

What Kind of Social Scientist Was Tocqueville?:
A Reply to Gary Wills

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Paper prepared for the Workshop on the Workshop 3,
Indiana University, Bloomington, June 3-6, 2004

Tocqueville's appeal

Two centuries after Tocqueville's birth, the "Tocqueville industry" is in full spate. The fact that the influential *Journal of Democracy* dedicated its tenth anniversary issue (January 2000) to Tocqueville by inviting a wide range of scholars to comment on his works shows the extent to which Tocqueville has become, so to speak, the "unsurpassable horizon" of our times.

How can we account for the current fascination with Tocqueville? As Cheryl Welch argued, we love to converse with Tocqueville because his work "seems to retain a greater measure of normative and exploratory power—and intellectual provocation—than that of many other nineteenth-century thinkers" (Welch 2000, 1). Tocqueville, who aspired to create a new science of politics, has manifested a unique power to bring certain political anxieties into sharper focus. His writings have been creatively appropriated by thinkers on both the left and the right, who admire him either for his insights into democratic citizenship and the art of association or for his defense of decentralization and self-government and his skepticism toward big government.

To be sure, the Frenchman was "the first anthropologist of modern equality" (Welch 2000, 50) and his writings addressed important topics such as civil society, pluralism, religion, participatory democracy, democratic mind, and the limits of affluence. Today, more so than with any other political thinker, we feel the need to converse with Tocqueville's "complex mixed messages of dire warning and hopeful counsel" (Welch 2000, 217) that stimulate reflection on contemporary political dilemmas in general and on American politics and culture in particular. Tocqueville's writings

appeal across ideological divides more so than the works of any other political thinkers. The reason is simple: everyone can look at that side of Tocqueville's works that best suits his or her own political convictions. At the same time, Tocqueville's particular combination of historical, philosophical, and sociological investigations provides us with a set of prescient psychological insights into the democratic mind and teaches us important lessons about how to moderate and educate democracy through the art of association.

Yet, in spite of his popularity, Tocqueville remains a notoriously difficult subject and a surprisingly elusive target. To make him a sort of guru or a prophet would certainly be a mistake. The editors of the recently published *Tocqueville Reader*, Oliver Zunz and Alan Kahan, warned us against the dangers of considering Tocqueville as an infallible prophet. Tocqueville, they pointed out, was an abstract thinker without a technically precise vocabulary and whose ideas were related to a particular political, social, and cultural context. Without a proper sense of the particular problems from which he started, we risk misunderstanding Tocqueville's political philosophy and cannot recognize the quality and unique character of his thought. To be sure, his unconventional liberalism—Tocqueville's "strange liberalism" according to Roger Boesche (1987)—continues to fascinate and puzzle his interpreters. Friends of classical liberalism would like to discover in Tocqueville a strong defender of market-based economic liberalism, and to their surprise and dismay, all they get is a somber reflection on the limits of the economic competition, the perils of abundance, and the leveling aspects of market-based democratic societies.

Tocqueville's critics

But this is not the only source of dissatisfaction with Tocqueville. Reacting against the claim that *Democracy in America* is the best book ever written on democracy in general and on American democracy in particular (the statement belongs to Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, translators of Tocqueville), some critics cast doubt on Tocqueville's method of inquiry. They suggested that Tocqueville got America wrong because he worked with a flawed method. Hence, the conclusions presented in his book are mostly unwarranted generalizations based on a priori ideas which he brought with him from France. One such critique appears in Gary Wills's recent article, "Did Tocqueville 'Get' America?," published in the April 29, 2004 issue of the *New York Review of Books*. In Wills's view, Tocqueville did not get America right. He opines that Tocqueville was "uninterested in the material bases of American life" (2004, 52) and points out that "there is practically nothing in his first volume ... about American capitalism, manufactures, banking, or technology." (52). Wills deplores Tocqueville's scarcity of examples and unwarranted generalizations when arguing that "Tocqueville reasoned a priori rather than from the facts he found in America. He 'divines' America- or 'intuits' it" (2004, 52). Wills also criticizes Tocqueville's "aphoristic and almost oracular style" (2004, 55) and claims that his popularity is in large part derived not from the soundness of what some of us call Tocquevillian analytics, but "from the ease with which detached maxims can support the fashion of the day. Conservatives find in him a proleptic attack on the welfare state, a defense of states' rights, and the insistence on

democracy's need of a supporting religion. Liberals find in him the praise of equality as the essence of democracy and the central role he gives to courts of law" (2004, 55).

After condemning "the shallow empirical basis of [Tocqueville's] study" and the fact that "he showed little interest in what ordinary people were doing at their work or in their homes" (2004, 52), Wills goes on to add: "In his erratic traversing of the country, what Tocqueville did not see is often more interesting than what he did. ... Most of his opinions were formed at his first encounters with an idea and they were rarely altered afterwards" (2004, 53). He criticizes Tocqueville's "propensity to form instant judgments" (2004, 53) and suggests that regarding religion in America (and not only), "Tocqueville concluded things about America because of prejudices he brought with him from France" (2004, 54). Wills concludes that "Tocqueville was not writing an objective account of what he saw in America. He was writing for the French. ... How best to inoculate his own country against its [democracy's] dangers was the first and final task he set himself." (2004, 54).

But Wills is not content to attack only Tocqueville's method of *Democracy in America*. He avers that "the taste for the grand simplification is apparent in all of Tocqueville's work" (2004, 55) and argues that even in the *Old Regime and the Revolution* Tocqueville "showed no interest in the material bases of a national culture" (2004, 55). Wills concludes by claiming that Tocqueville's economic analysis is always superficial and vague and argues that his political conclusions cannot be taken at face value.

The Old Regime and the Revolution

These charges--that Tocqueville was a superficial social scientist who reasoned a priori rather than from facts, who worked with a shallow empirical basis (in all his works), and observed only what he wanted to see--are serious and warrant closer examination. I do not intend to offer a point-by-point rebuttal of Wills's claims, nor do I intend to reexamine how Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*. Instead, I am interested in asking more broadly what kind of social scientist Tocqueville was. In what follows, I would like to challenge some of Wills's claims by concentrating mostly on Tocqueville's *Old Regime and the Revolution* (henceforth abbreviated as OR), a book that has never enjoyed in the United States the high reputation that it has always had in France. The choice is justified by the fact that in many ways, this was a surprising book for Tocqueville as well as for his readers. Because the conclusions of the book published in 1856 significantly differed from the assumptions Tocqueville started from in 1850, we can better appreciate the quality and nature of his research and method.

More austere in composition and less philosophical than *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville's *Old Regime and the Revolution* has never become a best-seller in America. Interestingly, the University of Chicago Press has been reluctant to publish a paperback version of the new Kahan translation for the past six years and the recent translation of Volume Two of this work, including Tocqueville's notes, has passed unnoticed. Those historians who tend to concentrate on big events are likely to be taken aback by the message of Tocqueville's book that downplayed the much discussed originality and achievements of the Revolution by proving that the real "revolution" had occurred long

before 1789. Not surprisingly, the archives of *The Old Regime and the Revolution* have never been studied as closely as those for *Democracy in America*. The result is that few readers of Tocqueville's last book have been able to fully comprehend the subtle and complex architecture of his analysis of the Old Regime and to appreciate the methods used by Tocqueville.

A former student of the late François Furet, Robert T. Gannett has recently published a superb and learned book that achieves, *mutatis mutandis*, what James T. Schleifer's classic *The Making of Tocqueville's 'Democracy in America'* accomplished two decades ago. Gannett obtained permission to consult Tocqueville's family archives which turned to be a true goldmine. We learn that Tocqueville in fact wrote not one but several "books" about the Old Regime and the French Revolution. These "books" are very different in focus, scope, and method, and their differences tell us a lot about Tocqueville's shifting ideas and interests from 1850 to 1856 (when Volume One was published). With the skill of a competent detective in love with his subject, Gannett lifts for his readers the veil of secrecy imposed by Tocqueville who refused to give precise textual references within Volume One of *The Old Regime*. Not surprisingly, his readers have hard time guessing the huge amount of research and thinking involved by the writing of this book.

Reexamining the laboratory of the *Old Regime* allows us to test some of Wills's most serious claims. Is it true that in all his works Tocqueville used to reason a priori rather than from facts? In particular, is this claim true when applied to *The Old Regime and the Revolution*? By reading Gannett's book, we can answer this question in the negative. We can clearly see how Tocqueville crafted the form and substance of his book

in response to his findings in the archives at Tours and Paris's Hôtel de Ville as well as to the theses of some of his contemporaries. The assumptions he started from significantly differed from the conclusions he reached at the end of his archival research. Indeed, *The Old Regime and the Revolution* is a work whose general framework evolved over time. Tracing this journey is indicative of what kind of social scientist Tocqueville was and how much work was involved in the writing of the book. It should also serve as a cautionary note for those who criticize Tocqueville for his allegedly impressionistic writing style. If the book seems clear and short, the appearances are certainly deceiving. Its conception took a very long time and Tocqueville was stricken with recurring and painful stomach and lung ailments during the writing of the book. He also had to overcome many doubts regarding subject, method, scope, and genre; furthermore, he moved to different places (Tours, his castle in Normandy, Paris) to gather data or concentrate on the writing of the book. The interesting part of the story is that Tocqueville's many writing blocks (widely documented in his letters) forced him to reassess the focus and method of his work (four of them to be precise, in 1852, 1853, 1856, and 1858).

There are approximately 3,700 pages of archival notes preserved in Tocqueville's archives that allow his interpreters to glimpse into his readings and extensive preparatory notes. To be sure, in preparing and writing the book, Tocqueville's developed an immense arsenal of ideas and data. He wrote detailed endnotes, that contain his famous "hic" observations and passionate rejoinders that range from single words to full pages of commentary that demonstrate his varying levels of engagement with his texts, sources, and authors. We now know that Tocqueville was heavily influenced not only by Burke

but also by the ideas of other authors such as Macarel, Dareste, Constant and Barante who are not usually listed among his sources (they do not appear, for example, on the index of Richard Herr's book, *Tocqueville and the Old Regime* or in Furet's analyses).

The first sketch of the book appears in Tocqueville's seminal letter to Kergolay from December 15, 1850, sent from Sorrento. In this letter, Tocqueville expressed his preference for a philosophical history that would seek to unearth the hidden cause beneath history's surface. In so doing, he hoped to be able to offer "an ensemble of reflections and insights on the current time," that is to say, a history that would shed light on "the cause the character, the significance of the great events that formed the principal links in the chain of our time."¹ This preference indicates the extent to which in this regard Tocqueville followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Guizot, who masterfully blended the analysis of historical facts and philosophical history.

Almost a year later, in January 1852, Tocqueville set out to write this book which, strangely, had little to do with the Revolution *per se*. At the heart of Tocqueville's project, lay a genuine political concern. He was intrigued by his country's oscillation between despotism and liberty and sought to explain this by concentrating on Napoleon who played a key part in this story. Hence, Tocqueville's decision to focus on the rise of Napoleon. But in order to do that, he needed to comprehend the nature of society formed by the Revolution. To this effect, he started with the Directory and worked his way through Lafayette's memoirs and Constant writings from 1796 and 1797 such as *On the Force of the Current Government* and *On Political Reactions*. He was preoccupied with finding the proper balance of facts and judgments and resorted to a combination of sociological analysis applied to revolutions and psychological analysis. He also planned

¹ The letter is quoted in Gannett, 2003, 29.

to consult witnesses of that period and was intent on reading printed documents and memoirs.

Seeking to understand the current of opinion of a certain era, he suspected, however, that these sources might be of limited help in unveiling the spirit of a certain age (in this case, the Directory). Tocqueville decided to eventually shift his research focus from memoirs to manuscript sources in archives. The next four years (1852-1856) were devoted to this arduous task. If the idea of continuity between the Revolution and the Old Regime emerged rather late in the conception of the book, its impact on his vision was fundamental. What was initially meant to be a history of the Revolution and the First Empire eventually turned out to be a history of the Old Regime as Tocqueville grasped that the administrative regime of the Consulate and Empire was not a creation *ex nihilo* but a mere restoration. Tocqueville realized that to understand the history of Napoleon he had to dig deeper in the heart of the Old Regime where we could discover the roots of the French malaise. As Gannett shows, the shift in Tocqueville's focus occurred in August 1853 when he decided to write a full-length book on the period preceding the Revolution. This seminal change gave Tocqueville the proper historical perspective that other interpreters of 1789, including Burke, lacked. But his change, important as it was, did not do away with Tocqueville's famous writing blocks. According to Gannett, these stemmed from "a contradiction at the heart of his historical vision, as he struggled to reconcile his view of the Revolution's continuity, seen in its administrative structures, and its radical ideological transformation" (Gannett 2003, 39).

The research stints in the archives in Tours and Paris allowed Tocqueville to achieve a better understanding of the evolution of feudal rights and the growth of

administrative centralization in the Old Regime. Anyone who traces Tocqueville's work in the archives cannot help be impressed by his unique research skills. He was a remarkably gifted social historian who did not shy away from researching thoroughly a wide array of resources including journals, histories, memoirs, diplomatic papers, letters, and unpublished manuscripts. His capacity for archival research was certainly amazing, equaled only by his well-known penchant for theoretical generalizations. He was able to delve into huge collections of documents, sometimes poorly organized and to extract from them the essential information he needed for his study. He consulted a mass of documents of various weight and substance in order to gain knowledge of specific facts. He had the luck of being assisted at Tours by a competent director of the collection, Charles de Grandmaison, with whom he allocated one-half hour for general conversation every time he arrived at the archives.

When exploring, for example, the issue of the peasants' property ownership of land in order to assess the remains of feudalism in 1789 (one of the most heavily documented chapter in his book), Tocqueville used various legislative acts, the record of properties from 1790, a count of property holders in 1852 and examined the population growth between 1788 and 1852.² Thus he eventually arrived at a paradoxical and counterintuitive conclusion, one of those Gallic paradoxes deplored by Wills and others, namely that the peasants' feudal hatred increased with the lessening of their feudal obligation.³ By carefully studying the archives and most notably the intendants' correspondence, Tocqueville also came to understand better the causes of the growth of administrative centralization in France. He saw that the absenteeism of the nobles had

² For more details, see Gannett 2003, 43-45.

³ On this issue, see Tocqueville 1998.

made possible the growth of royal power. As Gannett shows (2003, 83-87), Tocqueville conscientiously examined how the local administrators treated ordinary citizens and sought to determine the practical effects of those practices as well as the customs and expectations they engendered. At Tours, Tocqueville carefully studied the complex overlapping and competing jurisdictional claims in order to understand the growth of administrative centralization. Studying the intendants' correspondence as well as pre-Revolutionary administrative law and practice in the archives at Tours and Paris, Tocqueville discovered how the royal administrative machine progressed unopposed at the expense of local participation and liberties.

The continual and minute intervention of the administrative power within the judicial sphere struck him in particular because it stifled local initiatives and freedoms, destroyed any intermediary powers, and strengthened royal tutelage. The outcome was an arbitrary regime, powerful and feeble at the same time, a regime that was incapable of reforming itself in due time and thus paved the way for the Revolution of 1789 and the ensuing violent overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy.

Of special interest are his notes on Turgot's administrative reforms that have recently been translated into English (Tocqueville 2001, 3011-52). In commenting on Turgot who was an enlightened bureaucrat under Louis XVI, Tocqueville draws an impressive list of shortcomings of the administration of the Old Regime. "The reformer Turgot," notes Tocqueville, "is at the same time very much a centralizer. Not only does he not decrease government paternalism, he increases it while improving it" (2001, 303). Turgot's reforms did not lower the crushing weight of taxations, nor were they instrumental in establishing effective municipal governments. Interested in the actual

administration of the countryside, Tocqueville carefully studied the duties and powers of the intendants, the poor condition of the lower classes, and the role of parlements. Noting the almost unlimited power of the intendants, Tocqueville writes in his notes: “The idea of having the governed participate in government and to use them for this purpose is an idea seemingly absent from Turgot’s head” (2001, 326). Reviewing the functions of local governments according to Turgot, Tocqueville remarks the absence of self-government with regard to important tasks such as the administration of common property or schools (2001, 335). Turgot’s plan for urban municipalities, noted Tocqueville, had “no representative body properly speaking” (2001, 339). After reviewing Turgot’s reforms, Tocqueville comments on the political inexperience of the nation: “What is confounding ... is that [Turgot] thinks he is making an administrative reform chiefly destined to facilitate the reform of taxation and its proper division, and that he does not recognize that he is starting an immense political revolution which changes the state’s constitution from top to bottom” (2001, 341).

Equally interesting was Tocqueville’s examination of the famous *cahiers des doléances* that helped him trace the course of public opinion before 1789 and “eavesdrop” on the ideas, habits, and mores of that time (Tocqueville 2001, 352-63). As Gannett shows, Tocqueville was entirely familiar with Prudhomme’s 1789 *Résumé general, ou Extrait des cahiers* in which he could see the divisions between the nobles and the Third Estate prior to 1789. It is surprising to see how much attention Tocqueville paid to economic and social factors (something that Wills claims he failed to do) and how little he was preoccupied initially, as the outline of the book of June 1853 demonstrates, with the role of ideas.

It would also behoove me to say a few words about the dialogue Tocqueville had with a number of authors while writing the *Old Regime and the Revolution*. Gannett shows (2003, 50-51) how Tocqueville's found in Dareste's 1843 essay on the Old Regime the main source of instruction regarding feudal rights. He made extensive use of Dareste's feudal sources and vocabulary but reached a different conclusion. While the latter noticed solidarity among the classes of the Old Regime that allegedly brought steady improvement to the French countryside, Tocqueville saw isolation, distrust, and polarization (his famous collective individualism) that fueled in fact the trend toward centralization. The absenteeism of the nobles was a key factor in the growth of central power and the stifling of local liberties. Thus, Tocqueville understood early on that there had been two revolutions in France prior to 1789 that reinforced each other. The first one made the French peasant a freeholder of property, and the second one released him from the government of his absentee feudal lords. Tocqueville also made creative use of the ideas of lesser-known historians and economists such as Macarel and Le Trosne whose conclusions he rejected.

But if Tocqueville had a major interlocutor in writing the book that was Burke whose texts were seminal for Tocqueville at a crucial juncture in the writing of *The Old Regime*. Tocqueville came to know Burke rather late in his career after having read Charles de Rémusat's articles on Burke published in *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1853. Gannett shows how Tocqueville regarded Burke as his primary interlocutor in the book and highlights how highly efficient was Tocqueville's treatment of Burke, "stripped to the essentials of Burke's thought on the Revolution and adapted to the rhetorical purposes of Tocqueville's argument" (2003, 76). Tocqueville believed that Burke lacked a proper

historical perspective and was misguided by the events he closely witnessed in 1789, thus missing what was most important in the Revolution. He did not realize that the Revolution was not a mere French accident and that its fundamental objective was the pursuit of equality (of conditions) that could not be stopped. He also poorly understood the causes of the fall of the Old Regime and failed to grasp the extent to which his beloved French monarchs had contributed to the death of local liberties and the growth of administrative centralization. That is why, in Tocqueville's opinion, the revolutionaries did not commit the great crimes attributed to them by Burke; it did look as if they had torn living bodies, but in reality they had only dismembered corpses."⁴ In fairness to Burke, it must be pointed out that Tocqueville's treatment of Burke was ultimately biased as he downplayed or failed to mention the broad areas of congruence between their ideas. It can be argued that Tocqueville overstated the continuity between pre-Revolutionary and revolutionary France and thus understated the rupture introduced by the Revolution.

To conclude, Tocqueville's investigation of the Old Regime was a masterful blend of archival research, historical, sociological, political, and philosophical analysis that sought to retrace the loss of local liberties and the growth of centralization in France. Tocqueville regarded his book as providing the essential catalyst for the revival of liberty in France and hoped that by illuminating the causes of the fall of the Old Regime he would be able to contribute to the rejuvenation of political liberty under the Second Empire. By stressing the continuity between the Old Regime and the Revolution, Tocqueville invited his contemporaries to espouse a more balanced view of the Revolution and to refrain from exaggerating its achievements.

⁴ Quoted in Gannett 2003, 75.

Not surprisingly, as we have already seen, he had hard time writing this book. Precisely because he immersed himself in a huge mass of documents and was far from relying on a priori judgments (as Wills claims), Tocqueville found difficult to sort them and extract from them the essential information he needed. To his wife, Mary Motley, he once confessed: “Unfortunately, I still don’t find any ideas to illuminate my path. ... Lost amidst an ocean of papers whose banks I cannot see, ... what is most difficult is conceiving clearly what it consists of and understanding it” (Tocqueville 2001, 10-11). It is no accident that at some point, he deliberately refrained from relying on his voluminous notes and worked hard to extract the essential information and ideas. In this respect, he was not an impressionistic painter but a responsible thinker who cared as much about ideas as about facts.

Tocqueville’s views on economy and social reform

A few words about Tocqueville’s economic views are also in order. Although Tocqueville was not a political economist, he meditated upon the works of important economists such as Jean-Baptiste Say, François Guizot, Duchâtel, and Villeneuve-Bargemont. Tocqueville used Say’s *Complete Course in Political Economy* which he read in 1828 as a guide to understanding the influence of commerce on society and polity. He was also influenced by Duchâtel’s articles on Malthus published in *Le Globe*. By departing from the physiocrats, Say argued that industry was the source of revenue, not agriculture. Say contended that the working of land and commerce were forms of industrial activity. Tocqueville understood the economic and political implications of

Say's classification that challenged the primary role of agriculture and the power of landed aristocracy; this was an indirect argument against primogeniture and in support of equality. In Drolet's view, "that Tocqueville would later emphasise the beneficial consequences the absence of primogeniture had for the equality of conditions in *Democracy in America* is indicative of Say's influence" (Drolet 2003, 41). Influenced by Say, Tocqueville's first volume of *Democracy* appeared to endorse a new liberal political economy that reflected the growth of industry and challenged the preeminence of large landed interests. Tocqueville also endorsed another important aspect of Say's political economy, namely his stress on the relationship between self-interest and good government in an egalitarian society. Drolet argues that "Tocqueville's description of American democracy resembled uncannily Say's description of the market economy in the *Cours complet*. America embodied the spirit of commerce and industry, it permeated the whole society and marked the entire population" (2003, 65).

Yet Tocqueville would eventually advocate a more traditional view rooted in the belief that small and medium scale agriculture rather than industry should have priority in the use of a nation's resources. At the heart of the problem was a larger disagreement about the nature of political economy. On this issue, according to Drolet (2003, 43), Tocqueville's ideas were more in tune with those of Smith and Malthus for whom political economy was part of a wider science of morals and politics. Unlike Say and Duchâtel, Tocqueville did not believe in a divorce between morality, political economy, and politics. Moreover, Tocqueville did share neither Say's utilitarianism nor his conviction that the natural sciences were the model for social and historical studies. Finally, Say's political economy which ascribed such an important role to self-interest,

also gave license to the kind of unfettered financial and material pursuits Tocqueville scorned. Tocqueville realized that industry could become the driving force behind this greed. According to Drolet, Tocqueville suspected that Say's political economy focused on the concern for wealth creation, privileged the interests of industry above all others, and thus, divorced from morality, also could become a threat to liberty. It had little concern for justice.

Tocqueville recognized that Say adopted a simplistic approach when arguing that industry secured liberty which was tantamount to saying that prosperity guaranteed liberty and all that was needed was to follow the natural laws of the economy. According to Drolet (2003, 45), Tocqueville sometimes accepted Say's proposition that prosperity led to liberty but at other times he inverted the proposition, contending instead that it was liberty that led to prosperity. Thus, Tocqueville oscillated between understanding liberty as independent of commerce and liberty as stemming from commerce. While emphasizing the importance of mores and customs, Tocqueville was also prepared to affirm liberty as independent of its association with manners, customs, modes of thought, and laws. In Drolet's opinion, "he did try to formulate a way in which liberty and commerce formed a virtuous and reinforcing relationship. But he also believed, like Rousseau, liberty to be a value independent of market society. He frequently understood liberty in the same spiritual terms Rousseau reserved for virtue. ... By thinking of liberty as a supreme moral value, Tocqueville endowed it with an evaluative potential it did not have in the works of liberals like Smith or Say (Drolet 2003, 71; 70). This would prove to be one of the most original and innovative aspects of Tocqueville's thought.

That Tocqueville was deeply influenced by Christian political economy will come as a surprise to many of his readers who believe, as Gary Wills does, that he was not interested in economics. Michael Drolet has recently demonstrated (Drolet 2003) the influence of Villeneuve-Bargemont's ideas on Tocqueville's thinking on economic and social issues. Tocqueville read Villeneuve-Bargemont's *Christian Political Economy* in the autumn of 1834. This book strengthened Tocqueville's belief that economics and politics must be combined with moral and religious considerations and reinforced his misgivings about the unfettered market economy. Villeneuve-Bargemont's book influenced Tocqueville's unconventional liberalism that was skeptical of materialism and the market's corrosive effects on individuals and society.

Tocqueville's interest in pauperism should also be noted. He was interested in analyzing pauperism within the larger context of the development of democracy and in relation to its relation to social justice and political stability. He started from the following paradox. As civilization developed, and the majority of social classes become more refined, the poor found themselves moving backwards toward barbarism. Placed in the middle of the wonders of civilization, noted Tocqueville, the poor found themselves moving backwards toward barbarism. How can this paradox be accounted for? It had been argued (Drolet 2003) that when thinking about this issue, Tocqueville was reading and was influenced by Malthus who helped him understand better the close relation between combating poverty and crime. Both were consequences of individuals' natural passion for idleness. Tocqueville also grasped the relation between the rise of industry, the growth of the working-class population, and crime and realized how economic crises precipitated an increase in unemployment which in turn contributed to more crime and

poverty. His first report on pauperism, argues Drolet, was modeled on the reports on prisons. Tocqueville distinguished between two kinds of welfare: private and public and noticed that pauperism had grown more rapidly in England than in any country. His visits to England and Ireland were catalysts for his thinking on the issues of political economy, poverty, and the role of local government and local aristocracy. While understanding the importance of free trade, he argued that this policy contributed to multiplying the numbers of poor. He highlighted the economic causes of pauperism and also believed that accepting the principle of a legal right to welfare was the main cause of the growth of pauperism in England. The legal right to welfare in England robbed the poor of their liberty by forcing them to remain within their own parishes. Moreover, the principle of a legal right to welfare made in practice impossible to distinguish between the undeserving and the deserving poor. Tocqueville believed rights ought to be wedded to responsibilities. The legal right to welfare ignores this point and fosters in fact a greater animosity between classes and class conflict, thus breaking down the bonds of community.

For Tocqueville (1997), the solution was the creation of private charities linking private and local initiatives together. He accepted, however, that in times of crisis due to serious economic crises, it was legitimate for the state to give emergency funds. He emphasized the importance of creating an economy whose main branches (agriculture, trade, and industry) were in equilibrium in order to reduce the impact of severe economic crises). Tocqueville also stressed the role of civil associations and widespread property ownership that would lessen dependency, economic crises, and poverty. Workers, Tocqueville thought, must be given the feeling for and the habits of property and must

also be encouraged to build up a capital fund which could be invested. To this effect, he proposed the creation of saving banks independent of the state whose effectiveness could be enhanced if they were linked to *monts-de-piété*.⁵ Tocqueville also wrote a short *Letter on Pauperism in Normandy* in which he discussed various ways of combating the issue of poverty. He suggested the creation of a local association which could provide for mutual assistance and eradicate vagrancy and beggary.

Tocqueville's proposals for welfare were equally far-reaching. He focused on taxation, welfare, and social responsibility and he proposed to reform the whole system of taxation in a way to diminish the burdens on the poor by increasing a little those of the rich. He envisaged increasing the number of saving banks, *monts-de-piété*, mutual aid societies, charitable workshops, establishing free schools and laws restricting working hours, the creation of hospices and *bureaux de bienfaisance*, welfare payments. Tocqueville also took a strong interest in the issue of abandoned children and understood how it related to the issues of poverty and crime. He wrote four such reports for the general departmental council of the Manche between 1843 and 1846. The reports examined the issue of whether it was the responsibility of central government and local authorities or that of wet-nurses and adoptive parents to provide foundlings with clothing and also examined whether it was fair for young single mothers to be entitled to a legal right to welfare. In exploring this issue, he returned to the topic of the problems associated with the limitless expansion of welfare. Tocqueville was against the practice of the *tour* that allowed families to abandon unwanted offspring but thought that abolishing it would not solve the issue of abandoned children. He favored instead the creation of admissions offices.

⁵ For more details, see Drolet 2003, 153-60.

Finally, what can we say about Tocqueville's propensity to philosophical generalizations? I propose that we examine this issue by looking at Tocqueville's dialogue with Guizot that, in turn, would also give us the opportunity to say a few things about *Democracy in America*. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Guizot's history of civilization in Europe and France served as a historical model based on the interpretation of "external" and "internal" facts that helped Tocqueville arrive at his own version of philosophical history (it must be pointed out that while adopting Guizot's historical methods, Tocqueville refused to subscribe to his political message).⁶ Tocqueville applied Guizot's method while writing Volume One of *Democracy*. It can be argued that "just as Guizot's considered civilization a general fact, and European civilization as entering into 'the plan of Providence,' so Tocqueville understood democracy" (Drolet 2003, 63). Inspired by Guizot's seminal distinction between external and internal facts of civilization, Tocqueville's first volume of 1835 focused mostly on the external factors of democracy: climate, geography, laws, institutions, and commercial relations. In his efforts to grasp the role of external elements in the evolution of democracy, he remained close to Guizot's work while also modifying the latter's framework. Whereas Guizot had previously used this distinction between internal and external facts to describe civilization, classifying the internal elements as ideas, outlooks, attitudes, and beliefs, and the external elements as the political and social institutions and economic organization, Tocqueville applied it to society and his analysis of democracy. What he did with this approach was stunningly original. Tocqueville began by being predominantly interested in examining the external elements of society or civilization. It was only later, in Volume Two of *Democracy*, that he deepened his analysis by

⁶ See, for example, Siedentop 1994; Craiutu 1999 and 2003; Gannett 2003; Drolet 2003.

examining the internal elements of democratic society and how they interacted with the external elements.

One can argue that Tocqueville saw democracy in America through pre-existing lenses or conceptual frames that not only yielded a well-crafted image of America, but also a *pre-crafted* one. In other words, he did not contemplate the spectacle of American democracy with the innocence of a dazzled traveler to an exotic and new continent. He tested live some of the ideas that had been debated during the Bourbon Restoration such as the inevitability of equality and democracy (defined as social condition), but in doing so, he was not dogmatic, nor was he inattentive to the material bases of democracy. In America, he saw many processes at work amidst other many different strands of reality and his perception was, to a great extent, a *selective* one. Had he come out of a different theoretical background, he might have perceived and emphasized other equally powerful social patterns and strands, which in turn might have generated a different book, with different conceptual and political implications. To put it differently, one can argue that Tocqueville did not give an objective and neutral perception of America but rather one that was significantly shaped by the pre-existing conceptual lenses through which he saw the nation, and which many commentators embraced and magnified over time. This is *not* to say, however, that the American experience did not teach him anything new. On the contrary, the important role of civil and political associations convinced him that the sovereignty of the people can be purified of its destructive tendencies. America also taught Tocqueville that religion can be transformed into a bulwark of liberty, a lesson that his own country had yet to discover and learn

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