Tocqueville's Fix: Solving the Riddle of Democracy with Enlightened Self-Interest

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One of the most frequently referenced ideas from Alexis de Tocqueville's highly influential critique of American democracy - *Democracy in America* - comes in the way of 'the tyranny of the majority.' This notion has become a popular reference, both outside and within academic circles, as a means to raise a skeptical eyebrow towards strict majoritarian rule without explicitly expressing elitist sentiment. Nonetheless, the popular view of the 'tyranny of the majority' as being synonymous with that of mob rule often fails to capture the idea's true spirit. The threat to democratic stability posed by 'the tyranny of the majority,' as well as other less cited concerns raised by Tocqueville, is actually a complicated component of Tocqueville's larger purpose, 'how to best solve the problem of democracy?' In other words, how is it possible to allow the majority of people to exercise their political will while still allowing an 'appropriate' level of freedom for all? While it is tempting to quickly explore how Tocqueville addresses this fundamental problem of democratic order, it will be worthwhile to first discuss a few general observations that Tocqueville makes regarding the democratic project in a young America. For instance, 1) how deterministic is Tocqueville's view of democracy 2) how does Tocqueville develop and explain the shift in social and political organization away from an aristocratic and towards a democratic sociopolitical system 3) what mechanism(s) does Tocqueville believe have the greatest potential to solve the 'problem of democracy.' Once this background has been established I will explore how Tocqueville attempts to navigate the difficulties of creating and maintaining a sustainable democratic system of governance. Once Tocqueville's position has been firmly established, I will offer a critique and analysis regarding the possibility of successfully confronting democracy's most vexing question.

Writing in the introduction to *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville is quick to note the deterministic nature of democracy:

> Therefore the gradual progress of equality is fated. The main features of this progress are the following: it is universal and permanent, it is daily passing beyond human control, and every event and every man helps it along. Is it wise to suppose that a movement which has been so long on a train could be halted by one generation? Does anyone imagine that democracy, which has destroyed the feudal system and vanquished kings will fall back before the middle class and the rich? Will it stop now, when it has grown so strong and its adversaries so weak? (1969: 12)

Here, Tocqueville is expressing the idea that democracy, the political system that he reasoned as gradually replacing aristocracy, is a force, which, for a plethora of reasons including the progression of human equality, cannot be contained. However, while it seems correct to understand Tocqueville as suggesting that democracy represents a fated stage of sociopolitical evolution, it would be a mistake to understand this stage as meaning the same evolutionary result in all places and cultures. Tocqueville makes it very clear that no single recipe of democracy can feed the cultural and historical sentiments of all people. Thus, while democracy might be the inevitable result of various social and political changes in Western Europe it would be a grave mistake to assume that all of these changes will play out everywhere, Europe or elsewhere, in the same democratic tradition. For Tocqueville there is no such thing as a 'correct' form of democracy, only the deterministic notion that some form of democratic governance is bound to, in due time, occur everywhere. The important distinction here is between two types of political determinism. Method political determinism, Tocqueville's position, suggests that the essential means of political order are set in a deterministic mode. While, outcome political determinism suggests that the means of a designated political order are destine to determine the end of that same system. The method political determinist is suggesting that democratic government is an eventual necessary condition of enduring sociopolitical arrangements, but that such a necessary condition cannot sufficiently estimate the actual structural arrangements of a resulting democratic order. The outcome democra-

tic political determinist argues, alternatively, that such a necessarily resulting democratic order can be ascertained. The underlying question confronting both the method and outcome democratic political determinist seem to be, what if any are the necessary conditions for the practice of democratic governance? If such a question can be fully and satisfactorily addressed, then the initially restrictive sounding approach of the outcome political determinist appears much more reasonable. Perhaps the method democratic political determinism of Tocqueville could be saved by noting that, necessary conditions of democratic governance do indeed exist, but that a simple compounding of these conditions do not provide us with a sufficient picture of all the ways that a democratic government could take form. Instead, certain objectively reasoned necessary conditions of democracy must be wed with more subjectively based cultural and historical conditions if we are to arrive at the (sufficiently) proper form of democratic government.

Tocqueville does not actively argue that democracy is a good political outcome; he is merely suggesting that it is unavoidable. Throughout *Democracy in America* Tocqueville takes the stance of the fascinated observer, generally reserved in his positive endorsement of democracy. This neutral stance towards political systems in general might have an Aristotelian impetus. Aristotle argued that each political model had the possibility for either a good or bad result depending upon how it was administered. Thus, there is no intrinsic answer to the question, "what is the best, or good, political system?" Good political systems, whatever they are referred to, are simply those that are administered in a just fashion. Thus we find no talk in Aristotle's work, or Tocqueville's writings, that certain political arrangements, by virtue of their structure alone, are unjust or inept. However, Tocqueville with his soft social evolutionary outlook, was extremely astute to the critical relationship between aristocratic and democratic social and political structures. Tocqueville himself was born to aristocratic family, and it is important to keep in mind that Tocqueville was first a Frenchmen and second a man fascinated with American culture and political organization. His journey to America was possible only because he was granted an eighteen month leave from his post of juge suppleant (substitute judge). The officially designated

purpose of his American journey was explicitly the investigation of the American penal system. *Democracy in America* was the unexpected and unsanctioned brilliant result of the French government's attempt to better understand the American penal system.

The markings of an aristocracy are born out in its vast structural conditions of dependency. The mass of people within an aristocratic social structure had a simple interest to pursue, survival, and this interest was allowed in the narrowest of fashions. Tocqueville makes very clear the expected notion of self-interest in an aristocratic society:

> When the world was conducted by a small number of powerful and rich individuals, these liked to form for themselves a sublime idea of the duties of man; it pleased them to profess that it is glorious to forget oneself and that it is fitting to do good without [regard to] interest, as God himself [does]. That was the official doctrine of the times in matters of morality (1969: 525).

Thus, in an aristocratic moral environment all but 'a small number of rich and powerful individuals' were to find their redemption with a denial of selfish interests. However, as for the noble elite few, 'These few are designated "individuals" they stood out from all of the others; perhaps they even considered everything around them theirs' (Anastaplo, 1991: 427). Under aristocratic rule only a handful people matter in any meaningful social or political manner. Consequently, the masses were to find religious glory in having no self-interest, other than, of course, survival. However, as the land-based structure of aristocratic rule - that which allowed for self-interest to be understood as mere survival - evolved to form more commercial avenues, a new philosophic understanding of self-interest would capture the humanistic concerns of the masses. The doux-commerce thesis (endorsed by Smith, Hume, Condorcet, Montesquieu, and a host of other influential eighteenth century thinkers) nicely describes the process by which the structural change toward a market economy had a great impact upon the manners and morals of people, and as Smith often suggested nations as well. The primary idea behind the doux-commerce thesis is that individuals involved with commercial transactions begin to consciously shape their behavior around the way the other (their trading partner) perceives them. Commerce gives people a good practical reason to be honest as the following principle suggests: if I am honest then others will want to continue their trade with me, if I'm dishonest

then others will find more honest individuals to trade with. Thus, a set of morals conducive to fair (or at least perceivably so) exchange naturally develop within a commercial economy. A commercial economy renders moot any suggestion that one does not really care what is thought of them. In fact, it is because we must care what others think that forces us to morally develop attributes that others will find favorable.

Aristocratic and ancient sociopolitical structures were often concerned with virtue for its own sake, not for the sake of a greater utilitarian end. For instance, in Ancient Greece, consistent with Aristotelian thought, everything was believed to have a designated purpose, and the person was no different. The purpose, or telos, of a person was to reach a state of Eudemonia (human flourishment). Perhaps, the best approximation of this notion in contemporary form is found in Abraham Maslow's conception of 'self-actualization.' Virtue was viewed as an end in itself, and apart from the advent of utilitarian thought it does not seem at all strange for aristocratic or ancient societies to view concerns of social utility very differently from their modern counterparts. Moreover, without the idea of an 'innately good economic market' directed by political forces, it might have been difficult for the ancients to take seriously such notions of market inspired justice. It is likely that the idea of 'political economy' would have been viewed as an oxymoron. Nonetheless, Tocqueville is quick to bring the discussion of virtue back to the more pressing concerns of an 1830s American audience:

> In the United States there is hardly any talk of the beauty of virtue. But they maintain that virtue is useful and prove it everyday. American moralists do not pretend that one must sacrifice himself for his fellows because it is a fine thing to do so. But they boldly assert that such sacrifice is as necessary for the man who makes it as for the beneficiaries (1969: 525).

Where most observers see conflict between private and public goods Tocqueville sees an opportunity for democracy to become, due to an interplay of these goods, something great. This notion of finding a utilitarian path through a type of personal gain suggests that Americans quickly came to appreciate the broader philosophies of both Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and the free market economic approach of Adam Smith. This is a step forward towards partially explaining the strong pragmatic tradition in American thought. This idea, of personal profits as able to inspire public

goods, would have seemed alien to the mass of people in an aristocratic order who received their glory and virtue from the denial of self-interest, and their ration of what they were due from a benevolent noble to whom they owed both their allegiance and dependence.

The 'inevitable' decline of aristocracy and eventual spread of democracy was based upon more than simply a progressive belief in human equality and gradual social evolutionism. The advent of the Renaissance (sometime around 1500 A.D. depending on where in Europe one was) meant the arrival of mercantilism and commercial trade. At first glance, this economic shift might seem to be a mundane event in Western Civilization, but nothing could be further from the truth. As Welch astutely notes 'Citizens of modern commercial republics required not virtue but enlightened self-interest' (2001: 88). Aristocratic virtue, for instance, bravery, courage, and the sort, were noble traits needed before the birth of a free market. However, with the birth of the free economic market came a system, which was perfectly guided by an invisible hand that acted in accordance with the self-interest of all. Provided one honored their contracts, and worked to preserve their individual self-interest, the marketplace would take care of personal and social needs. The most appealing aspect of this new found economic faith was the (moral) utilitarian care the market had for all concerned. Adam Smith, in The Wealth of Nations, his influential attempt to blend economic concerns with moralistic notions of self-interest, affirmed 'commercial virtue' in the following infamous way:

> It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we may expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest (1976: 18).

Thus, according to Smith, a lot of little greed (self-interest) actually made everyone, in the long run, happier. This notion of a good self-interested economic actor was so powerful at the time of Tocqueville's writings that he felt inclined to fashion the idea of Smithian self-interest so that it could reasonably conjoin with his larger project of how to go about solving the problem of democracy. In fact, Tocqueville would go so far as to suggest that enlightened self-interest would prove to be the mechanism by which the problem of democracy could be solved. Hence, the origin of enlightened self-interest in Tocqueville's thought.

As commerce became increasingly important to a mercantilist socioeconomic structure the general sentiment of dependency among the masses decreased. Suddenly, if Smith had properly understood economic affairs, everyone's self-interest counted as an integral cog serving the entire machine of the free economic marketplace. Prior to the bustling commerce centres of the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment that followed, the masses did have a type of equality, but it was an 'equality of dependence,' and the political, social, and economic inequality between noble and serf was tremendous. The proliferations of commercial interests along with technologies in navigation are two of the most important forces that shattered the perceptions of this dependent political mass. Not long after this notion of dependence was broken did concerns for meaningful political equality and democratic reform emerge. Likewise, these increased notions and conditions of equity signaled a general gravitation towards humanism and individualism; 'Among the consequences, at least in America, of triumphant equality had been the development of vigorous individualism' (Anastaplo, 1991: 425). It is the linkage and collusion between democratic and individualistic sentiments that would cause Tocqueville his greatest pains in struggling to solve the problem of democracy.

Although I have made a point to note that Tocqueville saw democracy as inevitable, it is important to again stress that he did not view democracy as inevitably good. In fact, democracy, according to Tocqueville and later elaborated by Zetterbaun, faced a serious and potentially devastating dilemma - the problem of democracy. If the majority is to rule in a democracy, and if people are to be free, how can these positions be reconciled so that both majority rule and freedom for all can coexist? In other words, how can we avoid a 'tyranny of the majority' from destroying the liberties that make democracy an appealing political doctrine? Interestingly, and one of the reasons why understanding a tyranny of the majority to mean 'mob rule' can be misleading is because, a majority does not necessarily imply a numerical advantage. Votes can only determine so much in any political order. For instance, James Madison, while contributing to the Federalist papers, warns against the danger of extreme 'monetary majorities,' all-powerful factions of wealthy property owners. Madison, at the outset of America's democratic experiment, was still greatly concerned with the prospect of an aristocratic monetary majority subverting the interests of a numerical majority. Madison's concern is well founded, as there may be no simple answer to the question, what indeed constitutes a majority?

Two notable, yet very different approaches, to the problem of democracy, deserve a mention. First, Plato considered democracy to be little more than mob rule and, in effect, decided that the problem of democracy was not solvable. Thus, Plato suggested that democracy was one of the worst forms of political order. For Plato a tyranny of the majority was the inevitable result of democracy, and the fix was to ensure that a benevolent philosopher king held the power within any political system. Alternatively, James Calhoun, a southern American statesman prior to the Civil War, argued for the notion of popular sovereignty. Calhoun's idea was deceptively simple; the majority of people should never be denied their political will. After all, if such a denial occurs then how can we suggest that democracy is taking place? Thus, for Calhoun, the resolution to the problem of democracy is found in simply not worrying so much about the liberties of minorities, after all they were the ones who lost the political battle. I have two criticisms of Calhoun's rejection of even considering the problem with democracy. First, it depends greatly what 'minority' means. Does this mean a person who has lost a stake in a single position - a political minority - or are we discussing a group of people -status minority - who are destined to almost always lose political battles because of a certain status. If we are talking about the latter then it seems that such a condition is inconsistent with any just ideals of a democratic political system. Second, determining what is a majority is a harder question than a first peek would suggest. Is the majority to be calculating using a local, state, national, or even global unit of analysis? In this way, the force that gets to decide the unit of analysis also gets to decide who is in the majority. Thus, popular sovereignty might do little to resolve the very real problem of democracy.

Most often when aristocratic society is considered the great fear comes from the wrath of an oppressive tyrannical leader, or in the abuse of assumed noble power. Within a democratic framework, however, the fear is in the majority's will to use their might as a means to oppress minority rights and freedoms. In either case, interestingly enough, fear is found in the structural legitimization of unjust treatment, suggesting that both sets of fears are grounded in a pre-institutional notion of justice. It is almost as if a political necessity of democracy is to formulate a system that protects people from themselves, or at least their quick-tempered whims. This is a quite different type of proposal from that simply controlling a designated leader. Thus the problem of democracy is a problem of our time and ourselves, and thus qualitatively different than the most pressing political concerns of differing eras.

Hence 'Tocqueville shared the fury of the Publius over the anarchy created by Shay's Rebellion, and by Rhode Island's all-powerful legislature' (Brown, 1988: 54). Both of these examples represent instances wherein a proper functioning democracy was subverted by a tyranny of a majority, whereby the majority unduly violated the rights and liberties of the minority.

Tocqueville was particularly interested in how the American democratic system was able to function with very little difficulty. The conclusion that Tocqueville arrived at was two-fold. First, unlike their aristocratic European neighbours Americans started from a position of relative equality. The availability of land in the new America accounted for much of this relative equality. For centuries aristocratic land holdings had codified the sociopolitical arrangements in Europe, but the availability of 'unused' land in America would necessitate a position of relative equality not found in Europe. Of course, inequities in land and other sources existed in America during Tocqueville's visit, but Americans, more than their European counterparts, could actualize the possibility of going elsewhere. In many ways, the option of physical mobility represents one of the most pronounced checks against gross inequality. Early in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville notes 'So the more I studied American society, the more clearly I saw equality of conditions as the creative element from which each particular fact derived, and all my observations returned to this nodal point' (1969: 9). Second, Tocqueville places a heavy, and favourable, emphasis upon the Federalist Papers as well as the American political doctrine of federalism as a notion that has the strenght to properly direct governmental power. Tocqueville was extremely fascinated by the general political philosophy of federalism. As Bernard Brown explains,

> The American solution, he saw, was to divide responsibilities between states and the national government by giving each the power to enforce decisions against individuals, and by giving the national government all the power it needed to meet its obligations of defence and maintenance of national unity. … Tocqueville considered this "wholly novel theory" to be a "great discovery of contemporary political science" (Brown, 1988: 46).

Interestingly, both Tocqueville and the Publius (Madison Federalist Papers #51) arrive at a similar method, imbued with the same faith in federalism: to deal with at least one aspect of democracy's dilemma, adopt a Constitutional

provision with a proper separation of powers. This safeguard would help ensure that either a faction of wealth (monetary majority) or the unjust whims of a majority (numerical majority) could not corrupt the whole of a government by meddling with a single branch therein. (Thus, lessening the chance that a tyranny of the majority could subvert just minority interests). Tocqueville was very astute to the potential problems to democratic order that results when political power becomes overly concentrated and centralized in the hands of a few. Along these lines, Tocqueville notes the important role of the American judiciary in preventing abuses of political assemblies,

> Restricted within its limits, the power granted to American courts to pronounce on the constitutionality of laws is yet one of the most powerful barriers ever erected against the tyranny of political assemblies (1969: 103-104).

Although Tocqueville has a great sense of hope that America's democratic experiment will succeed, he is not completely confident that it will overcome two great challenges. Tocqueville identifies two primary devices, which have the power to undermine (American) democracy while ushering in tyranny. First, an unnatural love of money has the potential to make a democratic citizen neglect their civic responsibilities. This consideration is one of the first hints in *Democracy in America* that simple economic self-interest is not necessarily a complement to successful democratic order. Tocqueville reasons that if a person loves money to an unhealthy extreme, then it will become their master. If money becomes the primary interest in a person's life, then they will likely pay increasingly less attention to the political process. This type of politically compliant and materialistically driven behavior can silently and quickly render the necessary concerns of a democratic order moot to many of its citizens. Second, the concern more deeply expressed and developed by Tocqueville, is the fear that individualism will steer democratic citizens away from public concerns (Schlesinger, 1988: 97). If democratic citizens invest their time and effort managing only private concerns, as opposed to making some investment in public matters, then a tyranny of the majority might advance with very little notice or concern. It is in this way that Tocqueville breaks from Smith's notion of the benevolently self-interested actor. For Tocqueville, one cannot kill the two birds of public and private concerns with a single stone of 'self-interest'; instead public and private concerns must be treated as separate and distinct. Accordingly, an understanding of simple

self-interest cannot fulfill both the public and private duties of a democratic citizen. Herein lies the primary tension in any attempt to solve 'the problem of democracy' as originally stated. The moment that a political body assigns a 'civic duty' this seems to axiomatically restrict some degree of personal freedom. Thus, solving the problem of democracy must involve a delicate balancing act between the civic duties assigned to a person and the degree of freedom allowable to that person.

Nonetheless, Tocqueville reasons that the problem of democracy is not insurmountable and, aside from an effective separation of governmental power, can find resolution in a two-stage process. First, the actual workings of the government must be designed so that structural power is never allowed to be in a position wherein a few can be corrupted, and likewise affect the whole political process. Second, Tocqueville's solution seems to demand a certain degree of citizen involvement with the political process. Individuals, for Tocqueville, must act in accordance with enlightened self-interest (or self-interest well understood, as he used the two phrases interchangeably). As Welch expands the point, 'it naturally follows that these individuals, operating under the guise of enlightened self-interest, will form political associations with the purpose of both forming and resisting majority rule' (2001: 95). Thus, having a citizenry with enlightened self-interest is a necessary condition if the problem of democracy is to be resolved. Therefore, we can conclude that - if Tocqueville's stages are aptly followed - politics has moved from away from violence and toward persuasion as a means to exercise political action (Welch, 2001: 94). Tocqueville's dual stage program is designed to form an equilibrium, which offers both meaningful political participation and useful social control mechanisms. The idea is that if democracy is to be successful, and likewise avoid falling into a system of tyranny or rebellious anarchy, it is crucial for citizens to have access to non-violent means of political action, and a belief that these actions might have some real effect. If the citizenry of a democracy lose hope in the ability to change the system through ascribed sociopolitical processes, i.e., voting, peaceful protest, etc., then, the great potential exists for violence to become the (only) vehicle available for social and political change. This is the type of scenario that Tocqueville's attempts to solve with his solution to the problem of democracy. In order to do so, however, he makes a critical distinction between the egoist and the individualist.

Tocqueville defines egoism as 'a passionate and exaggerated love of the self which leads a man to think of all things in terms of himself and to prefer himself to all' (1969: 506). It 'springs from blind instinct' (1969: 506). Thus egoism is used to define the wholly selfish person. Alexander Hamilton, writing in Federalist #6, warns of an egoist who would use the public good (self-interest well understood) as a disguise to mask his truly private and selfish interests. Writing of these 'others' Hamilton notes

> And there are others … which take their origin entirely in private passions; in the attachments, enmities, interests, hopes, and fears of leading individuals in the communities of which they are members. Men of this class, whether the favourites of a king or of a people, have in too many instances abused the confidence they possessed; and assumed the pretext of some public motive, have not scrupled to sacrifice the national tranquility to personal advantage or professional gratification (1696: 27-8).

Alternatively, Tocqueville argues that individualism 'is based on misguided judgment rather than deprived feelings' (1969: 506); it is 'a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows' (1969: 506). Egoism, it seems, is associated more with the natural condition of man; individualism more with the disdain of civic duties (Anastaplo, 1991: 450-451). Tocqueville, with his distinction between egoism and individualism, is setting the groundwork for a very interesting and influential argument regarding the proper self-interest of a citizen within a democracy. Individualism leaves the false impression that people may neglect the task of political cooperation and suffer little or no consequence of their abandonment of the process. Tocqueville argues, however, that such sentiments of resignation are misleading, and, if they find any benefit at all, it disappears as one adopts a long-term outlook. Socially engaging politics is always, consistent with a democratic society, in the enlightened self-interest of the person. Similarly, withdrawing from political life - adopting individualism - will always erode enlightened self-interest. The means to avoid misunderstanding self-interest, is to keep a good political outlook, and refuse to abandon the political process when the chances of obtaining a desired political position appear to be bleak. Political associations serve to greatly aid this outlook. A properly functioning democratic system, having citizens involved in political associations, helps to aid this outlook by suggesting to citizens - which have adapted an attitude of enlightened self-interest - that they will

have the political opportunity to 'fight another day.' If democratic citizens internalize this promising suggestion the end result will usually be both resistance to tyranny, and the stifling of a potentially rebellious spirit. The opinion that future political opportunity might be lost (to be won another day), first appreciated by the acceptance of enlightened self-interest and then manifest through political association, likely outweighs any serious thought of rebellion.

It is important to note that Tocqueville did not share many of the favorable attachments that both traditional and contemporary American thinkers have placed on the notion of individualism. In numerous ways the favorable notion of 'rugged' American individualism has found comfort in a strange paranoia-like sentiment. For instance, consider Henry David Thoreau's comment regarding help from others, 'If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life' (1991: 61). By individualism Tocqueville meant something very different than the positive connotation expressed by Emerson's self-reliance or Thoreau's retreatism. Tocqueville understood individualism to occur when a member of the community made the choice, 'to sever himself from the mass of his followers, and to draw apart from his family or friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself' (1696: 506). In this way, Tocqueville argues that individualism sprang from self-interest wrongly understood (Schlesinger, 1988: 98). Consequently, if people possessed enlightened self-interest they would understand that 'retreatist individualism' is simultaneously counter to both a proper functioning democratic system and what is best for personal short and long-term goals. Tocqueville might consider someone who embraces individualism as one who has given up trying to be his own master, and in place of politics has engaged in little more than unproductive escapism. Implicit in this idea is that control and advancement of the self is only possible through some involvement in the political process.

The notion of political escapism is important because a common, and dominant, theme running through *Democracy in America* is that clearly people will have rulers, what remains in dispute is who these rulers are to be. This idea is crucial because once it is accepted that politics will happen whether or not (democratic) citizens approve or allow such a monster, then political participation (perhaps through political associations) becomes a civic duty as opposed to a 'free choice' that one can either justly make or decline to make.

In other words, the freedom to refuse the political might not, in a democratic society, be a freedom at all, at least not a freedom that allows the continuance of just democratic order. Furthermore, the withdrawn stance taken by an embrace of individualism, as understood by Tocqueville, is at best an act of futility, and at worst a misguided deterministic cry for tyranny. Tocqueville's observation of the individual is powerful when we realize that those who engage in 'political escape' never successfully invoke resistance to tyranny. One might advance the argument that individualism is in and of itself a political action, after all choosing not to collectively participate in political action seems to be politically motivated undertaking. But might we say that suicide is a freely chosen act of full self-ownership? Yes of course both claims can be made, but the larger point is clear: choosing not to continue a political life is certainly a choice, but it is hardly a decision rendered with a proper consideration of a continued political existence. One does not escape the political because they have abandoned the process. Refusing to practice politics, and thus entering into political isolation, will only subjugate one to the will of others - the majority - who refuse to enter into this same isolated state of affairs. Isolation is not a defence against tyranny. Thus, Tocqueville's individual is to be understood as in active revolt against the practice of politics, but as Tocqueville is quick to point out this revolt against the political is truly a revolt against enlightened self-interest. It is with this line of reasoning that Tocqueville makes one of the most compelling arguments in *Democracy in America*, and reaps the added benefit of pointing to the practical result of an apolitical stance.

It is fair to characterize Tocqueville's notion of enlightened self-interest as a type of personal interest, which realizes that the best means to undertake economic and political success is through a socially developed political process, as opposed to an individualistic retreat. Tocqueville would write about how the doctrine of enlightened self-interest could serve as a means to mitigate the social inequities of the old aristocratic order as well as stressing its importance to the success of America's democratic ideal:

> So the doctrine of self-interest properly understood is not new, but it is among the Americans of our time that it has come to be universally accepted. It has become popular. One finds it at the root of all action. It is interwoven in all they say. You hear it as much from the poor as from the rich (1969: 526).

Tocqueville offers two compelling reasons as to why the mode of political participation, as an expression of enlightened self-interest in democratic societies, ought to be socially constructed through direct participation in political associations. Tocqueville argues,

> An association may be formed for the purpose of discussion, but everybody's mind is preoccupied with the thought of impending action. An association is an army, talk is needed to count numbers and build up courage, but after that they march against the enemy (1969: 193).

He makes quite clear that political associations represent an effective means to deter a tyranny of the majority through the protection of minority interests. In discussing the important role of minority political association Tocqueville notes

> In our day freedom of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority. In the United States, once a party has become predominant, all public power passes into its hand; its close supporters occupy all offices and have control of all organized forces. The most distinguished men of the opposite party, unable to cross the barrier keeping them from power, must be able to establish themselves outside it; the minority must use the whole of its moral authority to oppose the physical power oppressing it. Thus one danger has to be balanced against a more formidable one (1969: 192).

In the above passage Tocqueville suggests that democracy seems to have the unique problem of needing a middle ground between individual or minority, and governmental or majority concerns. This is where associations find their greatest utility. Interestingly, this line of reasoning offers us a good explanation as to why a minority is just as important as the majority to the functioning of successful democracy. Clearly, the majority serves the role of representing the most widely held interest. But it is the identification of the minority as the 'other' which allows the majority to form an important sense of social cohesion. Inversely, minority interests often garner their support from individuals who reject the type or substance of social cohesion offered by majority involvement. Of course, the feeling of the 'other' created within both majority and minority groups can, but does not have to, result in disastrous consequences.

The lone individual can, structurally, accomplish very little. Likewise, if governmental power, understood as directed by either a numerical majority or an elite few, is allowed an undue degree of control then tyranny will likely follow. The best and most viable option that remains, according to Tocqueville, for successful democratic order, are individuals who partake in the only type of political participation that can both 'make a difference' and 'squelch the taste of rebellion,' join and participate in political associations. Tocqueville goes so far as to suggest that these associations are not only desirable, but also necessary if we are to ever escape the problem of democracy by the use of enlightened self-interest.

> I am not afraid to say that the doctrine of self-interest properly understood appears to me the best suited of all philosophical theories to the wants of men in our time and that I see it as their strongest remaining guarantee against themselves. Contemporary moralists therefore should give most of their attention to it. Though they may think it incomplete, they must nonetheless adopt it as necessary (1969: 527).

Thus, the end result of a democratic citizenry joining and participating in meaningful political association is so that egoistic individualism (Madison's factionalism) may be transcended, and an era of enlightened self-interest (Madison's public good) be ushered in (Brown, 1988: 54).

The strong emphasis that Tocqueville places on both enlightened self-interest and political associations presents an interesting concession that he suggests must be made in the name of democracy. It seems as if an effective democracy, along with the freedom and equality therein, exists only if its citizens possess enlightened self-interest and accordingly form meaningful political associations. This begs the question; how much freedom can exist within a political system where the citizens must adapt an outlook of enlightened self-interest? Tocqueville's line of reasoning suggests that members of a democracy, if they are to keep a democratic system, are slaves to the notion of enlightened self-interest. The use of the term slave may be harsh, but the point is clear; a good democracy does come with at least one very long string attached, the string of enlightened self-interest. Of course, the argument can be advanced, similar to the way Rousseau argues for 'general will,' which that enlightened self-interest can never be a citizen's burden because it is a 'good.' Further, regardless of whether a democratic citizen accepts enlightened self-interest as a 'good' is not important. The case is closed, the debate is over. This style of argument can easily catch a skeptical eye, as it suggests that free-

dom is somehow an assignment, and that those who have become enlightened know how this assignment is to be completed. If freedom is socially and politically accepted as an assignment then the problem of democracy seems to have found a psychological endgame. Democratic citizens simply accept their assignment, and accordingly democracy finds its place within this acceptance. However, a challenge to this potential solution would note that the purpose of democratic order should not involve assignments, but should instead allow people to create and practice their own assignments - the goal of liberal democracy.

How does one obtain Tocqueville's essential mechanism, enlightened self-interest? One might assume that Tocqueville is clear about how one might go about obtaining this extremely, almost paramount, democratic virtue, but unfortunately no such clarity is offered. The tensions associated with obtaining enlightened self-interest seem to be caught between education/socialization and pure 'natural' knowledge. For instance, Tocqueville writes:

> I do not think that the doctrine of self-interest as preached in America is in all its respects self-evident. But it does contain many truths so clear that for men to see them it is enough to educate them. Hence it is all-important for them to be educated, for the age of blind sacrifice and instinctive virtues is already long past and I see a time approaching in which freedom, public peace, and social stability will not be able to last without education (1969: 528).

This particular passage is troubling partly because of the all-or-nothing importance, which Tocqueville attaches to enlightened self-interest. Enlightened self-interest is so crucial to the general notion of democracy, freedom, public peace, and social stability that I am curious the length to which Tocqueville would go to make sure that citizens were aware of and practiced this necessary idea. Might his zealous defense of enlightened self-interest carry us to the same tyranny, which he is trying to avoid, thus creating a type of double democratic paradox? Enlightenment is a broad notion, and becomes ever broader when one tries to maintain the legitimacy of a political system based upon such an idea. It seems as if Tocqueville has caught himself in the middle of a very tenuous and questionable position. The challenge, however, still remains in explaining how this idea is transferred to the citizens of a democracy while still maintaining an acceptable degree of freedom.

For good reason Tocqueville avoids suggesting the 'easy' solution that enlightened self-interest is solely a natural occurrence. If he were to adopt this position he would have to explain why the doctrine was only apparent after so many thousands of years of human existence and political thought, and further why aristocracy would not be the best method to go about its realization. These explanations would prove to be very difficult tasks. Instead, Tocqueville argues that some of a person's enlightened self-interest is natural, leaving some parts of it to be learned through education. In reading *Democracy in America* a sense is felt that after a certain period of time ideas that are learned simply become habit, and thus people no longer have to deeply contemplate them before they are positively adopted into practice. For instance, Tocqueville makes a point to explain how enlightened self-interest can become a matter of instinct,

> At first it is of necessity that men attend to the public interest, afterward by choice. What has been calculated becomes instinct. By dint of working for the good of his fellow citizens, he in the end acquires a habit a taste for serving them (1969: 512-513).

Interestingly, there are no references in *Democracy in America* that indicate what part of enlightened self-interest, or for that matter how much of it, is to be learned. As a matter of rhetoric I cannot fault Tocqueville for avoiding the development of this line of thought. After all, once it is established what must be learned in order to solve the problem of democracy then by extension another political dilemma is likely not far behind. However, Tocqueville might still be caught in a serious logical problem. Either enlightened self-interest is natural to the person, learned from another, or a combination thereof. If the notion is simply natural it becomes difficult to reason that an aristocracy would not be better suited than a democracy to exercise the value. If, on the other hand, enlightened self-interest is learned, then the 'teachers' of such an idea would have a greater claim to political or social control than would a majority of those who were not enlightened. Tocqueville's answer to this delicate issue of obtainment must involve some sort of compromise between these two strict positions, but how this compromise is to take place is absent from Tocqueville's presentation. Even an idea as seemingly beneficial as 'enlightened thought', might well addresses some of democracy's riddles while at the same time instigating others. Whenever we propose a way

to make a political system work better it seems axiomatic that our action will somehow involve getting others to 'do something.' Thus, the desire to make a political system work better will usually involve the freedoms of some being curtailed or controlled. Accordingly, if the problem of democracy were to be restated more clearly it might ask, how much freedom is a good democracy worth?

Tocqueville makes a strong presentation of a democratic model based upon the notion of cooperative individuals using enlightened self-interest to pursue both private ends and public goods. For the most part, while still standing by the concerns I have raised, I find great value in treating enlightened self-interest as the glue, which enables both democracy and freedom to cohabitate within the same political and social boundaries. However, I am not convinced that Tocqueville's arguments allow for a resounding defense of liberalism or liberal democracy. Which individual rights under liberalism would be allowed in a democracy that must, to be successful, embrace enlightened self-interest? Presumably, only the rights that do not conflict with enlightened self-interest. However, these rights, if they could even be called such, would hardly be consistent with classical liberal thought if they were contingent upon the interpretation of such a broad notion. A response to this objection might be, if 'the people' are truly enlightened then conflicts will not arise, and disputes over rights or freedoms are simply the result of misunderstandings that can be fixed through education. However, this is exactly the type of philosophical hypothetical, which Tocqueville's discussion of politics is designed to avoid. We know that conflict will occur in a democratic system endorsing both liberalism and enlightened self-interest, so the question still remains, which ought to prevail, how much freedom is a good democracy worth? Tocqueville's focus upon the importance of collective action makes it necessary that the collective (association) be rewarded with political victory as opposed to the individual who goes about it alone. And if the matter ended with the victory of a position this does not seem to be much of a problem. However, problems do arise when the victory of democracy is viewed as contingent upon everyone being properly educated. What is this to say of the 'freedom to be left alone in a democratic society?' Should a citizen expect anything less from a democratic government? Tocqueville would likely answer this concern by suggesting, of course they should, if they desire to have a democratic government for long.

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