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Jefferson and Tocqueville

James T. Schleifer

"Jefferson . . . I consider him the most powerful advocate of democracy ever had."¹ So wrote Tocqueville in the pages of his famous book on America. Yet even more noteworthy than such praise is Tocqueville's careful reading of Jefferson. The Virginian's writings are cited repeatedly in the text and manuscripts of the 1835 *Democracy*; at least twenty-one specific references appear, disclosing direct links between Jefferson and Tocqueville's effort to define equality, his fascination with inheritance laws,² his accounts of the American Revolution, his analysis of the legislative and judicial branches, and his discussions of Indians, blacks, and Anglo-Americans. Perhaps only *The Federalist* is cited in as many places and in relation to so many different topics.³

The Jefferson known to Tocqueville came primarily from two printed sources: an edition of *Notes on the State of Virginia*; and a

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² In part, Tocqueville's stress on the importance of changes in land inheritance laws during and after the American Revolution came from his reading of Jefferson who is cited specifically on the topic in drafts of *Democracy*. Tocqueville failed to realize that Jefferson himself exaggerated the significance of the abolition in Virginia of the laws of primogeniture and entail.

³ On Tocqueville's use of *The Federalist*, see especially James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's "Democracy in America"* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), chaps. 7 and 8. Hereinafter cited as Schleifer, *Making*. Two other sources frequently cited by Tocqueville were the two *Commentaries* by James Kent and Joseph Story; his use of these works was largely restricted to legal and constitutional issues, however.

⁴ Originally printed in 1785. The edition read by Tocqueville is still unidentified.
two-volume selection from Jefferson's letters and memoirs, edited and translated into French by L. P. Conseil. Tocqueville digested these two books in 1833 and 1834 as he composed the first half of his *Democracy*. From Conseil's work, he drew the several quotations from Jefferson's correspondence which would appear in his own book.

The American journey also exposed Tocqueville to Jefferson, though more indirectly. As the visitor talked with Americans, he heard ideas which, once widespread among the revolutionary generation, were by 1831 and 1832 part of accepted opinion in the United States. In part, this *consensus universalis*, as Tocqueville labeled the American ideology, was shaped by Jefferson; in part Jefferson only shared commonly held beliefs. But whenever Tocqueville and his hosts discussed the need for education, the evils of slavery and its pernicious influence on the character of the South, or the future of the races in America, he heard opinions which he would find again in Conseil or in *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Tocqueville's interest in Jefferson's works also hints at broader affinities between the ideas of the two men as political theorists and moral philosophers. And, indeed, striking parallels do appear when they examine human nature, the requirements for a free society, and the proper functions and role of government. In these cases, similar ideas imply not borrowings by the Frenchman from the American, but a common background. Both writers accepted certain presuppositions of the Enlightenment, whether Scottish, English, French, or American. Concepts, for example, such as an "aristocracy of talent," the "pursuit of happiness," or the need for virtue in a republic, were found in the works of many of the

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6 *Democracy*, vol. I, pp. 433-39; also see pp. 408-10, 443-44.

philosophes. And the men of the eighteenth century in turn drew upon even earlier inheritances from the seventeenth century or the ancient world. Jefferson and Tocqueville shared this heritage, and to their words it sometimes gave similar coloration.

Human Nature and Equality

Tocqueville and Jefferson joined in certain fundamental assumptions about human nature. Men everywhere, they believed, were essentially the same. All possessed what Jefferson called "moral sense":

[Man] was endowed with a sense of right and wrong. . . . This sense is as much a part of his nature as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality. . . . The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm.


10 For Jefferson, see Notes, p. 115: "Human nature is the same on every side of the Atlantic, and will be alike influenced by the same causes." For Tocqueville, see Democracy, vol. I, p. 336.

Of this conscience, Tocqueville wrote in a discarded draft of the *Democracy*:

If we consider the human species as a whole, we will discover that to live and prosper, the species must obey certain moral laws which are derived necessarily from the nature and needs given by God to every man without distinction.12

On another sheet he elaborated:

To survive and prosper the human species taken as a whole needs to submit to certain moral laws which are found wherever men are found and which cannot be modified by time, political constitution, or place. These laws are indicated to each man by individual conscience. They are proclaimed by the common sense (*raison publique*) of all. What we call virtue is exact and willing obedience to these laws which all men instinctively acknowledge. . . .13

Human beings also possessed natural liberty.14 Using language similar to Jefferson's and common to much of the Enlightenment, Tocqueville, in a deleted portion of *Democracy*, reflected:

In a society founded on the dogma of the sovereignty of the people . . . each individual, born free and perfectly independent of his fellow men, master of his fate, is presumed able to govern himself. When he combines with others for social ends, he voluntarily concedes a part of his independence to the governing majority which he hopes sooner or later to join. But it is evident that such a concession can

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12Yale Tocqueville Manuscripts Collection, CV g, “Rubish” two large boxes of original drafts of the 1840 *Democracy*, tome 4, sheaf A, for the chapter on honor. Hereinafter cited as Yale, “Rubish.” CV g; previously unpublished. All translations of new Tocqueville materials are the author's.


only be made for a social purpose. The man who yielded for
that end wanted only to unite his individual strength with
that of his fellows and to have some control over the use of
their combined force. He certainly did not intend to put
himself in tutelage. So in all that concerns him alone,
he reserves the inalienable (*imprescriptible*) right of his
liberty and is responsible only to God.15

Nowhere in the published *Democracy* would Tocqueville so
clearly develop his understanding of social contract and of the
natural liberty and independence of every human being.16

Everywhere the same by nature, formed by Providence with a
moral sense or conscience, made free and independent, and endowed
with certain inalienable rights, all men were—in these charac-
teristics at least—created equal. But both Jefferson and Tocque-
ville quickly added that natural inequalities also existed. In a
famous letter to John Adams, Jefferson described his concept of
"a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue
and talents."17

In a clear example of Jefferson's influence (or at least of
Tocqueville's recognition of a common view), the Frenchman copied
the Virginian's name and idea into an early sketch for his chapter
on "The Social Condition of the Anglo-Americans." While cata-
loguing some of the many meanings of equality, he listed the mid-
dling level of intellectual attainments which marked American
society.18 An outline of the chapter presented a qualification:

Intellectual equality (*égalité des intelligences*). In the
equality of means that they use. The lower rise; the
higher descend. It happens that intellectual abilities

15Yale Toc. Mss., CVI a, Original Working Manuscript of *Democracy*, tome 1, for the
chapter "Necessity of Examining the Condition of States Before That of the Union at
16Note, however, that Richard Herr, in *Tocqueville and the Old Regime* (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 129, offers a similar excerpt written by
Tocqueville in 1836.
18See *Democracy*, vol. I, p. 54, where the French word *intelligences* is misleadingly
translated simply as "acquirements." The sense is, rather, intellectual attainments or
(intelligences), still unequal as Providence intended, at least find equal means at their disposal. The inequality which comes most directly from God is inequality of intellect (?). Jefferson.\(^{19}\)

More pointedly, in the text of the 1835 Democracy, Tocqueville cited “the natural aristocracy of knowledge and virtue.”\(^{20}\) Once, in his working manuscript, he declared that “[t]here are virtuous and peaceful individuals whose pure morality, quiet habits, opulence, and talents fit them naturally to be the leaders of their fellow men.”\(^{21}\) And in the 1840 portion of his book, he twice again discussed the natural inequality of minds “which [comes] directly from the hand of God.”\(^{22}\)

Equality, Race, and Slavery

Inequalities did not cease with differences of morality or intellect; other distinctions among men also existed. Here we approach the thorny issue of race. How did Native Americans and blacks differ from white Americans? What could be done about slavery? What did the future hold for race relations in America? When Tocqueville wrestled with these questions, he read Conseil’s volumes and Notes on the State of Virginia with particular care. So here especially, Democracy echoes Jefferson.

Both men began with the assumption of differences among races. In Democracy, Tocqueville observed:

Almost insurmountable barriers had been raised between [the three races in America] by education and law, as well as by their origin and outward characteristics; but fortune has brought them together on the same soil, where, although they are mixed, they do not amalgamate, and

\(^{19}\)Yale Toc. Mss., Drafts of Democracy, CV h, cahier 5, pp. 7-8. Hereinafter cited as Yale, Drafts. Previously unpublished. The copyist notes that in this passage one word, which I have marked “(?),” is illegible; it is almost certainly “intellect,” however. Compare Democracy, vol. I, p. 54.


\(^{21}\)Yale, OWM, CVI a, tome 1, from Tocqueville’s Introduction; compare Democracy, vol. I, p. 13, where, in the translation, the word “naturally” is omitted.

each race fulfills its destiny apart.\textsuperscript{23}

And Jefferson, after defending the intellectual powers of the Native Americans, declared: "I do not mean to deny that there are varieties in the race of men, distinguished by their powers of body and mind."\textsuperscript{24}

Traits peculiar to Native Americans fostered admiration by Jefferson and Tocqueville.\textsuperscript{25} From the Notes, Tocqueville learned of Chief Logan’s speech which reinforced in his thinking the familiar image of the Noble Savage. In December 1831, along the Mississippi, he witnessed the forced westward removal of the Choctaws. This experience and others in America also taught him about the pride and resignation of the native population of America, their disgraceful treatment, and the grim future which they faced.\textsuperscript{26}

Like Jefferson, he had a good opinion of the mental endowment of the Indians. Any deficiencies could be explained by circumstances. In passages deleted from the working manuscript of Democracy, Tocqueville declared:

\begin{quote}
You have only to see the native population of North America to be convinced that their race cedes nothing to ours. Social conditions have, so to speak, enclosed the Indian mind in a narrow circle, but within this circle, they show themselves the most intelligent of men. . . . Admitted to schools for whites, the young Indians astonish people with the rapidity of their progress; and if you think about the innumerable difficulties which surround the Cherokees you cannot doubt that . . . they have displayed as much and perhaps more natural genius than the people of Europe in their greatest undertakings.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., vol. I, p. 344; also see p. 373.
\textsuperscript{24}Notes, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{25}On Native Americans, for Jefferson, see Notes, pp. 55-64, 90; for Tocqueville, Democracy, vol. I, pp. 343-69.
\textsuperscript{26}The basic message expressed in Democracy was that due to pride, fierce independence, and inflexibility, the Indians faced inevitable destruction.
\textsuperscript{27}Both passages are included in Yale, OWM, CVI a, tome 2, from the subsection on "The Present and Probable Future Condition of the Indian Tribes." Both previously unpublished. Compare Democracy, vol. I, p. 359.
For blacks, Jefferson and Tocqueville showed sympathy, but not admiration. Both commented pointedly that different standards of physical beauty characterized blacks and whites; they left no doubt about their own preferences. And on the critical matter of racial equality, Jefferson equivocated. He insisted that both red and black men possessed a "moral sense," the characteristic which, for him, most defined humanity. In this feature, all men were similar; so Jefferson could still argue for equal creation. But in the Notes he also seemed to imply the probable equality with whites of Native Americans and the probable inequality of blacks. After a painful and lengthy discussion, he ultimately skirted the issue by concluding: "I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."

In Tocqueville's case, however, distinctions certainly did not mean inherent racial inferiority; differences were explained in Democracy by training, legal status, history, and physical appearance. In several fragments of his working papers he denounced racism explicitly and, in one, announced: "I do not believe that there are races destined to freedom and others to servitude; the ones to happiness and enlightenment, the others to misfortunes and ignorance. These are cowardly doctrines."

If their opinions about racial equality differ, the views of Jefferson and Tocqueville concerning slavery are nonetheless remarkably parallel. Both began with vigorous condemnation;

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30 Notes, p. 90 (on Indians), and pp. 133-39, especially p. 137 (on blacks).
32 Notes, p. 59.
33 Ibid., p. 138.
they found slavery morally repulsive and destructive.\textsuperscript{35} The Europeans who first enslaved Africans, Tocqueville asserted, "violated every right of humanity."\textsuperscript{36} And by the 1830s, "The legislation of the Southern states with regard to slaves [presented]... such unparalleled atrocities as suffice to show that the laws of humanity have been totally perverted."\textsuperscript{37} In a draft, Tocqueville declared: "Slavery . . . is an evil which is perpetuated from generation to generation, is constantly renewed, and can only end by events more harmful than itself."\textsuperscript{38}

Slavery had helped to create the chasm which separated blacks and whites in the United States. Eventual harmony between the two races was unlikely. "Wherever the whites have been the most powerful, they have held the blacks in degradation or in slavery; wherever the Negroes have been strongest, they have destroyed the whites: this has been the only balance that has ever taken place between the two races."\textsuperscript{39} "I do not believe that the white and black races will ever live in any country upon an equal footing."\textsuperscript{40} To emphasize this observation in \textit{Democracy}, Tocqueville included a quotation from Conseil's edition of Jefferson which made the same point.

For both writers, the great stumbling block to an end of slavery was the presence in the South of large numbers of people of African descent. "If the South abolished slavery," queried Tocqueville, "what would it do about the black population?"\textsuperscript{41} And Jefferson asked: "What further is to be done with [the newly freed slaves]?"\textsuperscript{42}

Options were limited. Both Jefferson and Tocqueville thought racial amalgamation impossible. In a discarded passage,
Tocqueville wrote:

In several European countries we have seen the various branches of the same race gathered together. They were similar in traits and in religion, homogeneous; yet they took centuries to mingle. The Moors, who scarcely differed from the Spanish, were not able to mix with them. If the various branches of the same human family have so much difficulty mingling and blending, how will two radically different races ever succeed? If a slight natural difference has been a nearly insurmountable obstacle, what will happen with a difference so enormous that what appears beautiful to one is extreme ugliness to the other?\(^{43}\)

In another sentence deleted from the working manuscript, he even admitted: “I regard the mixing of races as the greatest of human misfortunes.”\(^{44}\) According to both Jefferson and Tocqueville, the most likely result of the joint presence of blacks and whites on the same soil was race warfare, “the most horrible of civil wars.”\(^{45}\) In still another passage deleted from his manuscript, Tocqueville explored the future:

And if they do not intermingle, then what? Examine the various possibilities without dogmatism. No fear for the white race in America. But for the Black race. Perhaps they will separate? Perhaps there will be a war of extermination? . . . Finally the reason to maintain slavery and all its hardships for the good of the two races. If the two cannot mix in the southernmost states of the Union, what then will be their fate? It will be readily understood that we are here left to vague conjectures. In all human affairs an immense part is left to chance and to secondary causes which escape entirely from predictions and calculations.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{43}\)Yale, OWM, CV I a, tome 2, for the subsection “Situation of the Black Population in the United States”; previously unpublished.

\(^{44}\)Ibid.


\(^{46}\)Yale, OWM, CV I a, tome 2, for the subsection “Situation of the Black Population in the United States”; previously unpublished.
Elsewhere in working papers and in his published text, he was more definite and declared racial conflict inevitable.\footnote{47}{Democracy, vol. I, pp. 391-92; also see vol. II, p. 270.}

Given the impossibility of intermingling and the danger of race warfare, only one course of action remained for Southern whites according to the Frenchman: "to keep [the Negroes] in slavery as long as possible."\footnote{48}{Ibid., vol. I, p. 394; also see pp. 396-97. Note that in Democracy, Tocqueville argued that the earlier Northern answer—gradual abolition—was inappropriate for the South (pp. 386-87) and that the contemporary Southern answer—colonization—was unworkable (pp. 387, 392-94). On the latter point, he disagreed with Jefferson who supported the colonization idea.} In Democracy, Tocqueville's message is so hedged about, even convoluted, that readers often miss it. But his working papers are more emphatic. In one deleted fragment, he set forth the following alternatives for the South: ". . . either to blend with the blacks or to be exterminated by them." Given this choice, Tocqueville bluntly stated his conclusion: "To keep slavery."\footnote{49}{Yale, OWM, CV I a, tome 2, for the subsection “Situation of the Black Population in the United States”; previously unpublished.} In two other deleted pieces, he wrote: "I am obliged to confess that all of the ways to accelerate the coming of the struggle between the two races in the South, the abolition of slavery seems to me the most powerful."\footnote{50}{Ibid.} "I confess that if I had the misfortune to live in a country where slavery had been introduced and if I had the liberty of the Negroes in my hands, I would refrain from opening them."\footnote{51}{Ibid. See Tocqueville's qualification in Democracy, vol. II, p. 394: “God forbid that I should seek to justify the principle of Negro slavery, as has been done by some American writers! I say only that all the countries which formerly adopted that execrable principle are not equally able to abandon it at the present time.”} So in Democracy, Tocqueville presented no proposal to end slavery. In this, his book differed markedly from Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia.\footnote{52}{For Jefferson's early proposal, see Notes, p. 132. Of course, Jefferson never acted on his convictions in this matter.} But within four years he would draft a Report on Abolition which detailed plans for freeing the slaves in the French colonies and served as the basis for subsequent French action.\footnote{53}{Consult Drescher, Social Reform, pp. 98-136. Drescher has pointed out the minor sensation which Tocqueville's Report caused in the United States, especially among American abolitionists, pp. 98-99. Why did Tocqueville's position change? The most}
an abolitionist at home.

All along, however, he recognized that even in the United States slavery would end. "Whatever may be the efforts of the Americans of the South to maintain slavery, they will not always succeed. Slavery . . . cannot survive. By the act of the master, or by the will of the slave, it will cease."\(^5^4\) Jefferson, in similar words, hoped that "under the auspices of heaven," society was moving toward "a total emancipation and that this is disposed, by the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters rather than by their extirpation."\(^5^5\)

Tocqueville also believed that the tragedy of slavery had a message for humanity. Seeing the blighted present and dim future, "Men are able to say: 'Here at last is the justice of God.'"\(^5^6\) Jefferson found the same moral. "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever."\(^5^7\)

So on the matters of slavery and race, Tocqueville often echoed Jefferson. They both condemned slavery, rejected the likelihood or even the desirability of intermingling, saw the presence of a large black population as an enormous difficulty for the future, predicted race war, and believed that one way or another slavery would end. Important differences are clear as well, however. In his book, Tocqueville offered no plan to end slavery in the United States. But he paid close attention to the deleterious effects of slavery not only on the masters, but also on the slaves. (This Jefferson had failed to do in the Notes.) He showed much greater sympathy for American blacks, both slave and free, than Jefferson had. And most important, he explicitly denounced the idea of inherent racial inferiority. Tocqueville would not suffer the shameful fate that some apologists for racism imposed on Jefferson.

Tocqueville's working papers present several other fascinating

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striking difference between the 1835 Democracy and the 1839 Report is the absence in 1839 of predictions about race war. Tocqueville apparently believed that, for the French colonies, harmonious relations between the two races were possible after slavery had ended.


\(^{5^5}\) Notes, p. 156.

\(^{5^6}\) Yale, OWM, CV I a, tome 2, for the subsection "Situation of the Black Population in the United States"; previously unpublished.

\(^{5^7}\) Notes, p. 156.
unpublished passages on American slavery. The institution stood out as an anomaly in an overwhelmingly democratic society.

The slavery which reigns in the South of the Union is the only aristocratic institution which the Americans have. Examine (I think) this solitary element of aristocracy after I examine all the consequences of democracy. How American slavery, which exists in the midst of a complete democracy of whites, does not have the same general results that would be expected if it were only an appendage of an aristocratic system. Contradictory effects: It increases the feeling of equality among whites; however, in some ways, it gives whites aristocratic habits, turn of mind, character. When you accuse the American democracy of atrocities against Blacks, you [illegible word] against yourself. Americans have only one aristocratic side and it is there that they are heinous.\(^{58}\)

The minds of Americans are narrow, ... backward, rigid, and full of prejudices and limits on the subject of Blacks. 

When you see the Americans outrage reason and nature in the way they treat Blacks, you say that these are the effects of an immoderate and unpitying democracy! But wait a moment. Democracy need not blush for the crimes which you impute. The only aristocracy which exists in America is that of whites. The only aristocratic idea is that of color and race. The whites reveal their only aristocratic side vis-à-vis the Blacks and show what legislators, placed by birth in a position superior to and different from the governed, can do. The evil gets worse as the state governments become more aristocratic; that is, as a privileged portion of the nation becomes more absolutely the master of another because of its independence from any foreign sovereign or central government. Always come back to this central idea that no single principle should be allowed to dominate and reach its most extreme consequences.

\(^{58}\)Yale, Drafts, CV a, pp. 48-49; previously unpublished.
As for me, far from considering what happens in America concerning Blacks as an argument against democracy, I would be afraid that an exaggerated and unjust argument against aristocracy might be made, and that what results from particular circumstances which are not inherent, such as the differences of color, might be attributed to aristocracy in a general way.\textsuperscript{59}

From this analysis of slavery as an aristocratic institution, Tocqueville shifted to a discussion of America's lessons for the world.

What I limit myself to saying at this moment is this: of all modern people, the Americans have pushed equality and inequality among men the farthest. They have universal suffrage and servitude. They therefore seem to have wanted to prove the advantages of equality by contrasting arguments. Some claim that by establishing universal suffrage and the dogma of sovereignty [of the people], the Americans have shown the world the advantages of equality. But I think that they have above all proved this by establishing servitude; and I find that they demonstrate the advantages of equality much less by democracy than by slavery.\textsuperscript{60}

The entire political doctrine of Americans rests on the principle of equality, but the benefits of this doctrine are still debatable. The Americans prove the need and the goodness of equality better and in a more irrefutable way with slavery than with democracy.\textsuperscript{61}

"If the principle of equality among men needed to be advocated, the most perfect demonstration would be found here."\textsuperscript{62} Out of slavery Tocqueville derived an additional proof for the principle of human equality.

\textsuperscript{60}Yale, OWM, CV I a, tome 2, for the subsection "Situation of the Black Population in the United States"; previously unpublished.
\textsuperscript{61}Yale, Drafts, CV h, cahier 2, pp. 85, 90; previously unpublished.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p. 45; previously unpublished.
Education and the Pursuit of Happiness

Jefferson is widely known for a commitment to education, and his views on the topic are familiar. He urged those around him to "Enlighten the people generally, no other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness. . . . Preach a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people." 63 "Above all things," he confided to James Madison, "I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty." 64 Education helped not only to preserve freedom but also to further the pursuit of happiness. Jefferson acted on these convictions, especially by proposing for Virginia a system "to diffuse knowledge more generally through the mass of the people" 65 and, near the end of his life, by bringing the University of Virginia into being.

Tocqueville's concern with education is less obvious, even overlooked by many readers. Yet his diaries of travel in 1831 and 1832 record numerous conversations about the various state systems of support for public education and contain several long reflections about the apparently universal American faith in education as a guarantee of social order, good government, and individual development. 66 In France in 1835, as Tocqueville planned the second half of his book, he projected three possible chapters on American education: "(1) On academic institutions under democracy; (2) On the necessity for learned societies (corps savants) in democracies; [and] (3) On education in the United States and in democratic countries in general." "The influence of democracy on the education of men, or rather their instruction," he declared in another note, "is a necessary chapter." He even prepared a chapter jacket with the

63Letter to George Wythe, August 13, 1786, as quoted in Commager, Enlightenment, pp. 113-14.
65For his proposal, see Yale, Notes, pp. 139-43.
But instead of a comprehensive analysis, gathered into a single major chapter, the topic became one of the great submerged themes of Democracy, poking out in various places in Tocqueville's drafts and working manuscript and appearing on scattered pages throughout both parts of his book.\(^{68}\) "The great, the capital interest of the century," he exhorted his countrymen in one unused fragment, "is the organization and the education of the democracy."\(^{69}\) After stating in Democracy that the people must be enlightened at all costs, Tocqueville wrote: "The time is fast approaching when freedom, public peace, and social order itself will not be able to exist without education."\(^{70}\)

The access to ideas and to education which Americans enjoyed fascinated Tocqueville.\(^{71}\) Drawing upon what he had seen in the New World, he suggested that, with liberty and education equally available to all, the extreme dangers of a mass society could be avoided.\(^{72}\) Elsewhere in Democracy he observed:

> Give democratic nations education and freedom and leave them alone. They will soon learn to draw from this world all the benefits that it can afford; they will improve each of the useful arts and will day by day render life more comfortable, more convenient, and more easy.\(^{73}\)

Here once again was Jefferson's concept of the pursuit of happiness facilitated by learning.\(^{74}\)

Jefferson and Tocqueville valued education because it offered benefits which they both desired for democracies. For society,

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67For these brief fragments on education, consult Schleifer, *Making*, p. 21.
69For this piece, see Schleifer, *Making*, pp. 266-67.
70*Democracy*, vol. II, p. 132; also see vol. I, 7, pp. 335-37, 341-42.
73Ibid., p. 153.
74What kind of learning did Tocqueville have in mind? See ibid., p. 66, where he argues that, for most people in a democracy, education should be "scientific, commercial, and industrial." Also note his comment that book-learning is sometimes overemphasized as the path to knowledge; practical experience, he suggests, is often more effective instruction, especially in politics and public life (ibid., vol. I, p. 329).
learning helped to mold the mores and the virtue necessary for freedom.\(^{75}\) It made popular participation in government more responsible and created an enlightened citizenry. Tocqueville even argued that knowledge was a protection against the seductions of centralized administration.\(^{76}\) For the individual, education opened new possibilities for self-development and broadened opportunity. It smoothed the road to independence, achievement, and happiness.

But perhaps a shared enthusiasm for the life of the mind most fundamentally explains their parallel attitudes toward education. Both theorists were fiercely committed to intellectual liberty. Tocqueville spoke of "freedom of thought as a holy thing."\(^{77}\) And Jefferson declared: "I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."\(^{78}\) The two men, both devoted to culture, recognized that the emergence of new ideas and the continuing development of science and the arts demanded freedom of inquiry and education.

The Nature and Functions of Government

Still another example of the broad similarity of views which resulted from a shared heritage is their understanding of the object of government. Jefferson followed Francis Hutcheson and other figures of the Enlightenment in the belief that the end of government was the greatest happiness of the greatest number.\(^{79}\) For his part, Tocqueville declared: "[T]o my mind, the end of a good

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\(^{75}\) The two men also shared the common 18th-century conviction that particular mores were necessary for a free society; they agreed that a republic demanded morality and virtue. Jefferson wrote, for example: "It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigor. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats at the heart of its laws and constitution" (Notes, p. 158). This idea of the central importance of moeurs is a fundamental argument throughout Tocqueville's Democracy; see especially Democracy, vol. I, pp. 326-42.

\(^{76}\) Democracy, vol. II, pp. 316-17; also vol. I, p. 93.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., vol. II, p. 13. Also see Schleifer, Making, chap. 14.


\(^{79}\) See Wills, Investing in America, chaps. 10, 17, 18.
government is to ensure the welfare of a people." In his book he argued that a key advantage of democracy was its contribution to "the well-being of the greatest number."

On the relative powers and dangers of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, however, what the American statesman had to say interested Tocqueville much more specifically. For these topics, citations of Jefferson's writings appear repeatedly in his manuscripts and text. In 1835 Tocqueville theorized that in a democracy the legislature most directly represented the sovereign people and would therefore most likely become the instrument of popular tyranny. One of his primary fears for America was legislative despotism. So in the pages of Democracy, the similar views of Jefferson are carefully presented: "The executive power in our government is not the only, perhaps not even the principal object of my solicitude. The tyranny of the legislature is really the danger most to be feared, and will continue to be so for many years to come."

Tocqueville's drafts contain still another reference to Jefferson. In The Federalist No. 48, cited by Tocqueville, James Madison quotes his mentor to demonstrate the inherent danger of legislative usurpation. "All the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judiciary, result to the legislative body. The concentrating of these in the same hands is precisely the definition of despotic government. It will be no alleviation that these powers will be exercised by a plurality of hands, and not by a single one. One hundred and seventy-three despots would surely be as oppressive as one."

In Democracy, Tocqueville summarized:

To concentrate the whole social force in the hands of the...
legislative body is the natural tendency of democracies; for as this is the power that emanates the most directly from the people, it has the greater share of the people's overwhelming power, and it is naturally led to monopolize every species of influence... The existence of democracies is threatened by two principal dangers: namely, the complete subjection of the legislature to the will of the electoral body, and the concentration of all the other powers of the government in the legislative branch.\(^{84}\)

Agreement between Jefferson and Tocqueville did not last once thoughts turned to the judiciary, however. The former President's concerns were noted in Tocqueville's manuscripts: "Opinion of Jefferson on the dangers of the extreme independence of the judiciary in the United States. See Conseil, Volume I, page 232."\(^{85}\) But in Democracy, Tocqueville chose to reproduce the contrary analysis of the judiciary which he found in The Federalist and elsewhere.\(^{86}\) He argued that the judiciary was by nature the weakest of the three branches and that liberty had little to fear from courts and judges. Instead, the judicial power served as one of the few effective barriers to democratic excesses; it checked, or at least slowed, the potentially despotic actions of both the people and the legislature. The independence of the judiciary must therefore be protected in democracies. Tocqueville simply could not credit Jefferson's concern that judges not responsible to the people might somehow threaten freedom.

Tocqueville also disagreed with Jefferson's mature interpretation of the federal relationship. The Frenchman presumably read Jefferson's contention, expressed in several letters contained in Conseil's volumes, that the states were losing power to the central government and that the Union was sliding toward consolidation. The Virginian cited many examples and pointed to the elastic clauses of the Constitution and the interpretations of the federal


\(^{85}\) Yale, Drafts, CV h, cahier 5, pp. 29-30.

\(^{86}\) For evidence of Tocqueville's reliance on The Federalist, see especially Yale, Drafts, CV h, cahier 3, pp. 10-11; and cahier 5, pp. 16-25, 39-41.
courts to support his opinion. But once again Tocqueville followed *The Federalist* and other authorities and, in his book, argued for the constant weakening of the federal bonds and for the inevitable dissolution of the Union. In his working papers he even blamed a particular American leader—Thomas Jefferson—for setting the American republic on the road to debility. This critical interpretation of Jefferson’s policies was deleted in later stages of revision, however.

In his use of Jefferson as an analyst of potential tyranny, Tocqueville made a common mistake. He never adequately recognized the shifts in Jefferson’s views as time passed and circumstances changed. In 1785, in the *Notes*, for example, the Virginian focused most clearly on the threat of legislative despotism. By 1787, in letters commenting on the proposed Constitution, he was raising concerns about an executive who might become a king for life. Later, his attention shifted to the active role the federal courts had assumed as interpreters of the Constitution and as champions of the prerogatives of the central government, and he began to warn about an overly independent judiciary.

In 1835, Tocqueville, then also troubled by the dangers of legislative tyranny, turned with approval to Jefferson’s words. By 1840, however, his worry went not to the judiciary or to federal aggrandizement, but to a new sort of despotism: administrative or bureaucratic tyranny. So, although he noticed Jefferson’s fears of the courts and of increasing federal power, he never read or cited them with appreciation. The two theorists started at the same place, but their paths of analysis rapidly diverged. On matters of government, Tocqueville learned only from the earlier Jefferson.

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88 Ibid., chaps. 7 and 8.
89 Ibid., p. 109.
91 Tocqueville also quoted Jefferson (from Conseil) to support his view that legislative instability was one of the weaknesses of American democratic government; see *Democracy*, vol. I, pp. 213-14, 267-68.

Concerning the President, Tocqueville and Jefferson agreed that he should not be reeligible. Reelection opened the door to office for life, to political desperation, and to foreign intrigue. But they differed over the issue of Presidential power. Jefferson
Jefferson and Tocqueville are most commonly associated with limited government, with that government which governs least. Both certainly were suspicious of governmental power if it attempted too much.\textsuperscript{92} Especially remembered are Tocqueville's warnings against administrative centralization and his chilling portrait of the new soft despotism of the bureaucratic state which meddles in all public and private affairs and inexorably loosens the springs of individual will, purpose, and action.\textsuperscript{93}

This interpretation of the two statesmen can be overdone, however. Jefferson, we are reminded by his biographers and other commentators, strove for the vigorous application of his own power and authority as President. Throughout his life he looked to government-instituted reform measures, including land distribution to landless, adult, white males, and public educational systems. Most of all, he consistently advocated government support for various cultural and scientific activities, from the Lewis and Clark expedition to the creation of the University of Virginia.\textsuperscript{94}

Tocqueville, too, urged the French government to inaugurate reforms, including a new prison system and the abolition of slavery in the French colonies. All the familiar planks in his political program for France (including decentralization, wider suffrage, liberty of the press, and freedom of association) assumed significant governmental initiative. At least twice in his book on America he reminded leaders of their obligation to conduct personal lives and to set public policies which would exemplify the moral standards required in a democratic society.\textsuperscript{95} During the late 1830s, as he penned his warnings against bureaucratic tyranny, he was also

worried that the Chief Executive might be an elective king. Tocqueville, on the other hand, was convinced that weak executives were a major flaw of democratic government and that the executive should be as strong as possible. \textit{Democracy} described the President, despite the enormous potential power which Tocqueville recognized, as pathetically subservient to the legislature. For Jefferson, see especially letter to John Adams, Paris, Nov. 13, 1787; letter to William Stephens Smith, Paris, Nov. 13, 1787; and letter to James Madison, Paris, Dec. 20, 1787; Boyd, 12, pp. 351, 356-57 and 439-42, respectively. For Tocqueville, see especially \textit{Democracy}, vol. I, pp. 125-43.

\textsuperscript{92}See \textit{Democracy}, vol. II, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., pp. 336-37.

\textsuperscript{94}See Peterson, \textit{Adams and Jefferson}, pp. 735-39, 762-67, 802, 855-60.

\textsuperscript{95}\textit{Democracy}, vol. II, pp. 156, 160.
advocating subsidized hospitals and other institutional safeguards for the poor. And by 1847, Tocqueville was proposing tax relief and free education and legal aid for the poor; support for mutual insurance companies which would provide various kinds of social security; and new public institutions to aid the widowed and orphaned, the disabled, and others in difficult or impoverished circumstances.96

A fascinating example of this stance toward government action appears in sketches of the proposed chapter mentioned earlier on "Academic Institutions Under Democracy." Tocqueville wrote:

An Academy whose object is to keep minds on a certain path and to impose a method is contrary to the genius of democracy; such an Academy is an aristocratic institution.

But an Academy whose end is to honor men engaged in the arts and sciences and to grant them at state expense the modest comfort and leisure which is withheld by democratic social conditions is an eminently democratic institution. Such an Academy, though perhaps not to the tastes of a democratic nation, is nonetheless always compatible with, and sometimes necessary to, the existence of a democracy.

The necessity for learned societies which are supported monetarily in democracies. This necessity grows as the people turn increasingly to democracy. This truth is hard for the democracy to understand. Natural tendency is in the opposite direction which must be resisted. The Americans give in to it. The result: science abandoned to the ordinary encouragement which democracy can provide; that is, only application, no theories are produced by the men who are doing work.97

What Tocqueville proposed here was government subsidy for activities he believed essential for intellectual creativity, but...
which he did not think democratic societies would adequately support either through the marketplace or by voluntary contribution. His passion for the life of the mind once again shows through.

So—particularly for Tocqueville—let us consider a modest revision. For Jefferson and Tocqueville, public power was an instrument to be used, but only for particular purposes, which especially included the pursuit of science, education, culture, and certain kinds of equal opportunity. They championed the judicious use of government. And the ends thought worthy of public action were precisely what Jefferson and Tocqueville considered most vital for a free society and for individual independence. In some cases, at least, they were willing to put the government where their hearts were.

Individual Independence

Central to the thinking of both Jefferson and Tocqueville is respect for the dignity of each human being and the idea of individual independence. This concept explains both their interest in education and their attitude toward the proper functions of government. Education (and a basic level of material comfort and security) were preconditions for knowledgeable, self-confident, and responsible individuals. And such individuals, willing to play a role in public affairs, made an intrusive government unnecessary; willing to work together for common purposes, they had little need to call for governmental action. So individual independence had two quite different dimensions: self-fulfillment or the pursuit of happiness, and effective participation in public life. For neither Jefferson nor Tocqueville did the idea have a selfish connotation. In one of the most famous parts of Democracy, Tocqueville specifically denounced the narrow, materialistic pursuit of purely personal goals

as *individualisme*, one of the great plagues of democracy. For both theorists, individual independence had an essential social dimension. The individual was to be self-sufficient and wise enough to work toward public as well as private ends. This sensitivity to the proper blend of individual and social ends is still another distinguishing mark of the thinking of both men.

Other Parallels of Mind and Personality

Apart from similarities of ideas, Jefferson and Tocqueville also shared certain affinities of mind and personality. Both valued privacy and frequently showed an aristocratic aloofness or detachment which some observers thought cold. Both had a passion for ideas and enjoyed the constant reconsideration of familiar concepts; they exhibited what Merrill Peterson has called "intellectual spaciousness." Jefferson and Tocqueville also shared the mental habit of thinking in contraries or pairs in tension. And neither was a system-maker. Time, a tendency always to look at things in new ways, the dangers of thinking in dichotomies, and a belief that social and political principles had to fit the circumstances of particular societies kept both from devising any closed formulas for the guidance of others. One result of this open-ended nature of their thinking has been the rich and varied images of Jefferson and Tocqueville cast by readers over the years. Their writings can be read in a multitude of ways and have been used to demonstrate a broad range of not-always-compatible viewpoints.

Some significant differences also existed between Jefferson and Tocqueville, however. Four are especially striking. Although they thought human beings everywhere were fundamentally the same, the first was more optimistic about human nature; the second, more pessimistic. Jefferson, for example, believed that, given the
opportunity, people would choose natural aristocrats as leaders.\textsuperscript{102} In contrast, Tocqueville worried constantly about the poor choices democratic peoples seemed to make; for him, the quality of leadership was one of the weakest points of democracies. Sometimes Tocqueville was more inclined to think in terms of original sin than of natural goodness. Once in his working manuscript, for instance, he lamented that "men have at their command so large a reservoir of baseness that they always turn out to be more or less the same in the service of all despots, whether people or king."\textsuperscript{103} In Joyce Appleby's wonderful phrase, "Science and education pulled [Jefferson's] carriage of hopes."\textsuperscript{104} For Tocqueville, however, nothing could entirely erase the foreboding which he often felt as he surveyed the probable future of modern societies.\textsuperscript{105}

The American was also more of an activist than the Frenchman. Jefferson was, after all, a revolutionary. And throughout his life he often made efforts to put his favorite schemes into effect, sometimes with considerable success. Tocqueville was better at exhorting than acting. His political career was less successful, and Seymour Drescher and others have noted his tendency to write or speak for a proposal and then to stand aside. If his ideas were to be translated into reality, others had to respond to his words.

In addition, Jefferson's interests ranged over a wider field; his genius was broader. What excited him and what he observed, studied, and wrote about was much more varied than was true for Tocqueville. And he often approached his many interests in a detailed and scientific manner; Tocqueville's usual approach, by contrast, was theoretical and deductive. What the two men collected when abroad is telling. Tocqueville returned to France with a head full of ideas and trunks stuffed with books and papers. Jefferson, too, came home with ideas and books, but tucked away as well were seedlings and other specimens of a new way of life that he imagined for America.

\textsuperscript{102}For example, see Jefferson's letter to John Adams, Monticello, Oct. 28, 1813, Cappon, II, pp. 388-89.
\textsuperscript{103}OWM, CV I a, tome 1, for the chapter "The Principle of the Sovereignty of the People of America"; previously unpublished.
\textsuperscript{104}Appleby, "What Is Still American?" p. 294.
\textsuperscript{105}See Schleifer, Making, pp. 186-87, 333nn. 47, 48.
But if Jefferson was more universal and empirical, I believe we may sustain the argument that Tocqueville was more original than the Virginian. Jefferson exquisitely mirrored the presuppositions of his age and excelled at putting them in beautiful and memorable prose. Tocqueville was also a superb stylist known for his lucid and concise phrasing. But he went beyond the accepted to achieve significant new insights about modern society. As J.-P. Mayer demonstrated over forty years ago, his careful analysis of the consequences and especially of the dangers of mass society broke new ground. And we have just noted still another example of Tocqueville’s talent for putting a new twist on a familiar idea: Out of the horrors of American slavery he drew an additional proof for the advantages of equality.

Conclusion

The purpose of Tocqueville’s usual textual citation of Jefferson was to present an authoritative witness to seal an argument. Where Jefferson disagreed markedly from Tocqueville’s other major sources, especially The Federalist, the Frenchman’s habit was simply to acknowledge the difference in his sketches or drafts and then to ignore the Virginian’s dissent. Perhaps the major exception to this method is the topic of race and slavery; there, if anywhere, Tocqueville learned from Jefferson or from the American mind-set which Jefferson had helped so much to create. On these matters, the chain of ideas presented in Democracy is remarkably like that found in Notes on the State of Virginia and other Jefferson writings. But overall, Tocqueville did not so much as learn from Jefferson (even from the Jefferson of 1785) as share a heritage with him, agree with many of his opinions, and resonate to a certain fellowship of spirit and intellect.

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