak, just as England appears little preoccupied with governing them. From the start, they have their political assemblies and tribunals, they appoint their magistrates, organize their militia, provide for their needs, and laws. The metropole gets involved in almost none of their internal affairs; it acts only to protect their commerce and to secure them against foreigners. (ibid, 4)

He clearly encourages the French to learn from the British, all in spite of the fact that a larger part of the British colonies in America have already successfully rebelled. Still, Tocqueville, who according to Boesche (2005) is supposed to be an unreflecting, uncritical, ironfisted imperialist urges Paris to be like the British and allow the colonies to cherish "individual energy" and pursue the "art of governing themselves" (ibid.). Later Tocqueville becomes somewhat disillusioned and during the rebellion of Abd-el-Kader, he writes that France should use "all [available] means of desolating the tribes that support him" (2001, 71), which includes burning harvests and relocating whole villages. Cheryl Welch believes that when Tocqueville in the same essay calls Abd-el-Kader the "Muslim Cromwell" who wants to create a centralized theocratic empire of his own, he is being insincere, semi-ironic and tries to silence his own guilt. It is, however, quite possible, that Tocqueville, indeed, saw a similarity between the violent revolutionaries and the religious extremists and that he feared to see the world dominated by those two groups so much that he

found imperialism a preferable alternative and an efficient way of delivering political order to the less developed parts of the globe. Again, we must allow Tocqueville to speak for himself even if his explanations are ethically unacceptable from the point of the contemporarily dominant convictions.

In his later post-rebellion writings, Tocqueville also advocates for the temporary centralization of civil administration in colonies in the hands of one, Parisian politician. Interestingly, however, he never completely abandons two elements of his former concept: protecting the indigenous religions through educating the Islamic “clerics” and eventually devolving the political power. In the same late, 1847 essay, he for instance, urges the French to build more mosques. Once the rebellion is quenched he is also quick to speak of restraining the “centralization in Paris” (ibid., 161). To be sure he is more moderate than in his early writings, but he continues to advise the assembly by saying, “In Africa deprive the central powers of some of their functions and restore these to the municipal authorities. In Algiers, simplify the machinery of central administration...return responsibility for secondary affairs to the local authorities, or permit them to deal directly with Paris. Place all administrative authorities under the direction or at least under the surveillance of the political power” (ibid.). The administration, however, paid little attention, and soon France itself was again about to become an illiberal empire.

Tocqueville, when writing the reports on Algeria, naturally puts on a hat of a builder of French power and on that ground becomes a target of moral criticism. Nevertheless, his thesis concerning the different and more fortuitous developmental path of the former British colonies and in general liberal colonies is often explored by the contemporary political scientists who examine the correlation between the colonial past and the politico-economic achievements of the former colonies as independent states. This kind of research, naturally, in no way exonerates any

form of colonialism on moral grounds; it is, however, yet another observation made by Tocqueville that was later corroborated by modern research in the field of comparative political science. One of the most interesting work of this kind is that of James Mahoney (2010), who after conducting an extensive study of the history of South American political bodies fully confirms Tocqueville's insights on the developmental benefits of the more liberal model of colonialism represented by the British and, for a short period in the eighteenth century, by the Spanish Bourbons. Mahoney juxtaposes such liberal colonialism with the adverse developmental effects produced by the Portuguese or Habsburgian centralized, aristocratic, statist and mercantilist way of colonizing.¹³⁴

When researching the postcolonial developments in Asia, Jeff Goodwin (2001) reached conclusions that are very similar to Mahoney's. What Goodwin observes is that former mercantilist French and Dutch colonies interacted with the Japanese occupational forces in a completely different way than the former British domains. And once Nippon's imperial project

¹³⁴ The two distinctive modes of colonization Mahoney describes are mercantilist colonialism and liberal colonialism (ibid., 50-183). The mercantilist model (Habsburg Spain and Portugal) is characterized by controlled economy, limits on exports and a rigid hierarchical social structure with a strong role of aristocracy. The liberal (British, and Spanish Bourbons who succeeded the Habsburgs) is characterized by a strong role of the local, settled bourgeoisie, more autonomous economic development and an expanding role of the local institutions. Based on the general knowledge of global economic history, Mahoney expects (ibid., 28) that high levels of postcolonial development takes place either following a strong liberal colonization (Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia, New Zealand - not in Latin America, but mentioned among his examples) or following a weak mercantilist colonization (Argentina, Chile, Costa-Rica, southern Brazil Uruguay). Low levels of postcolonial development occur either following a strong mercantilist colonization (Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala) or a weak liberal colonization, in which the colonizers actually enforced the patron-client relations and ruled indirectly (British Africa). Mahoney chooses Latin America as his case study, because on that continent some culturally similar societies were exposed to very divergent colonial experience, i.e. both weakly and strongly colonized mercantilist colonies were subject to varying levels of liberalization later in their history. This, naturally, provides for an excellent comparative research material. What Mahoney finds in his sample (ibid., 253-271) is that countries or regions that were relatively unimportant (weakly colonized) under the mercantilist rule and became very important under the liberal rule (strongly colonized) in their postcolonial history experienced the highest levels of development (Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela). In contrast, countries that were important centers for mercantilist rulers and later peripheries under the liberal regimes, had the weakest results (Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala). The states that were important both for liberals and mercantilists experienced an intermediate level of development (Mexico, Peru, Colombia). States that were important for neither of the two regimes experienced divergent level of development depending on how they organized their economies in the nineteenth century (El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Chile and Paraguay).

had fallen, French and Dutch highly centralized domains were far more likely to undergo the communist revolutions and eventually remain governed (often up till now) by post-revolutionary mono-party systems. Naturally, it would be a mistake to put forward a hypothesis that Anglo-Saxon colonies are all democratic; even now when examining the political map of the world this does not always seem to be the case. Nevertheless, they are all exceptionally stable, immune to communist revolutions, and entrepreneurial when compared to the regional background.¹³⁵ As for the French colonies, Franklin Delano Roosevelt apparently had a good reason to scold the Frenchmen as those “who had done the poorest job of all colonial powers” (Spector 2007, 96). Indeed, the president was probably right in saying that “the French had done nothing for the population [of their colonies] but had misgoverned and exploited it” (ibid.). This remark of the American president clearly resonates with Tocqueville’s fears that unless Frenchmen listen to his advice they will never be able to create good government in their colonies and his negative

¹³⁵ This is partly because in those colonies, a significant amount of the financial and political capital always resided in the hands of the indigenous population. While Vietnam in the late forties had to issue dramatic calls for national solidarity to gather enough rice to feed the starving population, the Malaysians very early on initiated market economy processes. Actually, according to Spector that process was much faster than the British desired. The moment food was distributed based on a stamp system “the black market flourished” (Spector 2007, 88). A common quip was that the British Military Administration acronym, BMA actually meant “Black Market Administration” (ibid.). The fact that the independent, local albeit “black” market developed so quickly after the war is indicative of two very important features of the Malayan society. Firstly, there were people with enough valuables to invest them and engage in trade with an acceptable margin of profit. Secondly, the local elites were apparently quite independent and entrepreneurial. It, however, comes as little surprise that an empire of merchants had trading colonies with tradesmen as their local elites. In contrast, the French and the Dutch treated their colonies solely as a source of cheap resources and instilled an almost feudal model of social relations; later the Japanese more or less preserved this state of affairs. Ho Chi Minh observantly claimed that for Cochinchina the change during the second world war amounted to the “French imperialist wolf” being “devoured by the Japanese hyena” (ibid., 102). Korea, which was occupied by Japan since 1910, was another example of this strategy of ruthless, predatory exploitation. Fortunately for Koreans they had an ancient tradition of statehood they could at least partly fall back on after the war. In fact much like the Poles in the Russian Empire and later under the Soviet Protectorate, Koreans felt they are civilizational superior to their new masters and thus nurtured the memories of their former political tradition with extreme piety (ibid., 140). Not surprisingly, the pro-Western sympathies seemed to be also higher in the former Anglo-Saxon colonies. The Japanese perhaps won the English Malaya relatively easily but this ease was nothing compared to being granted the French domain “without a fight” (ibid., 94). It was also no secret that the French administration swiftly began to collude with imperial Japan under the auspices of the Vichy government. In contrast, the Malaysians even if they saw the British defeated, never witnessed them collaborating with the Japanese. Whereas “in the Philippines, Japanese troops had been stalled for almost four months by the stubborn defense of Filipino troops fighting alongside the American forces...” (ibid., 95).

assessment of France's achievements in Canada. In accordance with the Tocquevillian logic, centralized and micromanaged Habsburgian, Dutch or French rule in the colonies meant that as those overseas territories matured in the era of democratic revolution, their internal structure invited a communist revolution followed by an authoritarian regime, as did domestic absolutism in Russia (see the previous chapter) and China (see the next chapter).

As for Tocqueville's teaching on the importance of grounding new governments in the indigenous religious tradition, this judgment too is repeated by modern political scientists. In his recent work Francis Fukuyama observes that in the Arab world traditional monarchies were "quickly replaced by secular nationalist military officers, who proceeded to centralize authority in powerful executives that were limited by neither legislatures nor courts. The traditional role of Ulama was abolished in all of these regimes, and was replaced with a "modernized" law that emerged solely from the executives" (Fukuyama 2011, 286). As a result, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, which was never colonized and developed its own adaptive version of old regime, most "Arab regimes turned into oppressive dictatorships that failed to produce either economic growth or personal freedom for their people" (ibid., 286). Importantly, Fukuyama approvingly quotes Noah Feldman (2008), who argues that the robust political movements opting for the return to sharia gained support not because of some intrinsic backwardness of Islamic societies, but precisely because of the widespread dissatisfaction with the despotic nature of the new regimes that with respect to the rule of law performed far worse than the traditional religious institutions. Even from the point of view of the moderates, sharia is superior to the whims of the despot because it is, at the very least, based on written, legal clauses that can be subject to an open dispute in the court of law.

In other words, Fukuyama argues that if the Islamic world is to have some independent judiciary and legislature, then as in the case of the West its constitutional design has to be

grounded in some form of “higher law background” (see Corwin 1955). In the West this background was provided by the Greco-Roman and Christian political thought that only later took on the more secularized and modernized form of constitutions. If in the Islamic world a similar mechanism is to be employed, then, in accordance with Tocquevillian insights, this will be done only in cooperation with some conscientious Islamic scholars. And if those scholars are scarce, one should again consider Tocqueville’s advice that in modern circumstances would amount to establishing scholarships, aiding educational foundations and improving the functioning of legal departments of the old Islamic universities.

Conclusions

To be sure, Tocqueville in writing on Islam and colonialism is not describing the interactions between independent states, but between the colonies and the metropolis. Moreover, his general treatment of religion may strike a more sensitive reader as instrumental. Still, Tocqueville’s study of the development of colonies and the relations between religion and the state remains pertinent for modern political science. The readers, however, have to separate the relevant parts of Tocqueville’s vision of global politics from his imperialistic rhetoric as well as display some level of historical expertise in examining Tocqueville’s motives for advocating for the preservation of traditional religions. Once a careful and discerning reading is employed, it become clear that Tocqueville embraces some of the basic concepts that future generations of researchers will use to explain relations between religion and politics as well as the democratization and the development of the post - colonial states.

The main practical implications of his teaching on religion and democratization in the colonies consist, firstly, in observing that sustainable democratization starts at the local level. Therefore, until political practices of accountability and the rule of law are present at the level of the municipalities, no major revolution or coup will bring a lasting improvement of the

governance, even if for a short period it will effectively liberate the people from the former authority. Secondly, the colonial legacy of absolutism with its peculiar (mercantilist) economics and administrative practices is a great liability for the future development of any state.

Centralized, weak power after undergoing a rapid democratic modernization is likely to develop into a form of an equally centralized strong power (Compare Huntington 1968, 144), which in more recent times implies, for instance, a transition into authoritarianism or totalitarianism.

Thirdly, infusing traditional societies with Western notion of secularism can have adverse effects and fuel extremism. Fostering rampant secularism in developed societies, on the other hand, can create a fertile ground for equally radical pseudo-religious ideologies.

In conclusion, critics of Tocqueville are justified in their observations that he is less in tune with modern sensibilities in his writings on empire and colonialism than in his works on America and France. Nevertheless, in spite of disturbing to some of our modern sensibilities and having certain Machiavellian moments coupled with a set of “noble lies,” Tocqueville in all his works maintains a consistent theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 6

TOCQUEVILLE AND MODERN REVOLUTIONARY STUDIES

As I have observed in Chapter 4, political philosophy no longer adheres to the once influential Marxian revolutionary theory. This work argues that over time, especially the theories of another XIX century thinker – Alexis de Tocqueville have proven to be remarkably perceptive and endowed with immense predictive power, especially when it comes to the description of revolutions. Tocqueville owes the popularity of his theories on revolution among contemporary students of politics to three aspects of his thought. First, he bases his theses on a combination of empirically recorded history and philosophy proper rather than just on deductively devised theories. Secondly, Tocqueville explicitly refuses to construct a closed system where all philosophical phenomena are ultimately reduced to a single cause and all conclusions follow from axiomatic assumptions. Thirdly, Tocqueville neither demonized revolutions, nor glorified them, although, in general he saw those phenomena as tragic failures of politics in changing societies.

Tocqueville and the Modern Explanations of Revolutions

Tocqueville is now quoted by students of revolution of almost all hues. He, however, remains more important for some researchers than for others. One of the first major non-Marxian theories of revolution derived from Tocqueville's DA and AR is that of the James Davies who stresses that "revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a period of sharp reversal" (Davies 1962, 6). This phenomenon is also described by Jon Elster who claims that "in the social sciences, 'the Tocqueville paradox' refers to the idea that subjective discontent (and hence the likelihood of revolution) and objective grounds for discontent may be inversely related to each other" (2006, 58). And although Davies claims that his theories are derived from both Marx and Tocqueville, the quotations from Tocqueville are far more precise and conspicuous.

Tocqueville, as I have already noted, argued that the absolutist regime replaced the local elites and intermediary institutions with centralized administration and this process resulted in a proto-democratic preponderance of central authorities. Power, however, is bought at the price of responsibility, and therein the J-curve¹³⁶ mechanism of democratic revolution becomes apparent. As the central government becomes omnipotent, it also becomes ultimately responsible for all social affairs (AR, 71-80). Thus, when minor setbacks occur the society immediately turns against the government. Davies himself, however, veers into the psychological reading of Tocqueville and ascribes the revolutionary mechanism to the universal features of human character, noting that we become easily accustomed to improving living standards and more demanding as the quality of life increases.

It would be, however, far too simple to claim that Tocqueville simply states that economic advancement causes revolution. Firstly, the economic advancement needs to be fairly rapid and sped up by economic growth. Tocqueville notes the following:

The number of factories, workshops and blast furnaces had multiplied so rapidly in Paris as the Revolution drew near that, in the end, the government grew alarmed. The sight of this increase filled its mind with purely imaginary fears. One particular council decree of 1782 carried the that ‘the King, fearing that the rapid increase of factories might result in a use of wood which would damage town supplies, henceforth forbids the erection of such establishments within a radius of fifteen leagues around the city’. (AR, 84)

Secondly, the newly affluent society needs to encounter a set of clientalist social networks that stifle its activities but do not prevent its economic progress. This constitutes another

Tocquevillian paradox; as the new elites raise their heads, the old ones insist more and more on

¹³⁶ The term comes from a famous shape of the graph that shows the economic advancement of citizens over time. According to the theorem, a „J” shaped pattern is indicative of a possible revolution. The pattern occurs when a long period of economic advancement is followed by a sharp but relatively shallow downfall of in affluence. Such a temporary slump is not enough to materially deprive the society, but just enough to anger it.

the traditional and conventional divisions since they are the only real source of their declining power. The French thinker first observes that the economic advancement indeed equalized the French society since “seemingly all men living, there especially those occupying the middle and higher ranks of society – the only two ones which could be observed – resembled each other exactly” (AR, 85). However, “on the other hand, within this uniform crowd there was still an extraordinary collection of minor barriers which split it up into a large number of groups within each of which there existed, as it were, a particular social group that was involved with only its own concerns while not taking part in the life of the whole community” (ibid.).

Thirdly, the conflict is exacerbated if the old elites are losing their factual status while retaining most of their formal privileges. Tocqueville is aptly clear about the fact that as noblemen “gradually grew poor” they started ceding their “land, piece by piece, to the peasant farmers, retaining for himself only his manorial dues which maintained the appearance rather than reality of his former status” (AR, 87). At the same time, “the instinct of government slipped away from them [the nobles]” (ibid) and as we have already noted in the previous chapter the absolutist intendants have circumvented the former prerogatives of feudal lords. Now they were locked in the cage of their own privileges. Being himself an aristocrat, Tocqueville is naturally not as critical of the French nobles as one could have been. However, using Mancur Olson’s terminology (1982), one can easily observe that French aristocrats during the reign of Louis XVI actually fell below the status of “stationary bandits” or common gangsters since they collected the “protection money” without offering any substantial protection services. The only real protection that was available was provided by the king and his clerks (mostly of modest background).

Generally, the peasants were prepared to continue to pay the *taille* –a tax levied on non-nobles as they did in the past. Interestingly, however, Tocqueville finds the cities and especially Paris at the same time most opposed to *taille* and least likely to pay in full. As he notes “the urban

middle class as a group had a thousand ways of reducing the burden of the *taille* and often of escaping it altogether” (AR, 97). It is, however, precisely the fact that the privileges were not attached to any real power that was so irritating. According to Tocqueville, in the feudal past:

...the nobles possessed annoying privileges, enjoyed rights that people found irksome but they safeguarded the public order, dispensed justice, had the law upheld, came to the help of the weak and directed public business. As the nobility ceased to conduct those affairs, the weight of its privileges seemed more and more burdensome and its very existence was, in the end, no longer understandable.
(AR, 44)

Thus, the history of certain type of nobility comes to an end. Olson described, how the roaming bandits become stationary bandits; Tocqueville described how their descendants became “melancholic” bandits and were eventually swept away by the social forces they themselves unleashed but could no longer control. And having only their family traditions and titles left untouched, made the nobles cling to those the more desperately and thus with each become more and more separated from the persons of non-noble birth.

The Olsonian analogy goes even further. Although the real power rested with the king, the absolutist state was still not locked in the “iron cage” of professional bureaucracy. On the contrary, it retained a lot of the characteristics of clientalist structure. Aristocracy was only one of the clients of the court; other included guilds, corporations, and various coteries. All of those bodies were vertically structured and seeking to effectively block all the ambitions of young, educated but not well connected persons. As Tocqueville notes in his descriptions of guilds, “the right to work was tantamount to a privilege which the king could sell” (AR, 108); as a consequence each guild became “a small closed aristocracy and finally we saw the creation of those monopolies so damaging to any progress in the skilled professions” (ibid.).

The description of this system of patronage and the new middle class that opposed it

bears a striking resemblance to Michael Mousseau's (2002) account of the clash between the meritocratic, contract-based market society and the traditional, clientalist community. In Mousseau's terms, the various "small aristocracies" and their clients were the main in-groups. Their power was based mainly on a set of allegiances, traditional ties and rituals. According to this approach, the in-group/out-group conflict is one of the main mechanisms behind some of the most violent process in history. In one of his most well-known articles, Mousseau uses this theory to explain Islamic terrorism in which the former members of a traditional in-group rebel against the new, impersonal, market-society. The same theory can explain modern revolutions; some of them can be described as rebellion of neo-aristocrats who reject market society (the Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution, Iranian revolution) and some as rebellions of out-groups that favor transparency and economic freedom (the beginning of the French revolution, the American revolution and the initial phase of the Arab Spring).¹³⁷

Of course, Tocqueville would add that the rule of law necessary for conducting exchanges based on voluntary contracts, is predicated on understanding how to exercise ones freedom, which in neither a short, nor an easy process. The legacy of centralization and corruption, (which is essentially a world market cultures' use for "normal" clientalist relations) can be therefore expected to be extremely prevalent. Hence consecutive French governments were so quick to become surrounded by new interest groups and thus continually kept inciting new revolutions. Scarcely had the flamboyant Napoleonic era ended, and Stendhal in his *The Red and the Black* (2002) was once again obliged to bemoan rise of a new set of "small aristocracies" that precluded social advancement based on work and merit. Needless to say that knowing that overcoming clientalism is such a daunting task from its own history, the West should have no illusions about

¹³⁷ See (Mousseau 2002b).

the long march that the third world states are facing. Indeed, it is Mousseau's conclusion that the best way to combat phenomena such as global terrorism is to provide some assistance to the states that find themselves in the difficult moment of transition from the clientalist society to the market economy.

The Weakness of the State and the Need to Overcome the Revolutionary Violence

Probably the weakest point in Tocqueville's model is the strange ambiguity in which he at the same time tries to praise the local feudal, organic community and criticize the particularism, corruption and clientalism of the absolutist regime. Clientalism is clearly something the old regime inherited from feudalism. Tocqueville, however, has a soft spot for feudal history; he, for instance, describes how feudal lords often became godfathers to the offspring of their tenants or how the nobles defended the liberties of their people, etc. However, just as in case of Marx, Tocqueville's political theory makes sense only if one assumes that feudalism is something that has to be rejected. And Tocqueville paints two possible types of such a rejection: the new despotism that increases the state control, and the new republicanism that tries to combine the rule of law with liberty (at least for a time being).

One explanation of Tocqueville's ambiguity about feudalism is to assume that in AR he uses the word "feudal" as a synonym to what he calls aristocracy in DA. And thus just as in DA, in AR he advocates for the preservation of some of the feudal/aristocratic virtues but at the same time desires to find for them a new form of articulation. And, if we are to adopt a Straussian interpretation, we may safely conclude that Tocqueville believes that political virtue is always aristocratic in the Platonic sense.

Interestingly, however, according to Tocqueville, the problem of the old regime and of its last great men, such as the physiocrat Turgot or the lawyer Malesherbes, was precisely that it was too ambiguous in its understanding of what constitutes civic virtue. The meaning of the old

symbols was lost and the new ones were not allowed to develop. The old township and parish became replaced by a rule of court statisticians rather than some new forms of local government. And because the future revolutionaries and the *philosophes*, according to Tocqueville, developed without any experience in governing even a hamlet, their rhetoric became their only skill and their only weapon. Hence the old regime was becoming dangerously despotic in its center but at the same time it was less and less able to penetrate the society. It also kept using and abusing the feudal symbols that carried little real power. Those symbols of power eventually became items left for sale, which further confused the society. The procedures of buying a title and then pretending to be a member of the closed aristocratic caste or entering the guild were more or less clear; but what one needs to do to become a minister or an intendant or a person responsible for a large governmental enterprise was a well-guarded secret one could learn only by trial and error.

According to Tocqueville, once the government had sold all the offices it could it was left both without that “endless, supply of favors, supports and honors and money” (AR, 114) and without the democratic legitimization. It was thus unable to tap into the human resources that can be freed only through political liberty. It is not without a reason that according to Tocqueville it is the destruction of political liberty and the separation of classes that ultimately weakened the French government. Let us for a moment return here to the discussion of the problem of democratic legitimization presented in Chapter 2. Tocqueville seems to suggest is that the old regime’s problem was that although it was already as centralized as a modern democratic state, it still did not find a suitable way to tap into the new form of legitimization. This constituted a major difference between the French court and the strikingly “republican” English monarchy. To put it bluntly, the French citizens interacted with the government only through curious practices that we would nowadays label as corruption and the government communicated with the citizens mainly through edicts.

Thus Tocqueville touches upon another paradox, the problem with the old regime was that it was both despotic and weak. Or to put it differently, it used its force to destroy active political life but could not maintain power due to its internal contradictions. Tocqueville aptly notes that when the monarchy tried to gain popularity, it ran into debt and created a deeper dependency of the local authorities on the resources coming from Paris. Moreover, none of the government's prerogatives was "consistently acknowledged or established on a sturdy footing" (AR, 114). As a result, "its scope for action was extensive, but it still moved forward with hesitant steps, as in a dark, unknown place" (ibid.). To make matters worse, the administration "feeling that it was recently created and of low birth, was always hesitant in its approach if it should meet any obstacle in its path" (AR, 114). Thus the business of government became increasingly "complicated, cumbersome, slow and costly" (AR, 120).

The economic (debt) and political weakness (detachment from the society) of the government is another prerequisite for the revolution. Revolution is after all characterized by violence, and violence used for political purposes is in modern times monopolized¹³⁸ by the state. Therefore, in order for a revolution to take place, there must be a power vacuum within the state. Tocqueville of course provides more support to the J-Curve psychologicistic approach to revolutions, however, the above insight are also conducive to an interpretation in the tradition of power-struggle theories of revolution elaborated by such contemporary authors as Theda Skocpol (1980) and Charles Tilly (1973). Tilly, for instance, describes politics as strife between contending groups that form sub-polities within the large polity. In the contest between those factions the government is the ultimate prize. As for revolutions, according to Tilly:

The multiplication of polities is the key. A revolution begins when a government previously under the control of a single, sovereign polity becomes the object of

¹³⁸ This has been true already in the case of the French old regime that for instance outlawed duels (since 1626) and progressively decreased the amounts of weapons in private hands.

effective, competing, mutually exclusive claims from two or more separate polities. A revolution ends when a single polity – by no means necessarily the same one – regains control over the government. (1973, 439)

In other words revolutions are not sparked by the society's aspirations, but by the ruling elite's practice of limiting the access to the precious resource called "power." Of course, every government by definition limits access to power: thus, in accordance with Skocpol's expansion of Tilly's theory, government needs to be relatively weak if it gives in to contenders.

It seems that Tocqueville's original philosophy provides a connection between the psychological J-curve theory and the power-struggle theories of Skocpol and Tilly. Tocqueville is able to do so by agreeing that the first impulse is created by a temporal drawback, but at the same time stressing that in states like France, which are imperfectly centralized and absolutist, the revolution's aim is not to uproot the government but to increase its role. Based on Tocqueville's detailed account one may argue that the same mechanism occurred in Russia and China (primary focuses of Skocpol's study). In other words, in an absolutist state a particular revolutionary group wins precisely because it promises to create a government that is stronger, more oppressive and more decisive. Moreover, in the course of revolutionary civil war, the winning revolutionary faction usually has ample occasions to prove its determination, cruelty and ruthlessness.

According to Tocqueville, "the regime destroyed by the revolution is almost always better than the one that immediately preceded it and experience teaches us that the most hazardous moment for a bad government is normally when it is beginning to reform" (AR, 175). Therefore, an extremely sudden and profound political change can cause a shock that will lead to a reoccurrence and radicalization of the atavistically-despotic elements of the former regime. Eventually, new, post-revolutionary polities can simply "succeed in being more perfect tyrannies" (Fukuyama 2011, 286).

Goldstone (1982) agrees with Tocqueville and expands his theory of post-revolutionary government even to the American Revolution. As he writes, “it is widely agreed that full-scale revolutions, whether liberal or socialist, from the American colonies to the Chinese republic, have led to more centralized, more powerful governments than had existed under the old regime” (ibid., 201). One may, naturally, argue that the level of violence and terror in the course of a revolution varies, but it is never smaller than the prerevolutionary level. Similarly, the overall size of government almost always increases after a revolution.

One should cast aside the romantic myth of liberalizing revolutions for at least one additional reason. There is no evidence that mass revolutions lead to democracy, and there is some evidence that points to the contrary. Indeed, according to Adam Przeworski (1999) democratization (in the normal sense) seems to be more of a revolution-avoidance strategy, in which the old regime strikes a deal with the moderate opposition, than an outcome a mass uprising that usually marks a failure of any negotiations.

Tocqueville also seems to suggest that democratization (understood as the creation of a democratic republic) in France did not occur in the wake of a revolution but as a slow, gradual process. In Russia and China, full democratization did not occur at all. America, on the other hand, was already locally democratic before the war of independence. Moreover, American elites consciously limited the revolutionary upheaval¹³⁹ and later prudently saw to it that the Tories, many of whom were initially supporters the former regime, were not automatically excluded from all political processes. In spite of this historical evidence, many thinkers still cherish a very romantic myth of the masses tossing away the yoke of tyranny, which, indeed, remains one of the

¹³⁹ Let us not forget that even the founding fathers’ and Benjamin Franklin’s preference was initially to negotiate with the British government or at least have an amicable divorce, war was a painful and expensive alternative for both sides.

most resilient influences of the Marxian vision of modern history. Tocqueville, on the other hand, clearly proposes a more somber and realistic approach to revolutions that allows his students to see both the opportunities and the costs of all revolutionary actions. This view is for instance supported by Zimmerman (1990), who, while believing that the French revolution was relatively liberalizing in general, adheres to Tocquevillian realism and dutifully quotes him on that (*ibid.*, 42). Among the most common results of revolution Zimmerman lists economic crisis (*ibid.*, 38), violence, oppression and very rarely democracy and liberalization

A valid question that may arise, however, is how, do we account for the huge democratizing shift of 1989? For the author of this work as for Jeff Goodwin (1994) and Jadwiga Staniszkis (1991), the crucial observation is that this was not a typical mass revolution. One might actually argue that in comparison to the old revolutions in France, Russia and China, the changes of 1989 were revolutions avoided rather than executed. They were clearly less violent (Goodwin 1994, 591) and resulted from a pact between the old regime and the opposition (*ibid.*, 592). One might also add that they empowered civil society rather than the state. A possible explanation for this is, however, that the state in many of the central European cases was a disguised occupational force representing the interests of the Kremlin elites. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that, in Russia itself the collapse of communism consisted mainly in a reshuffle of elites and a revision of economic policies without any lasting democratization.¹⁴⁰ What followed 1989 in Russia was a period of near anarchy and more recently an effort to rebuild the authoritarian and imperial power. Goodwin; also stresses that since the whole social hierarchy in the Central European regimes was tied to a central government; the social change did not turn against society itself but focused solely on negotiating with the government. This naturally led to

¹⁴⁰ According to recent research of the Freedom House, immediately after the Russian state started rebuilding its temporarily lost administrative strength, it became more authoritarian, see Freedom House (2013).

the privatization of the *nomenklatura* and a compromise that at first glance seemed quite rotten to the radical opposition.¹⁴¹

Generally, the path to democracy and capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe only further confirmed the Tocquevillian concept of the gradual unfolding of all substantive social changes. When the post-soviet states were freed from the influence of Moscow, most of them simply returned to where they found themselves politically in 1945. Poland became again a democracy that is marred by the old specter of authoritarian rule. Czech, Slovaks and the Baltic States also returned to their old republicanism. Bielarus and Eastern Ukraine, on the other hand, continued to cling to Russia not being able to find their own identity, which is exactly the same political problem they had before the war. Finally, the central Asian states again became sultanic autocracies.

It would seem that addressing the doubts concerning the truthfulness of Tocqueville's account one must examine the Tocquevillian theory of the expansion of government in its full perspective. Although sudden, extremely steep hikes of administrative power in a given area, like those produced by totalitarian regimes and political communism are bound to be relatively quickly corrected, the overall global trend is, indeed, clearly visible. Centralization, concentration and penetrative abilities of administrative power increase over time in every corner of the earth.

The Tocquevillian New Middle Ages?

In the final section of the final content chapter of this work, I would like to return to the question whether Tocqueville saw something even newer looming beyond the great democratic revolution? Firstly, however, we must focus on one more paradox. In spite of, all his criticism of the French revolution, Tocqueville feared, as we have already noted, that revolutions with time

¹⁴¹ Staniskisz 1992 provides a good example of such a disillusionment.

will become rare. Moreover, there are things for which Tocqueville cautiously praises the revolutions. Interestingly, his commendation of revolutions is phrased in a way very similar to his conditional praise of war. In the notes to the projected second part of AR, Tocqueville writes for instance that there is “sincerity and warmth” among revolutionary exaggerations and notes:

People had real convictions, everyone followed his own convictions boldly, passionately, was concerned with them and not with the role they would make him play, thus doing the most eccentric the most bizzare, sometimes the most ridiculous things, without intending to make themselves noticed. (Tocqueville 2001, 237)

Let us juxtapose this with the fears he voices in DA:

Will I dare to say it amid the ruins that surround me? What I dread most for the generations to come is not revolutions.

If citizens continue to enclose themselves more and more narrowly within the circle of small domestic interests and to be agitated there without respite, you can fear that they will end by becoming as if impervious to these great and powerful public emotions that disturb peoples, but which develop and renew them. When I see property become so mobile, and the love of property so anxious and so ardent, I cannot prevent myself from fearing that men will reach the point of regarding every new theory as a danger, every innovation as an unfortunate trouble, every social progress as first step toward a revolution, and that they will refuse entirely to move for fear that they would be carried away. I tremble, I confess, that they will finally allow themselves to be possessed so well by a cowardly love of present enjoyments, that the interest in their own future and that of their descendants will disappear, and that they will prefer to follow feebly the course of their destiny, than to make, if needed, a sudden and energetic effort to redress it. (DA IV, 1150)

Thus we see the category revolution in a completely new light. Tocqueville does not praise the phenomenon itself, but he openly praises something even the bloodiest revolution is indicative of. Tocqueville seems to yearn for a certain social youthfulness that is expressed by general preoccupation with political issues and the boldness in asserting one's views. In the two passages, one coming from the beginning of his writing career and one put to the paper in his last years, he writes about revolutions as one would write about the youthful excesses of a gifted and

talented human being. They are dangerous and will easily destroy someone who does not exercise at least some moderation, but still they are a sign of vitality.

As we have already noticed, the soft despotism in Tocqueville's general model is the ultimate regime, since it stifles all political movement for an unpredictably long stretch of time. Tocqueville openly ties this phenomenon with the aforementioned "cowardly love of present enjoyments" since from the point of view of the democratic people soft despotism is precisely the regime that "facilitates their pleasure, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, settles their estates, divides their inheritance" (DA, 1251). By promising stability, the soft despotism extinguishes normal revolutions understood as violent political events. Thus in the democratic era it is the last regime, analogous to Nietzsche's last man (1999, 7). This regime, indeed, cannot be quickly overthrown. One would have to wait for another slow process of a truly great revolution to see a lasting change after the soft despotism is born. This section will entertain the proposition that historically this period of stagnation that Tocqueville seems to predict can be deemed the new "Middle Ages."¹⁴² I choose the name because such an era would share many characteristics with the period that modern historians since the Renaissance traditionally described as the Middle Age; the "smaller" centuries that are neither primordial nor progressive; the hundreds of decades that differ very little between each other; a time with so little observable time in it, so to say.

The crucial point I wish to make is that the new Medieval era predicted by Tocqueville will by no means be a simple return to the past. The Tocquevillian Middle Ages will be characterized by a different spiritual identity and a far greater level of administrative centralization of power. Nevertheless, I believe that in this period we would still see a somewhat

¹⁴² I first introduced this concept in a recent essay that gained considerable recognition in Poland and was reprinted by several media (Kuź 2013), I am currently working on an English translation of this text.

perverse analogy to the era following the fall of the Roman Empire and predating the Reformation.

James Schleifer very aptly asks the pivotal question whether “*Démocratie*” would “usher in a New Dark Ages”¹⁴³ (2000, 279). Unfortunately, he does not expand that thought and omits to juxtapose the ideas of Tocqueville with other authors who also predicted that modernity will end in some neo-medieval era. Apart from MacIntyre (1984) one should focus especially on Pitrim Sorokin (1941/1991) and Nikolai Berdyaev (1933). Both of them, described their “New Middle Ages” as a rejection of the present materialism and a simple return to the spiritual past. The Tocquevillian though, however, is inherently suspicious of any easy returns to the past. Moreover, Tocqueville suspected that democracy has its own spirituality and thus the return to traditional religiosity may be problematic, in spite of all the salutary effects, it may or may not have on democracy. Thus, if we are to paint a truthful picture of the Tocquevillian Middle Ages, we would have to focus on the following factors: 1) the transformation of the drive towards equality into a neo-religious dogma; 2) the neo-feudal rise of the new aristocracy and the economic smoldering of the middle class; 3) reduction of technical innovativeness; 4) population decline and the lack of political revolutions over a prolonged period of time (the lifespan of several generations). Indeed, one may venture to make a claim that thus understood the “New Middle Ages” may have already commenced in certain corners of the world that not long ago saw themselves as the most progressive.

Most of the abovementioned four points have already been discussed in previous chapters. Now, I am merely trying to form a new Tocquevillian theory that in some points departs from the

¹⁴³ Schleifer with all probability borrowed the concept from Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, 263)

political reality known to Tocqueville himself and apply Tocqueville's thought to the decidedly contemporary political conditions.

Regarding the issue of the discrepancy between democratic dogma and democratic practice, one needs to note it was not historically uncommon for the old ethical prescriptions (ones that for various reasons become less observed in everyday-life but remain revered) to become fetishized.¹⁴⁴ Mankind has always tried to appease the God or gods by offering sacrifices, raising temples, building monasteries etc. All those activities are aimed at restoring the power of the ethical law that was not obeyed. Of course, creating a token of faith or, for that matter, a fetish does not necessarily imply disregarding the rule it represents. Nevertheless, the danger of appeasing the old law is clearly visible. The problem is by no means a new one, the Bible, for instance, describes numerous occasions on which either Yahweh himself or through his prophets rejected the sacrifices of Israel precisely because he felt they were just an act of appeasement.

Tocqueville suggests that the spiritual undercurrent of modern civilization is the strong belief in equality. He also stressed that this faith is expressed in such neo-religious forms of worship as pantheistic imagery and activities underscoring the possibility of infinite perfectibility. In modern times, it is very easy to recognize those categories in our humanitarianism ideas, eco-awareness and the perfectionist piety of healthy lifestyle. However, apart for those fairly obvious examples, one can also argue that we observe an increasing fetishization of the main principle of the democratic spirituality – the belief in human equality itself. According to most available data, the social mobility in the USA and Western Europe has progressively decreased in the recent years (Milanovic 2011); the rich tend to stay rich and the poor tend to remain poor. Thus the

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of various forms of fetishism see Pietz (1984).

Tocquevillian “revolving door” is turning more and more slowly. Moreover, the recent economic crisis disproportionately affects the younger generations, forming what some may call a new “lost generation” (Casselman and Walker 2013). However, as this very fundamental issue becomes more and more visible, we also witness that more and more of the political attention becomes focused on non-economic inequalities as if in a deliberate effort to overlook the obvious. This can create a suspicion that equality itself is being fetishized. Any hint of political, legal or economic disadvantage based on gender, ethnicity and sexual practices immediately irks our sensibilities. Formally¹⁴⁵ or informally, the developed countries are introducing various quotas to guard themselves against accusations of supporting such practices. But, at the same time, there seems to be a certain insincerity in our extreme preoccupation with those issues. In light of those processes, it may be that the famous switch from the modern to postmodern values (see Inglehart 1997) was premature and, perhaps, artificially engineered.

Unlike the socialists, Tocqueville never saw a state, even a socialistic state, as an answer to the social problems. It is not a coincidence that he often referred to the political product of centralization and bureaucratization not as “state power” but as “social power.” In stating this he indicates that future centralized and illiberal power structures may in many ways differ from the nation states. However, whatever social power they will have, will still be a product of the centralization that according to Tocqueville was initiated by nation states. Moreover, as I have already noted, Tocqueville clearly states that powerful states favor powerful industrial institutions and indeed transfer some of their power to such entities.¹⁴⁶ He also explicitly warns of the rise of a new “industrial aristocracy” that may be far less benevolent than the previous ones:

¹⁴⁵ For example, according to the Quota Project website (2013) about 40 countries (mostly considered developed) have introduced gender quotas to date.

¹⁴⁶ On the ties between modern states and modern corporations – see David Ciepley (2012).

I think that, everything considered, the manufacturing aristocracy that we see arising before our eyes is one of the harshest that has appeared on the earth; but at the same time it is one of the most limited and least dangerous.

Nonetheless, it is in this direction that the friends of democracy must with anxiety constantly turn their attention; for if permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy ever penetrate the world again, you can predict that they will come in through this door (DA III, 985).

In the twentieth century it seemed that Tocqueville was right and the new aristocracy, indeed, seemed to be the “least dangerous” of them all. Fortunes of the new nobles rose quickly and disappeared with equal speed. During the early phases of the digital revolution, the foundations of multibillion dollar companies that were still created in garages. However, recently the decreasing social mobility and practices such “patent trolling”¹⁴⁷ or the insistence on treating patent rights and copyrights as absolute, unfringeable entitlement seems to suggest that a less dynamic period in global economy is just about to begin. The visible slowdown of innovativeness, which was previously discussed, is yet another disturbing symptom.

Many readers of Tocqueville also overlook how much attention he pays to the issue of the democratic way of war and the level of expertise he displays in military matters. Tocqueville, for instance, recognizes the importance of the military revolution that is the creation of large infantry armies. He was even aware that in modern European history, this method of fighting was first put to practice in the fourteenth century by the Swiss (DA IV, 1180). Before that, the battlefields of the West were dominated by armored, well trained, smaller and highly mobile cavalry units. It was only in the classical period that infantry armies played a major role.

¹⁴⁷ That is patenting concepts without specific technological solutions solely for the sake of suing smaller entrepreneurs, who may not afford adequate legal services. Recent reports accuse Samsung, Microsoft and Apple of patent trolling; there is also a growing number of companies that specialize exclusively in this kind of activity, see Duhigg and Lohr (2012) .

Historically, some scholars¹⁴⁸ have pointed out that the rise of modern democracies in the nineteenth century (and earlier in France) correlated precisely with the need to provide political payoffs to the soldiers in large infantry armies. This naturally begs to draw a comparison between the modern republic and the ancient ones. In both cases, the republican government correlated with the importance of the infantry armies. Interestingly, however, the late modern neo-aristocratic traits are also visible in the military practices. In the recent decades, the most powerful armies not only became fully professionalized, but just as in the Middle Ages they are increasingly reliant on highly skilled individuals equipped with extremely expensive equipment. In extreme cases, the modern “knights” are merely operators of billion-dollar unmanned vehicles.

Finally, we must note all those trends that can be collectively singled out as the founding elements of the new Middle Ages form a fairly stable social system that in the foreseeable future will not be threatened by great revolution comparable to the events of 1783, 1789 or 1917. To be sure, our new-old world might be threatened by slow decay visible in the pauperization of the citizens and recurring economic crises, but not by revolutions. This is mainly because the social vitality Tocqueville so praises seems to be lost in the modern advanced societies both factually and figuratively, and the less advanced societies are already not far behind. It is not only the case of losing a taste for the political life due to “material enjoyments;” the tendency has also a lot to do with the demographic processes. The current “millennials” might be a lost generation not just because there are no more assets they can use; even more significantly, it is unlikely that they can perform a revolutionary change of the old social order simply because they do not live in young societies. Aging societies with negative or stable birth rate by their very nature favor safety over

¹⁴⁸ See Townshend (2005) for an overview.

reform. Conversely, all major revolutions, civil wars and uprisings shared at least one common feature: they were all fought by young men and women in relatively young societies.

Let us also add that negligible demographic growth and periodical demographic decline was historically one of the most prominent features of the medieval social reality. It is only in the nineteenth century that the West woke up to the new, Malthusian fears. Now, after decades of fear of overpopulation, we can finally say that both the UN¹⁴⁹ and major scientists predict that due to a set economic and cultural phenomena the global population will eventually stabilize. In Western Europe and the Far-East, the populations are, actually, already declining. Of course, fewer people will use less natural resources. The question is, however, can we avoid returning the feudal social practices once there will be no more threats of a young people's revolutions. One would, for instance, expect that the number of jobs for young people will grow as their number decline. However, the social reality of the rapidly aging Western Europe is radically different. Astonishingly, as the European demographic crisis exacerbates the unemployment numbers among young adults continue to grow (See Casselman and Walker 2013). One explanation is that a social group that is not threatened by a revolution¹⁵⁰ and has a democratic majority will automatically twist all the possible regulations in its favor. Tocqueville spoke about the old regime's corporations as the providers of the "the right to work". One may argue that late-modern, increasingly complicated labor codes and increasingly byzantine corporate structures play the same role, they protect the senior workers from the competition.

¹⁴⁹ See Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁰ It is not certain that even a complete collapse of the global economic system due to the indebtedness of the Western states will reverse the march towards neo-feudalism. Revolutions do not rejuvenate political bodies when they are coupled with a demographic decline. For instance, although, the late Roman Imperial culture was replaced by Christianity in one of the great historical revolutions, the demographically feeble Western empire was no longer salvageable (see Scheidel 2007).

Conclusions

This chapter points to the vitality of Tocquevillian insights in the realm of modern revolutionary studies. Tocqueville is a classic for the proponents of the J-curve theorem, as well as for the researchers favoring the institutional approach. He is also known for exploring the often illiberal effects of revolutions. At the same time, the “strange liberalism” of Tocqueville enabled him to combine his criticism of “normal” revolutions with a conditional commendation. Indeed, for all their dangers revolutions are for Tocqueville a sign of social vitality. The final section of this chapter deals with the description of the opposite of this social vitality, the historical category I call the “New Middle Ages.” By introducing this category I strive to arrive at a general description of a modern developed society that becomes fossilized in the post-democratic state suggested by Tocqueville’s political science of revolutions.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

In his recently published work on Tocqueville, Lucien Jaume (2008) speaks against treating Tocqueville simply as our contemporary and overlooking the particular historical context that gave birth to his thought. In my work I have, however, argued that while examining Tocqueville's times and life does provide important insights into his work it does not give Tocqueville full credit for the importance of his thought to the study of modern politics with all its glories and miseries. That is why this work departed from the historical approach, which indeed can be seen as both a source of its strength and weakness. On the one hand, I have attempted to show Tocquevillian theory as tool for exploring modern politics; on the other, in order to achieve my goal I necessarily had to simplify some of the historical nuances.

One may even argue that Tocqueville, like Rousseau, is a victim of his own mastery as a writer. Academics attached to the school of German philosophy may even suspect that there can be little real philosophy in work that reads so well. Nevertheless, this dissertation suggests that there is a guiding philosophical notion in Tocqueville's oeuvre. This guiding notion is, however, not what we might today call democracy. Tocqueville does not focus on one particular regime examined in a stable state of analytical isolation. He is the philosopher of revolution and change. He focuses on the mutability of modern politics. He tries to classify the changes he sees. He views some of them, in line with ancient insight, as cycles that do not institute a lasting change. Others, like passing from aristocracy to democracy, constitute for Tocqueville changes that may not be overlooked. And even though, as I have pointed in the final chapter, he does mention the possibility of a return to some form of aristocracy, he is adamant that the great revolutions never repeat themselves. It is we who need to use old notions to describe new things based on their remote resemblance.

To be sure, cyclical revolutions still happen, but in the general scheme of politics the Polybian wheel of regimes is in Tocqueville's science of politics replaced with the two vectors of equality and liberty. Tocqueville also asks fundamental methodological questions. What can we reasonably expect to predict in politics, and what changes can be perceived only after they occur? Asking this question in earnest is precisely what enables him to make bold prediction about the democratization on a global scale and still remain skeptical of his own theories. This skepticism, however, does not stifle Tocqueville, but on the contrary it is a major source of his creativity. He does not hesitate to apply his models not only to American and France, but also hits at their ability to travel to North Africa, Russia and further into the world. This part of Tocqueville's legacy was taken up by generations of other researchers. Long after the fall of the great "–isms" in political science, Tocqueville's open-ended political science of revolutions still continues to inspire. And part of the inspiration comes from the fact that his skepticism is a clear invitation to continue to challenge him and continue to develop "new sciences of politics" for worlds "entirely new." It is thus impossible to box his theories in and change them into a dogmatic belief.

Alluding to great, modern political philosophies such as Hegelianism, Marxism, etc., Robert Nisbet notes that, "it is in a way a high tribute to Tocqueville that at no time has there been, or is there likely to be, anything called Tocquevilleism" (1976, 65). Indeed, Tocqueville's approach to political philosophy embraces change more than that of any other nineteenth century thinkers: it embraces even its own mutability and finitude. In this respect Tocqueville anticipates Kuhn's philosophy of revolutions in science. He sees himself both as a paradigm-shifter and a part of the paradigm that will eventually be shifted. In spite of stating his moderation and attachment to tradition, Tocqueville is thus a true revolutionary, who did not insist even on the conservation of his own theories.

This, however, does not imply that he did not possess a general model of revolution and regime change that he persistently used in all his major works. This work in the initial chapters (Chapter 2 and 3) examined precisely this model and insisted that although Tocqueville's writings and his interest evolved over time, he was constantly working within the same general theoretical scheme. In this sense, there truly is a Tocquevilleism, but it is not perceived as such because Tocqueville's beautiful writing makes the conclusions he reaches almost too obvious. One does not see the forest for all the trees. An "-ism" indicates the existence of something external and tangibly different from the more natural and organic reality. Tocqueville, on the other hand, creates a theory of the political world in which we live in a way that does not immediately alert us. At no point does he attempt to upset all the reader's commonsensical convictions. He targets them progressively and slowly weaves a net of small, brilliant and paradoxical *bon mots*. He seems chaotic and incomprehensive, but with each new paragraph he slowly pulls the reader deeper into his philosophy.

Indeed, we only see how innovative this philosophy was, when we compare how the comparative political science based on the Tocquevillian philosophy differs from its main contenders. Tocqueville's views on regime changes, religion, and colonialism prove to be remarkably pertinent. Chapter 4, for instance, described how Tocqueville's early insights were utilized by Astolphe de Custine in his remarkable description of Russia. Chapter 5 examines Tocqueville's account of French colonialism, Islam and religion that again provides some insight that cannot be ignored by contemporary researchers focusing on post-colonial development. Chapter 6 returns to the notion of revolution and shows that modern studies of this phenomenon did move significantly beyond Tocqueville; it also contains a short description of the possible slow cooling of the fire of the great democratic revolution, providing a singular late-modern concretization of Tocqueville's model.

The essence of this model rests in understanding that the “great democratic revolution,” which is a general social drive towards equality of conditions, can make the particular, historical revolutions more violent and dangerous to respective societies. What was a relatively mundane cycle for the ancients, for Tocqueville becomes a spiral that incessantly moves in the direction of greater social power.

Importantly, with each new cycle the net level of administrative control increases; that is why the cycle ultimately becomes a spiral. Nevertheless, as Tocqueville himself observes “new worlds” (DA I, 6) do come into existence; in other words, political history has a way of surprising humans with the unexpected. According to Eduardo Nolla (DA, Ed. Into, cxxvi), Tocqueville, deliberately abandoned a thoroughly systematic and consistent discourse in order to show that political actors are not imprisoned by historic necessity or causality suggested by various cycles, schemes and theories. Tocqueville, both in his life and oeuvre, defended the right of the free will to assert itself in politics in spite of the various forms of direct and indirect oppression. That is why he says that what he “dreads most for the generations to come is not great revolutions but apathy” (DA IV, 1150). Elsewhere in his works, Tocqueville uses the term “great revolution” only to denote democratization. In AR, however, he suggests that the appearance of new large religions such as Christianity is also an example of a “great revolution.” By great revolutions, he seems to mean breaking free from the confines of deterministic social theories, predictable political changes and petty, individual interests.

The Tocquevillian theory of regime change and revolutions is, therefore, open-ended and perhaps for that reason immensely useful in understanding the modern political phenomena. Humans, however, even within the limits of various schemes and cycles, remain “powerful and free” (DA IV, 1285). Of course, as this work argues, Tocqueville is far from the Marxian or Hegelian historical optimism. For Tocqueville, human freedom does not include the freedom to

end history by creating an ultimately post-historical and post-political society, which would never be shattered by any unrest or revolution. Even if a certain “political world” avoids minor revolutions for centuries, it will ultimately reach one of the great thresholds that will put its existence to an end.¹⁵¹ Human freedom for Tocqueville is the freedom to continue to make political choices not for the sake of an ultimate goal that would render normal politics obsolete, but for the sake of avoiding “cowardly doctrines that can produce only weak men and pusillanimous nations” (ibid.). Political choice is, in other words, valuable because the activity of choosing creates better humans. In this observation, Tocqueville returns to the ancient vision of civic virtue in spite his rejections of Plato’s and Aristotle’s discussion of political change. To be sure, Tocqueville does hint at the existence of two classical principles that guide all politics: the more or less democratic rule of the many and more or less aristocratic rule of the few. However, apart from those two natural tendencies the number of possible, particular regimes and their developmental schemes emerging from future great revolutions is virtually unlimited. And even if at times those revolutions become rare, they eventually return. In short, humans will always be celebrating some form of renaissance (or modernity) or descending into some form of dark ages (or post-modernity).

¹⁵¹ This pertains even to the soft despotism that is ultimate regime in the Tocquevillian democratic cycle and therefore ushers in the new Middle Ages.

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