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**Democratic Man and Democratic Mentality;
A Tocquevillian Perspective**

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Acknowledgements and Preface

I want to express thanks my supervisor Henrik Syse for his contribution. It was through one of his excellent courses on the University of Oslo that I was introduced to Alexis de Tocqueville. Subsequently, my initial ambition to write a thesis on International Politics was promptly discarded. The decision to write a thesis concerning Tocqueville and his elaborations on democracy was in large part due to what I perceive as a growing indifference and indolence within Western democracies regarding the sense of political responsibility and identification from its citizens towards the democratic regime which it is dependent upon. I believe that the source of this phenomenon is to be found within the democratic society and the current mindset of the modern, democratic age. In this regard, Tocqueville's insights and observations on democratic man and democratic mentality are here considered remarkable, given the fact that he was a thinker of the 18th century.

During the progress of writing this thesis, Henrik Syse's comments and insights have proven invaluable. Initially, my preliminary suggestions concerning the topics to be included were narrowed down from "4 Ph.D's" to the 'comparatively' restricted fields of inquiry in this thesis.

The decision to write a thesis in English was based in the hypothesis that reading English and writing English was somewhat similar and uncomplicated. This hypothesis was early on proven significantly false and without any substance in reality. Fortunately, Syse's outstanding knowledge of the English language and his consequential language editing has to the highest degree contributed to making this thesis just about comprehensible.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis is dualistic: first, it will attempt to interpret and explain some fundamental thoughts and theories elaborated by the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville. Secondly, its aspiration is to illustrate how Tocqueville's elaborations and theories may contribute to an understanding of modern-day democracy. What, then, is the 'social relevance' of Tocqueville's theories? Undoubtedly, contributing something genuinely new and relevant to the democratic debate seems overly ambitious; furthermore, one has to justify writing a thesis on a thinker of the nineteenth century. Why write a thesis on a thinker of former times? The view set forth here is that Tocqueville's work has significant normative and explanatory power on a number of issues and challenges in present-day democracy. Although he is not widely debated in Europe (he is more acknowledged as an historical observer of the French revolution and the *ancien regime*), he remains a central figure in the political and academic debate in the United States. The groundwork of this debate is Tocqueville's magnum opus *Democracy in America*, published in two volumes, in 1835 and 1840 respectively.

The centre of attention here is not primarily the structural, institutional or judicial aspects of democracy. Rather, the points of departure for this thesis are certain sociological, cultural and psychological aspects of modern democratic society, and in this regard Tocqueville is perceived here as a far-sighted thinker who provided less a general theory of modern democracy than a set of perceptive psychological insights into the democratic mentality and democratic man. What Tocqueville describes is democracy's impact on democratic man's political mindset and his preferences, outlook and values, and the consequences that the principle of equality as a guiding moral principle exerts on modern society. By 'political mindset', this thesis emphasizes that the generally held political and normative conceptions of what is just and unjust, legitimate and illegitimate, right and wrong, are not arbitrary values randomly chosen at will, but based in a coherent and culture-bound 'world-picture', where certain behaviour and action are given meaning and purpose.

Tocqueville has been described as the first political thinker that sounded a warning on some of the potential dangers of democracy, such as the pressure towards conformity,

standardization, and the dominance of public opinion. Furthermore, he was the “first political theorist to treat democracy as a theoretical subject in its own right.” (Wolin 2001:59)

Tocqueville, an aristocrat, realized that the democracy he observed in the United States would inevitably spread to France and Europe, and that democracy as a modern political phenomenon differed fundamentally from pre-modern politics. The crucial difference is located in the fact that modern politics derives from two normative philosophical doctrines; first, every individual is a sovereign entity endowed with reason, and given the fact that they have reason, they should rely on their own rational judgement and not the opinions of others. This philosophical doctrine, labelled sovereignty of the people, represents in conjunction with the other doctrine – the principle of equality – the heart and soul of democracy. The United States of America was the first country that practiced these doctrines, and although *Democracy in America* provides noteworthy insights into the political system of the Americans, it is primarily Tocqueville’s reflections on democracy as a psychological and sociological phenomenon that is given attention here. What makes Tocqueville interesting as a thinker with continued theoretical relevance is, in my opinion, the fact that he was the first thinker who meticulously explored the manner in which the democratic principle of sovereignty of the people and equality function as the normative and philosophical *primus motor* in democratic societies. This includes not only these principles as the indispensable normative foundation of political justice, but also their effect on the political institutions in the West, “the customs, manners, and intellectual habits of the citizens.” (Zetterbaum 1987:761) Furthermore, Tocqueville was aware that the imminent democratic revolution was genuinely *new*, its nature and philosophy differed essentially from previous forms of democracy. It was the political regime of a new governing class – the bourgeoisie – and represented new interpretations of political and social legitimacy, justice, social organization, rights and sovereignty.¹ Tocqueville contemplates upon the democratic organization of society and the rights of the individual, now thoroughly established in Western democracies, and his insights and comments upon the philosophical and theoretical foundations of modern democracy and their effects upon democratic man and democratic mentality are what this thesis will attempt to explain and analyse.

¹ ‘Bourgeoisie’ is here understood as middle class. This class is perceived here as the social class that achieved predominant political importance in the transition from mediaeval to modern social organization. Furthermore, the understanding of middle class status in this thesis is not determined by occupation or social rank, but as a subject of outlook, mentality and values.

Tocqueville created from history and from his own observations certain hypothetical models of social and political actions in order to make comparisons among societies and cultures and to create hypotheses about larger social patterns. It is difficult to reconstruct a larger vision of Tocquevillian sociology, and his particular mix of sociology, history, politics and moral concerns points to the inevitable limits of any overarching theoretical perspective – social scientific or philosophical. An analysis of Tocqueville reveals his disregard for terminological consistency; certain phrases and terms reoccur frequently; 'liberty', 'equality', 'democracy', 'despotism', 'tyranny' and 'centralization' to name a few. These phrases do not carry a wholly stable set of meanings: they are context-dependent constructs. (Welch 2001:3) He wished to avoid an overly technical vocabulary, and though there is a singularity of vision behind his work, there is no systematic elaboration of interrelated theoretical categories. Rather he sought to analyze the complex links – institutional, intellectual, and above all psychological – between social and political institutions. "What guides Tocqueville is not a quest for scientific clarity, but rather the desire to express his ideas in a form that will lead his contemporaries to see their own society with new eyes." (Welch 2001:54)

His insight and perception concerning the future of democracy were in some ways disturbing and even dramatic, but his concern was not to draw an overly pessimistic picture of the democratic future, but rather to portray the weaknesses and strengths of the democratic movement, which he perceived as inevitably moving forward. Furthermore, through civil associations, religion and intellectual freedom he prescribed a recipe that could act as an antidote against "democratic despotism" and "tyranny of the majority", expressions that are central to his understanding of the embryonic predicament of modern democracy.

Also of interest is the fact that he is widely quoted and referred to both by the political 'Left' and 'Right', particularly as a moral and insightful justification of their expressions. On the 'Left' he is the philosopher who supports community and civic engagement and who warns against the appearance of an industrial aristocracy and against the bourgeois or commercial passion for material well-being: in sum, he is for democratic citizenship. On the 'Right', he is renowned for his strictures on 'Big Government', and his affection for decentralized administration, as well as for celebrating individual energy and opposing egalitarian excess: he is a balanced liberal, defending both freedom and moderation. However, in my opinion, few outside academic circles have actually read his works meticulously and achieved a substantial and comprehensive

understanding of his theories and philosophy. Furthermore, the problems and dilemmas that Tocqueville brings into question cannot be categorized as leaning to the 'Right' or 'Left'. His inquiries, his criticism, and his concepts of good governance burst the categories of political and scientific outlooks of thought; even today, they still illustrate new territory lying beyond the staked claims of schools of social science and political parties. Tocqueville's liberalism is, in fact, of a different kind. With rare exceptions, he has not gained followers, either in social science or in politics. His fate has been to be "quoted more often than read and understood." (Hereth 1986:10) His observations bypass the political polarities of the one-dimensional 'left-right' axis. The contradiction and paradox of the fact that politicians and academics of various and often opposite political ideological standpoints use Tocqueville as a source of validation prove the complexity of his work. ²

The decision to focus on Tocqueville as a relevant and significant political thinker in the contemporary democratic debate may seem peculiar. He has been long absent from the centre stage of democratic theory, but through an increasing number of publications the last decade he has regained his status in bringing certain political anxieties into sharper focus, as well as providing an alternative to a Marxist form of analysis. Tocqueville addresses a number of issues that are present in the current democratic debate: why is the public's interest in politics deflating, what is, and what should be the role of government, what is the role of public opinion, why is there a considerable apathy among the public concerning political and civic duties, are norms and virtues important in the preservation of a vital democracy? These questions are not restricted to a particular democratic nation, but widely present in virtually all democratic states in the West. My ambition is to display that a number of issues that Tocqueville discussed and contemplated upon are relevant in the current democratic debate. Tocqueville's greatest strength was perhaps his description of the duality of democracy; inherently democracy – in its Western and pluralistic form - displays a number of potential flaws as well as vigour. Tocqueville's observations are attention-grabbing because they were written at a time when modern democracy still was in its founding, he shows us the ambiguities of democracy and he points out that by itself it is not a miraculous prescription that effortlessly guarantees liberty,

² Tocqueville was also aware of this: he wrote to Eugene Stoffels, February 21, 1835, "I please many persons of opposite opinions not because they penetrate my meaning, but because, looking only to one side of my work, they think they find in arguments in favor of their own opinions." (quoted in Welch, Cheryl (2001) *De Tocqueville*.)

freedom and happiness for all. The issue is not whether democracy is *the* supreme political regime or not; rather, it is what *kind* of democracy we choose to live in. To Tocqueville, democracy is not an abstract and static construction; there are various potentialities and outcomes of it. The potentially positive force of democracy consists of a society where individuals participate in the political environment, actively take responsibility for their own lives, and thus create a vibrant and dynamic political environment. However, democracy can also develop into an atomistic and indifferent society where individuals narrowly follow self-interest and lack any deeper sense of responsibility to the community. In order to live up to its fullest potential, democracy as a political regime demands active practise, political consciousness, enlightenment and responsibility by its citizenry. If these traits are neglected it can potentially develop into a materialistic, conform, indifferent and docile society. The issues Tocqueville raises are not easily categorized into the 'Left' versus the 'Right' or the customary discussion of the Individual versus the State.

Tocqueville confronts us with problems and dilemmas that are largely absent from the central debates and discussions which today address the democratic inertia, as perceived by a significant number of scholars. There is a wide recognition of the fact that participation, both in regard to voting and active practice on the civic level, is dwindling in the West, faith and trust in politicians are diminishing, and grander visions and enthusiasm are to a large extent absent in politics. In this respect, Tocqueville provides an alternative outlook to the contemporary explanations that dominate political science. In the political language of the West, there is a common impression that the democratic regime we know is somehow natural for human society. This thesis claims that the conception of democracy, in its Western form, has become universalistic and detached from its historical, cultural and specific evolution. Tocqueville recognized the immense gravitational force of modern democracy, and he was conscious that modern democracy was not merely a political regime among others. It is not, like ancient democracy, one category in a general classification of political regimes, constituting one of the legitimate forms of human cohabitation, a form that is "eternally possible and eternally susceptible to degeneration and replacement by another. Modern democracy breaks with its natural cycle. It succeeds other political regimes." (Manent 1996:XII) This distinction is essential in understanding modern democracy; a comprehensive analysis requires an amalgamation of the political and the social; its influence and consequences penetrates all aspects of the human

society. The democracy of today is not merely an administrative or a political phenomenon; it is intellectual, psychological, cultural, and economic as well.

While the problems that are usually addressed concerning democracy in the West are very real and must be taken seriously, their explanatory power is, as perceived here, often somewhat inhibited by an overly structural, institutional and empirical outlook. A philosophical explanation that aims at a deeper and wider understanding of Western democratic society is more often than not disregarded as speculative, subjective and 'unscientific' outside academic circles. Tocqueville's theories were written and developed at a time when contemporary political theory was, if not pristine, then still open-minded towards rhetoric, ethics, cultural history, philosophy, religion and humanism, and hence, I will claim, more intellectually reflective and qualitative in nature and outlook.

The aspiration of this thesis is not to present an elaborate and complete presentation and analysis of Tocqueville's works. First, there is a vast literature that has presented and interpreted his works in an excellent manner, and it would be exceedingly ambitious to contribute something significantly new in this regard. Secondly, as the title of the thesis implies, the focal point here is the psychological, philosophical and sociological aspects of his theories, and their validity in contemporary society, especially democracy's impact and effect on democratic man and his mentality.

Briefly on *Democracy in America*

I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there an image of democracy itself, of its penchants, its character, its prejudices, its passions; I wanted to become acquainted with it if only to know at least what we ought to hope and fear from it. (DA I, introduction, p. 13)

Alexis de Tocqueville's main work was *Democracy in America*, published in two volumes, five years apart, in 1835 and 1840.³ The first volume was well received and made Tocqueville renowned, while the reception of the second volume was more differentiated and ambiguous. He complained that there was something problematic in the second volume "which contains something obscure and problematical not grasped by the masses," and that he had wanted to

³ The references to *Democracy in America* in this paper will divert from the norm. For instance, DA I, 1.5 p. 82 refer to *Democracy in America*, volume 1, part 1, chapter 5, page 82 in the publication by Mansfield and Winthrop. The reason for this is the large number of publications of *Democracy in America*, and verifying quotes may prove frustrating when the gap can be more than one-hundred pages, depending on which publication the reader holds.

portray the “general features of democratic societies, for which there is not yet a complete model.”⁴ The disparity between the two volumes has been described as where the first volume treats the forms of democracy, the second moves to the matter. (Mansfield and Winthrop 2000:LV)

Democracy in America contains an analysis and description of the political system in the United States, but the more interesting aspects of the book retain a normative and prescriptive dimension to them, that has remained politically and theoretically alive since its publication. The style resembles a written oration, which was more common in the nineteenth century than today. Although the subject at hand is the United States, the purpose was the illumination of France’s political destiny, and universally, the development of democracy itself. America serves only heuristically as a way of achieving this. He wrote to a friend about the aims of the book:

To show people, so far as possible, what one must do to avoid tyranny and degeneration while becoming democratic. That is, I think, the general idea by which one can comprehend my book, and which will appear on every page of it I now am writing. To labour this sense is in my eyes a holy occupation, and for it one should spare neither his money, nor his time, nor his life. (December 12, 1836, OC:431)

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

In this thesis, I have chosen in chapter two to fragment and dissect Tocqueville’s theory under key headings that I perceive as quintessential. After a short interpretation of some key terms, a more thorough examination follows of crucial terms deployed by Tocqueville. Such an approach has several drawbacks. Tocqueville himself did not present his theories, thoughts and reflections in a comprehensive or methodical way. Throughout his work different conceptions are intertwined and correlated, theory and practice are often treated simultaneously and the same subjects are treated a number of times in different contexts. By fragmenting and systematising the different conceptions there is a risk that connections and relations between them are lost or weakened, interrupting Tocqueville’s wide-ranging train of thought by artificial categorizations. That said, the incentive for choosing this approach is in some way to simplify the task the reader faces in understanding and criticising the conceptions as they are treated

⁴ Letter to John Stuart Mill, December 1840. Tocqueville’s frustration concerning the fact that “the success of the second part of *Democracy* has been less widespread than that of part one.” Furthermore, he writes, “of all the articles written on my book, yours is *the only one* where the author truly masters my thoughts and knows how to express them.” (Zunz and Kahan 2002: 213-14)

and presented here. Furthermore, it will hopefully ease the objective of examining the validity and relevance of the claims made in chapter 3, where some of Tocqueville's conceptions are employed to understand and analyze certain aspects of modern democracy as mentioned previously.

Evidently, by evaluating certain features of modern democracy and claiming that the premises of this assessment are Tocquevillian, the hazard of misinterpretation of theories and concepts is excruciatingly clear. In addition, though a large number of able scholars had commendably scrutinized Tocqueville's theories, the different subjects I have chosen in the ambition to demonstrate the relevance of Tocqueville may diverge from the customary subjects of attention. The focus upon what I conceive as the influential ideas of democracy, such as tolerance, universality, virtue, mores, culture, equality and freedom, and the rationale behind these ideas – modernity, the Enlightenment and post-modernism – constitutes an incomplete and partial field within a complete explanation of contemporary democracy. Employment of these concepts as theoretically independent terms proves difficult, since they in many cases are interdependent and *de facto* variations of the same subject matter. I hope that a comprehensible and thorough description and constructive usage of these terms will illustrate the relevance of Tocqueville as an insightful observer of democracy today. It shall be added that the emphasis on culture and ideas are quite different from a Marxist understanding of social organization and hierarchy, in the sense that it is not the means of production that determines social structure, but the culture of ideas and notions of justice and rights.

There are many schools of thought that study democracy as a theoretical subject, and these provide valuable and insightful understandings of democracy. There are a number of studies that employ Tocqueville as a starting point in investigating certain features of democracy, and there is a multitude of options in using Tocqueville in an examination of democracy. Perhaps the most obvious would be to show causality between the trend of decreasing participation in civil associations and an increasing apathy on political issues and voting-participation. Robert Putnam, Theda Schopol, and Francis Fukuyama are just a few examples of scholars that have used a Tocquevillian understanding in quantitative studies examining this aspect.⁵ Another

⁵ Literature that uses Tocqueville in a quantitative and comparative manner is for example (ed.) Edwards, Bob, Foley Michael W. and Diani, Mario (2001) *Beyond Tocqueville. Civil Society and the Social capital in Comparative Perspective*. Hanover, NH.: University Press of New England, (ed.) Putnam, Robert (2002) *Democracies in Flux. The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. New York: Oxford University Press. Fukuyama, Francis (1999) *The Great Disruption. Human Nature and the reconstruction of Social Order*. New

possible field of study would be the thesis of the growing state and its mounting influence of responsibilities in the tasks that were once conceived as natural for the private sphere.

I have chosen to concentrate on the metaphysical aspects of Tocqueville's reflections, and I hope to present valid arguments, which illustrate that his description of democracy's characteristics were principally predisposed by a concern for virtue and intellectual freedom. By this, I put forward that Tocqueville's underlying intention in the depiction of equality and freedom, associations, self-interest well understood, religion, local democracy, democratic society and democracy's effect upon democratic man and his *mentalité*, was primarily that democratic man ought to exercise and develop his virtuous capabilities.

Chapter Two

Understanding Tocqueville; Methodology and Concepts

2.1 Thesis: Structure and Interpretation

The objective of this chapter is to present an explanation and analysis of Tocqueville's theoretical subjects and work concerning his deliberations on certain aspects of democracy; his anthropology and views human character and virtue, the role of government and the state, civic virtue and associations, the relationship between liberal freedom and democratic equality, the role of religion, individualism and materialism, public opinion, tyranny of the majority and democratic despotism.

Although he was a liberal, Tocqueville distinguished himself from the formal liberalism of John Locke and his followers (in his own time and ours). He did not think it necessary or wise to lay down absolute and all-encompassing universal principles to serve as the formal basis of politics. Even though he lays great emphasis to certain virtues, politics should be open-minded and pragmatic; he favoured leaving the actual exercise of those rights unstipulated, open to experience, and free to be as applied as circumstances permit. His political science is concerned with society that is essentially inspired by liberal principles and the nature and manner by which these are implemented. One of Tocqueville's fundamental observations was the passion for equality in modern democracy, and his understanding of equality is the starting point of his theoretical framework.

I find it also interesting to observe that Tocqueville distinguished himself from other liberal thinkers in the sense that he did not base his anthropological view upon the formal, universal rights of man or a "state of nature" (as conceived by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant or Benedict Spinoza). "Tocqueville looks at the whole soul and at all of democracy. He considers individual, society, and government as involved with one another without the simplifying state-of-nature abstraction." (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:XXVIII) Unlike many thinkers, both contemporary and classical, he did not overly emphasize the importance of an institutional, representative government. His observational starting-point regarding politics is as it is lived and practiced, but what he seeks to understand are the deeper philosophical

commitments that political manifestations are based upon. No ideological principle is imposed *a priori* from the outside. Tocqueville does not discuss the best regime; he acknowledged the fact that democracy was an inevitable force on the verge of breakthrough in Europe, and was more occupied with understanding the changes and consequences that would follow. In this respect, one of the crucial reasons Tocqueville travelled to America, was to observe the future society of "almost complete equality of social conditions" toward which he believed Europe moving inexorably. (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:XL)

Categorizing Tocqueville's method as 'inductive' or 'deductive', or as primarily empirical rather than theoretical proves difficult. Anthropologically, his observation of the political and social organization in the United States, where he analyses institutional and organizational aspects, is of an inductive character. At the same time, Tocqueville undertakes to reveal democracy's effect as an ideological construct upon democratic man and society. By emphasizing mores, he bypassed institutional and judicial explanations, and instead tried to grasp the complex psychological mechanisms that sustain and compose a political culture.⁶

His conception of the proper fit between society and the political gave primary place to the potentially creative activity of citizens, not to the constraining or directive laws of society. Democratic individuals could intervene successfully to create free institutions only if they first understood the 'tendencies' shaping their world, but tendencies and instincts were not social laws. (Welch 2001:22)

Among Tocqueville scholars there are different ways of dealing with the 'light of truth' underlying many of his evaluative judgements and normative presuppositions. One is to ignore the issue as peripheral to what is of enduring importance in his work, namely the innovative contribution on comparative political sociology and cultural history. This view declines to discuss the more philosophical aspects of his thought. A variation of this strategy recognizes that Tocqueville often based his interpretations on unacknowledged moral pre-suppositions, but argues that such prejudices – or moral clichés - are merely the inevitable biases that make true impartiality impossible for any theorist. Their validity is therefore dismissed as unimportant and theoretically uninteresting.⁷ On the other hand, those who deliberately set out to give a wider and more complete picture of Tocqueville's thought, or who are themselves more interested in

⁶ Webster's dictionary defines mores as "the fixed customs or folkways of a particular group that are morally binding upon all members of the group and necessary to its welfare and preservation <the relationship between law and mores, between the decrees of courts and legislatures and the vast body of community beliefs which shape private action>".

⁷ For an in-depth analysis of this subject, see Jon Elster's discussion in *Political Psychology*.

questions of moral and political philosophy, are obliged to include the philosophical outlook that Tocqueville omits.

Tocqueville himself never explicitly presented a comprehensive methodology in his publications. Judging from his private letters, he displays an uncertain and ambivalent attitude towards his perceptions and the human ability to uncover universal truth.⁸ The rhetorical and philosophical language that characterized his writing sometimes blurs the structure of his arguments. "All discussions of the Tocquevillian 'method', then, are more reconstructions than critical engagements with a theorist self-conscious about the tools of his trade." (Welch 2001:101) Nevertheless, while there are methodological inconsistencies in Tocqueville's theories, there is a set of explanations of the causes of social and political beliefs and behaviour in his work. There is wide agreement among Tocqueville scholars that he practiced 'ideal-typical' analysis pre-dating Max Weber. 'Democracy', 'Aristocracy', the 'Puritan mind' are abstract types that accentuate certain features of reality, "rendering them internally more logical for the purposes of clarity in analysis." (Welch 2001:102) He described the practise as seeking the 'shape' or 'image' or 'model' of a phenomenon; "Beginning from the facts furnished by American or French societies, I wished to paint the general traits of democratic societies of which no complete model yet exists."⁹ Among the 'general' causes that explain attitudes and behaviour, a people's *mœurs* (mores) are the most significant, and constitutes the analytical axis of Tocqueville's examinations. Tocqueville was vigorously attracted to this Montesquieuan notion of the 'spirit' of the people, in this case the complex of basic attitudes that exist within a new democratic cultural formation. As Tocqueville tells us in the introduction, "I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there an image of democracy itself, of its penchants, its character, its prejudices, its passions." (DA I, Introduction, p. 13) The concept of the social state as a significant methodological origin of analysis reflects his belief that in order to extricate the essence of democracy's nature, the solution lays in "the legacies of particular histories and in deciphering new patterns of social and political psychology." (Welch 2001:69)

⁸ "When I first began to reflect, I believed that the world was full of demonstrated truths; that it was only a matter of looking carefully in order to see them. But when I sought to apply myself to considering objects, I perceived nothing but inextricable doubts [...] It is not that there are not some truths that merit man's complete conviction, but be sure they are very few in number." (Tocqueville to Charles Stoeffels, October 22, 1831)

⁹ Tocqueville to J.S. Mill, December 18, 1840

Tocqueville never intended to present a general theory on democracy; rather, his works are attempts at clarifying concrete conditions of society. He explicitly expressed scepticism towards all-encompassing general theories and ideas;

General ideas do not attest to the strength of human intelligence, but rather to its insufficiency, because there are no beings in nature exactly alike: no identical facts, no rules indiscriminately applicable in the same manner to several objects at once. General ideas are admirable in that they permit the human mind to bring rapid judgements to a great number of objects at one time; but on the other hand, they never provide it with anything but incomplete notions, and they always make it lose in exactness what they give in extent. (DA II, 1.3 p. 411)

It is precisely because in democracies there is a tendency toward general concepts and a certain disdain for concrete details that this “practical prudence” is important.

[W]hen there is a subject on which it is particularly dangerous for democratic peoples to indulge in general ideas blindly and beyond measure, the best corrective that one can employ is to have them occupy themselves with it every day in a practical manner; they will then be forced to enter into details, and the details will make them perceive the weak sides of the theory. (DA II, 1.4 p. 416)

“The more general a statement and the greater the claim to general validity of a statement concerning social phenomena, the less is the probability that any specific phenomena are adequately described. In addition, systematic, closed, all-embracing abstract explanations and assertions of general laws must ignore the free person acting concretely, must consider him as only a cog in the running of a process that cannot be influenced.” (Hereth 1986:84). Tocqueville recognized that the political, social, cultural and economic environment exerts considerable influence upon the action of the individual. What he dismissed was the democratic tendency of historians and social scientists to overly emphasize the structural and historical determinacy upon the freedom of will and the leverage of the individual’s action and responsibility upon the society in which he operated. “For my part I hate those absolute systems that make all the events of history depend on great first causes linked together by the chain of fate and thus succeed, so to speak, in banishing men from history of the human race.” (*Recollections*, 1970:62) Every important assertion, insofar as significant groups or classes of society take it seriously, becomes itself a part of the realm of opinions, ideas, and convictions that determine society. Thus, Tocqueville criticizes certain “views” that try to explain the actions of people and the fate of whole nations by causes lying outside the decisions of people.

2.2 Introduction to Some Important Conceptions

2.2.1. The Influence of Aristotle and Montesquieu

As Aristotle, Tocqueville understood democracy in contrast to aristocracy – not just as forms of government – but ways of life, values and social organization – and considered politics comprehensively in the regime in which it operates (*politeia*).¹⁰ Reminiscent of Aristotle, Tocqueville uses a classification of regimes, but they differ on an important facet in this regard. Aristotle assumed that monarchy, aristocracy and democracy were based on inclinations of *human nature*, and that any one of them may become dominant in certain circumstances. Tocqueville, following Montesquieu, particularizes those regimes, taking the *circumstances* rather than human nature as given, thereby setting aside human nature as a permanent potentiality beside those circumstances.

The democracy that Tocqueville describes was foreseen by Montesquieu, but as democracy's extreme and dissolute form: "Such is the difference between a well-regulated democracy and one that is not so, that, in the former men are equal only as citizens, but in the latter they are equal also as magistrates, as senators, as judges, as fathers, as husbands, or as masters." (Montesquieu: *Spirit of the Laws*, book VIII, 3) Montesquieu's descriptions of the "spirit of extreme equality" is a corruption of ancient democracy, whereas for Tocqueville this was the very principle of modern democracy.

What distinguished Tocqueville from other political thinkers was that his focus was not the classical concept of 'the best regime,' or the more contemporary topic of describing and justifying a legitimate regime; in this respect, Tocqueville's liberalism differs from both the Middle Ages and antiquity. Although he has tremendous respect and appreciated the classic authors, and welcomes the spiritualism and moral elevation of Plato, he does not accept them as authorities for modern times; he does not care for the best regime as they do. He cares little for ancient metaphysics, and was no supporter of 'the rule of the wise.' The ancient philosopher most recognizable in his influence upon Tocqueville was Aristotle and his ideas on virtue. What Tocqueville emphasizes is not an enlightened upper class, but the idea that through an

¹⁰ However, there are some fundamental differences between the two: "while Aristotle argues that these two regimes offer an open choice ever present to human beings because each is rooted and fixed in human nature, all human beings always being arguably equal and arguably unequal, Tocqueville describes them as distinct historical epochs, once there were aristocracy, now we have democracy

independent mind and the exercise of freedom, each individual – in an Aristotelian sense – reach an elevated state in the human soul. This observation is crucial in the understanding of Alexis de Tocqueville. His main concern was not the political arrangements and institutional structures *per se*, but the ability of each individual to exercise freedom as a form of self-fulfilment and self-realization.

2.2.2 The Social State

The social state is ordinarily the product of a fact, sometimes of laws, but most often of these two causes united, but once it exists, one can consider it as the first cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas that regulate the conduct of nations; what it does not produce, it modifies. (DA I, 1.3 p. 45)

The theoretical frame of reference Tocqueville used to analyze and describe the political and social conditions of a nation, was the concept of the social state (*état social*), an analytical sum total which connects particular laws, customs, and mores prevailing in a democracy or aristocracy. He predicted that democracy, at least in Europe, would be the only social state. Analytically, Tocqueville employs three different concepts to describe a nation's political and social system and structure. Initially drawing on Montesquieu's thesis about the influence of geography and climate (this was a starting point for most nineteenth-century anthropologically minded voyagers), and the explanation of the American success, he first turned to particularistic or accidental causes. The national character, habits, customs, and geography were located in the terms *circonstances* or *point de départ*, a notion that included both physical factors (such as character, size, and location of the land) and historical factors (such as the English and Puritan character of the first settlers in the United States). The two other classes of phenomena are democratic laws (communal and federal institutions, constitutional forms, and the organization of the judiciary) and democratic mores. The laws and mores particular to the United States are, according to Tocqueville, different from those operating in England and is therefore an attribution of the democratization process itself. Of the three factors that regulate and direct American life, Tocqueville argues that

It is therefore mores that render the Americans of the United States, alone among all Americans, capable of supporting the empire of democracy; and it is again [mores] that make the various Anglo-American democracies more or less regulated and prosperous [...] one attributes too much importance to laws, and to little to mores. Without doubt, these three great causes serve to

regulate and to direct American democracy; but if it were necessary to class them, I would say that physical causes contribute less than laws, and laws less than mores. (DA I, 2.9 p. 295)

Tocqueville cared most about contrasting the effects that democracy has produced in different settings. In *Democracy in America*, he argues that certain patterns of social behaviour and belief in America are *inherent* to democracy and hence potentially of great significance for pre-democratic France, rather than merely American and hence of only parochial interest. To make the argument plausible, he must of necessity ignore or downplay unique historical causes of those behaviours.

Leaving aside the problems of the definition of democracy 'itself', how does Tocqueville move from a discussion of America's *point de depart*, at once geographical and historical, to a discussion of those newer laws and mores from which the perceptive analyst may draw out the typical 'shape' of democracy 'itself'? In Tocqueville's analysis, he asserts that the underlying premise for understanding laws and mores is the study of a nation's social state; this implies that legal arrangements of a state is the least important factor in the maintenance of a free and stable form of democracy. What must be studied and understood are the patterns of cultural and social behaviours that shape and are shaped by those laws. Theoretically, this reflects a causal point of view that the constitutional laws of a nation represent the formal manifestation of a nation's culture and social state, rather than institutions and constitutions being determinant in shaping a nation's political climate and culture. (This distinction is imperative, as it deals with causality and what constitutes a democracy; is it primarily culture or institutions?) This explains the comparatively little attention Tocqueville paid to the American constitution in *Democracy in America*; political institutions were of limited value either for good or evil compared to ideas and beliefs. Tocqueville comments when one of his friends managed to draw the opposite conclusion of his thoughts: "You know my ideas well enough to know that I accord institutions only a secondary influence on the destiny of men [...] political societies are not what their laws make them, but what sentiments, beliefs, ideas, and habits of heart and the spirit of men who form them."¹¹ It follows from this that it is not a particular social or institutional situation that gives power to ideas and to the makers of ideas.¹² An administrative or electoral structure,

¹¹ Tocqueville to Claude-François de Cordelle, September 17, 1853. Boesche 1985:294

¹² What this implies, is that - in contrast to the classical view of political regimes - no matter how malignant and atrocious the constitution is, can it not by nature itself corrupt the citizen. Consequently, no matter how benign and well-meaning the constitution is, it can not "breathe

centralized or decentralized, is not in itself sufficient cause for change or the presupposition of certain ideas. The environment of opinion and ideas is the crucial factor. It is within the social state that the theoretical assumption of universal equality becomes practical reality;

The democratic social state undoes the social bond and places individuals on the same level. Each is considered a basic unit of the social body, equal and similar to every other. It follows that what moves democratic man can be immediately generalized to the whole of the social body. What moves everyone else is immediately believed capable of moving any particular individual. The emotional motive in such a situation is the presumptive identification of each with all and all with each. (Manent 1996:62)

The principle of equality is the principal normative *modus operandi* within the social state that consequently represents the philosophical *nomos* of democratic society; it defines the boundaries and guidelines of what is morally tolerable. All other conceptions of justice and right are subservient to its authority; it is the *doxa* of democratic mentality – constant, superior and righteous.

2.2.3 The Enlightenment and the French Revolution

Enlightenment was not only, or perhaps not even primarily, a scientific project, but a political one. The old order was founded on Christianity, and free use of reason simply could not be permitted within it, since reason accepts no authority above itself and is necessarily subversive. The right to freedom of thought is a political right, and for it to exist, there must be a political order that accepts that right. (Bloom 1988:258)

For Tocqueville, the rise of the absolute monarchy and centralization in the seventeenth century was linked to the transition to modernity. The general cause of the development of absolutism was the passage from one social stage to another, from feudal inequality to democratic equality. His standpoint towards this transition and the anthropological shift in the sentiment upon human nature and reason (the belief in reason that rested on beliefs about the goodness in human nature) expressed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, was ambiguous. The effects of the universalistic and anti-historical tendencies that distinguished the eighteenth century, was largely portrayed by Tocqueville in a concerned manner. "While

life into liberty in a country where its flame had burned out." (Kahan 1986:38) On the other hand, I suspect that Tocqueville's emphasis on mores and the neglect of laws, was an deliberate choice to enhance a theoretical point. He spoke very highly of the founding fathers and their wisdom, and described Thomas Jefferson as "the most powerful apostle that democracy has ever had." (DA I, 1.7 p. 249)

aristocratic nations, with their inherently restricted social mobility, tended to have overly limited ideas of human perfectibility, democratic ones tended to have overly generous beliefs about human nature." (Kahan 2001:19).

As castes disappear, as classes get closer to each other, as men are mixed tumultuously, as their usages, customs, and laws vary, as new facts come up, as new truths are brought to light, as old opinions disappear and others take their place, the image of an ideal and always fugitive perfection is presented to the human mind [...] Thus, always seeking, falling, righting himself, often disappointed, never discouraged, he tends ceaselessly toward the immense greatness that he glimpses confusedly at the of the long course that humanity must still traverse. (DA II, 1.8 p. 427)

2.2.4 The Democratic Revolution

A great democratic revolution is taking place among us; all see it, but all do not judge it in the same manner. Some consider it a new thing, and taking it for an accident, they still hope to be able to stop it; whereas others judge it irresistible because to them it seems the most continuous, the oldest, and the most permanent fact known in history. (DA I, introduction, p. 3)

Tocqueville stated that the impending modern democracy was a "providential fact" – unlike most previous political philosophers, he refrained from joining the search for the single legitimate regime that would change the political question from what is best to what is universally attainable. The "great democratic revolution" was inevitably unfolding, and "to wish to stop democracy would [...] appear to be to struggle against God himself." (DA I, Introduction, p. 7) The democratic revolution was not defined or understood in political terms, rather his focus of attention was the historical and social currents in the democratic torrent; there *are* no other future political regimes but democracy. Throughout *Democracy in America*, particularly the second volume, he is not merely describing and predicting its development, but also examining the virtues and defects of democracy. His political philosophy examines the idealistic constructs that democracy is built upon, without a normative *a priori* standpoint whether the democratic regime is superior or inferior. He recognized the immense universal appeal of democracy, and his interest was how it would alter men's thoughts, sentiments and mores, and thus politics and governments, not solely in America, but everywhere. Tocqueville's gravest fear was that democracy would evolve into a tyranny of the majority or a democratic despotism; these conceptions seem somewhat unintelligible in the pluralistic and open democratic society of today. His reflection upon this matter hardly fits well within contemporary democratic political

theory, where the attention is predominantly institutional, and a critical normative perspective on the democratic regime is *per se* somewhat inconceivable and susceptible.

However, though he deemed democracy as an inevitable and irresistible force in the West, his concern is *what kind of* democracy that would characterize the future states of Europe. As noted, he believed in the idea that the people are to some degree free to decide its own futures and destiny, and that this freedom of choice will best be upheld through the active exercise of civil and political liberties. For him, freedom for the individual as a goal in itself was not satisfactory; freedom must be applied in conjunction with the exercise of moral agency. "Political freedom is, in truth, a sacred thing. There is only one other that deserves the name; that is virtue. Yet what is virtue if not the free choice of what is good?" The Tocquevillian liberty encompasses not just a guarantee of civil rights and a metaphysical approach to man's free will, but also "some dimension of duty and loyalty to a larger whole, under modern social conditions this element grows into full-blown and active participation in collective self-government." (*Voyages en Angleterre*, quoted in Welch 2001:3)

The emerging democratic regime was something that distinctly broke with the past, a new social order that would profoundly affect society and state. Tocqueville was one of the first observers that acknowledged this fact, and although he lacked a complete set of analytical tools to describe the full contents of this development, he stated that "a new political science is needed for a world altogether new." (DA I, introduction, p. 7) The new generality has to do with aristocratic or democratic man, and only indirectly with man simply.

2.2.5 Liberty

There is nothing more prolific in marvels that the art of being free, but there is nothing harder that the apprenticeship of freedom. (DA I, 2.6 p. 229)

Tocqueville never defined liberty, much less developed a theory of it.¹³ When he wrote to John Stuart Mill that "I love liberty by taste, equality by instinct and reason", he was being

¹³ Tocqueville connected love of freedom to morality and politics in the following manner; "I have always loved freedom instinctively, and all my reflections lead me to believe that no moral and political greatness is possible for long without it. I am therefore as strongly attached to freedom as to morality, and I am ready to lose some of my tranquillity to achieve it". Letter to Eugène Stoeffels, July 24, 1836. (Zunz 2002:153)

literally truthful.¹⁴ Tocqueville never elucidates upon liberty, or why nations pursue liberty in the first place, liberty is simply a value that does not need to be justified. What needs explanation, are the attractions of equality in the modern democratic age:

Please note that what I blame is not that we have destroyed the Old Regime, it is the manner in which we have demolished it. I am not the adversary of democratic societies [...] What saddens me [...] is that the inherited vices of our ancestors and our own vice are of such nature, that it seems to me very difficult to introduce and animate an ordered liberty among us. But, I confess, I know nothing more miserable than a democratic society without liberty. (Letter to Pierre Frelson, September 11, 1857, quoted in Kahan 2001:31)

In Tocqueville's mind, people's freedom and responsibility are not the result of the working of hidden forces or an invisible hand that intervenes if, for example, one gives free reign to the passions of self-interest and pursuit of wealth. On the contrary, an important prerequisite of freedom is the citizenry's consciousness of their responsibilities and the worship of freedom for its own sake. Opinions and convictions of the citizens that pervade actions and habits are the basis of a liberal order.

Tocqueville's notion of freedom implies the 'traditional' conception of the individual's rights to determine their own lives and providence, but what separates him from most liberal thinkers, is the idea that individual freedom alone is not sufficient; in order for freedom to have a purpose, it must be exercised within a legal and ethical framework. If freedom is reduced to the private sphere of 'doing what one wants to do', freedom will become amputated and without a deeper sense of purpose. This implies that, in order for a democracy to be vibrant and a fully functional political regime, an Aristotelian sense of active practice and participation of freedom in the social and political realm is required. For freedom to have a valuable meaning and function, it is not sufficient that it is merely an option; it must be practiced and upheld.

Perhaps the deep-seated ambiguity of liberal theory is the antagonism between the individual's freedom – the sphere of activity where the individual is free to pursue its goals – and the state, which was necessary to supervise and enforce a common set of rules that limited the "arbitrary power of individuals over individuals", in the form of a constitution. (Lively 1962:14) The ambiguity lies within the two-pronged perception that the state, which is required to uphold order and provide basic needs in order for a society to function, also could evolve into a

¹⁴ Tocqueville to J.S. Mill, June 1835. (Boesche 1985:100)

coercive apparatus that would constantly cross and contest the desires and ambitions of the individual, "a perpetual conflict which in each victory for power involved the frustration of individual desires, the imposition of actually felt constraints." (ibid.) The focus of attention for the liberal thinkers would therefore concentrate upon "the methods of restraining power, either by constitutional devices – separation of powers, constitutional declarations of rights, parliamentary or electoral responsibility – which would make its exercise more difficult, or by theoretical principles – natural rights; self-regarding actions – which would mark its legitimate limits." (Lively 1962:15)

To demonstrate what distinguished Tocqueville from mainstream liberalism, this subject needs further elaboration; he accepted that the theoretical construction of individual rights and equality in the state of nature formed the inclusive normative basis in the universality of democracy. He also believed that there was a common recognition of a particular set of basic moral standards; all men perceived these as morally valid and binding. However, if these moral standards were - in a teleological sense – to fulfil their *purpose* as guidelines to citizens identification and affirmation of themselves as responsible agents, they had been recognized by each citizen individually, as a result of choice, and not because they had been imposed by government or society as moral standards. Tocqueville greatest fear, I think, was that individuals refused to accept the burden of freedom and choice, since this would drain energy and attention from the search for material well-being;

Neither the growth of state activity nor the strengthening grip of public opinion was the root problem, for both were symptomatic of a more fundamental tendency, the refusal by the individual to accept the responsibility of decision. It was a miss-statement of the danger to picture government or society as squeezing the individual into a smaller and smaller area of free activity; it was nearer to the truth to say that the individual would withdraw into that field allowing government to fill the vacuum. The treat to liberty lay as much in men refusing freedom (and its responsibilities) as in their being refused it. (Hereth 1986:52)

The growth of the strong centralized state and the abdication of free will to public opinion was not necessarily the result of a power which independently arose to infringe upon the freedom of the individual; it did not necessarily represent the conquest of government or society over the individual; rather, it may signify the voluntary resignation of freedom by individuals themselves. This is what haunts Tocqueville throughout his writings and symbolizes the concept of 'tyranny of the majority' and 'democratic despotism'; that "the Leviathan that might emerge from social

democracy would not be repressive; it would grow not on frustration but in satisfaction of men's psychological needs." (Lively 1996:15-16)

2.2.6 Rights: Liberty Continued

After the general idea of virtue I know of none more beautiful than that of rights, or rather these two ideas intermingled. The idea of rights is nothing other than the idea of virtue introduced in the political world. (DA I, 2.6 p. 227)

The relationship between liberty and rights was inseparable in Tocqueville's mind; they were mutually interdependent. His conception of rights and liberty may differ from some of the contemporary perceptions of this relationship; in our time, citizens, interest groups and politicians emphasize foremost the right of freedom *from* something. We face different nuances in this regard; the freedom from unemployment, from poverty, from sexual harassment, from discrimination, while others think of the sanctity of the individuals' private sphere. In the Tocquevillian sense, this is not freedom *in itself*.

What is imperative to authentic sovereignty of the people is that citizens practice the political virtues of open-mindedness and moderation. We shall later examine in depth Tocqueville's notion that rights are defined politically, not socially or economically. This distinction is important, since it differs from the notion of rights in modern democracies, which incorporates a wider understanding of the term. There are two distinctions which initially come to mind: first, modern rights are not exclusively tied to the individual, but extended to – self-proclaimed or politically defined – minorities; on the one hand there are minorities whose characteristics are more or less unchangeable; women, children, the disabled, ethnic groups. On the other hand, since these rights are associated with changeable and non-discriminating circumstances – environmental and health-related risks, the workplace, social security – they primarily centre on security, freedom from risk. Secondly, what is common to this modern notion of rights is the fact that their implementation does not necessitate active participation of the citizen. Rather, rights in the contemporary Western democracy are more likely than not perceived as entitlements, and the implementation of these rights usually relies on programs organized by the state and public expenditure.

Freedom and rights consist of more than the formal institutional sphere that grants privileges; "he intends more than a sum of legal guarantees or constitutional articles that guarantee

protection of the individual from harm, or that set forth the authority of the legislature, the executive, the courts, parties or other institutions, and the limits of their power to act and decide." (Hereth 1986:14) Although constitutional guarantee of freedom and rights are vital to the provision of the citizen's acquisition of a free life, it is not synonymous with freedom itself.

Tocqueville accentuated that freedom was a practical matter, a certain way of life, and that constitutions and legal arrangements merely facilitated the foundations of practicing freedom. He was sceptical towards the Enlightenment's postulation of universal and natural rights in the sense that they were abstract and did not reflect the concrete reality of culture-laden society and the necessity of practicing rights. In this regard, Tocqueville resembles Edmund Burke in the sense that respect for rights and law-abidingness is the consequence of traditional continuity. Nevertheless – believing that democracy was predestined – he differed from Burke by supporting equal admission to political rights. Tocqueville's study on the ideological and psychological foundations of democracy persuaded him that inclinations towards individualism and materialism were intrinsic features of Western democracy, but that consciousness of virtue and exercise of rights might serve to combat and stem this trend.

What mattered was the exercise of freedom and rights in conjunction with other individuals; what is "transcendentally valuable is not any particular set of rights, but the very capacity to form the idea of right and to abide by it." (Welch 2001:187) Tocqueville was ambiguous towards the Enlightenment's abstract spirit, and it is difficult to detect any comprehensive and consequential use of the natural rights jargon in his works. However, there are notions of natural justice, in the sense that there exist absolute boundaries to which no legislation can surpass, no matter the sovereign's claims, because higher law "forms the boundary of each people's right."

I regard as impious and detestable the maxim that in matters of government, the majority of a people has the right to do every thing, and nonetheless I place the origin of all powers in the will of the majority. Am I in contradiction with myself?

A general law exists that has been made or at least adopted not only by the majority of this or that people, but by the majority of all men. This law is justice. Justice therefore forms the boundary of each people's right.

A nation is like a jury charged with representing the universal society and with applying the justice that is law. Ought the jury that represents society have more power than the society itself for which it applies the laws?

Therefore, when I refuse to obey an unjust law, I do not deny to the majority the right to command; I only appeal from the sovereignty of the people to the sovereignty of the human race. (DA II, 2.7 p. 240)

This resembles the Lockean notion of the right to disobey unjust laws, based on a transcendent idea of the divine or/and natural rights of man. The Tocquevillian notion of freedom is the freedom for political citizens to act and perform by self-government, in cooperation with citizens in a political community. In order for democracy to reach its fullest potential, the motivation for citizens acting together, must be based in the aspiration of maintaining their political institutions, i.e. that political activity is perceived as an end in itself. Therefore, freedom is not freedom *from* politics, but *with* politics. The implementation of political freedom provides opportunity to shape one's own providence, but this is simultaneously done in conjunction with other individuals in the society. Man is a social being, and if he so autonomous that he is detached from society, he is either an animal or a god.¹⁵

2.2.7 Mores

The more I study [...] the cause of changes in this world, the more I remain convinced that everything in politics is nothing but consequence and symptom, except for the ideas and sentiments reigning among a people, which are the true causes of everything else. (Tocqueville in letter to Louis Bouchitté, September 23, 1853)

It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution – Thomas Jefferson¹⁶

An essential term in *Democracy in America* is *mæurs* or mores, patterns of social thought and behaviour that reinforce each other – or pull against each other – and settle into cultural practices. Initially, it may be constructive to present what Tocqueville meant by mores:

I understand here the expression *mæurs* in the sense the ancients attached to the word *mores*; not only do I apply it to mores properly so-called, which one could call habits of the heart, but to the different notions that men possess, to the various opinions that are current in their midst, and to the sum of ideas of which the habits of the mind are formed. I therefore comprehend under this word the whole moral and intellectual state of a people. (DA I, 2.9 p. 275)

The world of politics itself turns out to have a culture, history, and sustaining *mæurs*. "Tocqueville, then, attempted to fathom the intricate psychological mechanisms that sustain a political culture and to assess the weight of these practices on contemporary action." (Welch

¹⁵ This follows from Aristotle's notion of the state and the individual: "It follows that the state belongs to the class of objects which exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. Any one who is by nature and not simply by ill-luck has no state is either too bad or too good, either subhuman or superhuman..." (*The Politics* 1253 a1-5)

¹⁶ Quoted in Hunter 2000:6

2001:22) The liberalism of Tocqueville is not based on law or on the sovereignty of the legislator, as does that of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Partly derived from Montesquieu, who feared that relying solely on institutional laws could be as hostile to freedom as was the devotion to virtue in ancient times, "both the fearfulness of law and self-sacrifice in virtue are too demeaning on men. By asking so much, law and virtue humiliate those whom they are supposed to empower or ennoble." (Mansfield & Winthrop 2001:XXXV) Tocqueville claims that democracy is potentially hostile to individual rights, which are aristocratic in origin and character (DA II 4.4), yet the great theorists of rights – Hobbes, Locke, and Kant – were all explicitly against aristocracy. How can this be explained?

Now, Tocqueville recognized that a political culture solely based on morality or virtue – particularly his aristocratic conception – was implausible in the democratic social state, given the particular features of it. However, this is not to say that morality was absent from his political thinking, as he links rights not to interest but to virtue:

It is with the idea of rights that men have defined what licence and tyranny are [...] There are no great men without virtue; without respect for rights there is no great people: one can say that there is no society; for, what is a union of rational and intelligent beings among whom force is the sole bond? (DA I, 2.6 p. 227)

Tocqueville's concern was then; what genus of morality is feasible in a democratic society? He acknowledged that the desire for material well-being was a determinant force in democracies. How, if possible, can one prevent this craving from becoming excessively dominant? Likewise, what is required for avoiding extreme individualism developing into political apathy?

Mores form the basis of all social and political institutions; essentially, the customary conventions, patterns of expectation, 'habits of the heart,' principles of justice and order; these constitute social institutions. Beyond the formal procedures that constitute the legal and constitutional system of a state, the authoritative power that is embodied in it needs to correspond to the general principles of justice and common standards which is held in society: otherwise the formal structure of power will not be perceived as fully representative and legitimate by the people. Tocqueville's centre of attention in order to 'understand' a society, then, was not the constitutional and institutional arrangements, but the generally held ideas and

standards, "that common language by virtue of which alone men can be said to form a society."
(Lively 1962:236)

Methodologically, there is another important aspect of his conception of mores, its resemblance to the Aristotelian notion of human nature, which was teleological. In this sense, Tocqueville's liberalism can be interpreted as teleological:

[b]ecause its values of liberty, individuality, and diversity were based on an idea of human nature in which these values were fundamental human needs. Embodied in this concept of human nature was the idea that certain kinds of needs had to be fulfilled for a human being to reach his or her highest and fullest expression, and that such fulfilment was a factual criterion for defining the good and the virtuous. Since among these needs was participation in society, political participation was thus a good in itself. (Kahan 2001:83).

However, in the emerging modern democracy Tocqueville recognized that the traditional notion of liberty within Liberalism would be challenged by the most archetypal of all democratic principles: the principle of equality.

2.3 Equality

The gradual development of equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact, and it has the principal characteristics of one: it is universal, it is enduring, each day it escapes human power; all events, like all men, serve its development (DA, introduction, p. 6)

Men will be perfectly free because they will all be entirely equal; and they will all be perfectly equal because they will all be entirely free. This is the ideal toward which democratic peoples tend. (DA II, 2.1 p. 479)

2.3.1 The Enlightenment and the Equality of Reason

It was during the French Revolution that the Enlightenment project of a 'science of man' began its transformation into the nineteenth-century search for a meta-social science. "The term 'science sociale' [...] referred to a body of knowledge that would allow one to identify the natural needs of society – for freedom or equality or rights or property – that had been ignored or despised by allegedly unnatural aristocratic governments." (Welch 2001:13-14) Essential to the aristocratic system was the degree of individual freedom determined by hereditary authority of

one person over another. Democracy replaced this tradition by the "idea of individual consent." (Gregg 2000:39)

Although never explicitly postulated, the logic of the connection between a universal set of truths about human psychology and the desirability of universal equality in rights seemed obvious from the very definition of all people as conscious creatures endowed with reason. In 'the state of nature', the principle of equality is a theoretical design in a hypothetical theory, where man as a solitary being rationally chooses to form a political society. This principle has become praxis in the democratic reality, and has produced the doctrinaire argument; "since individuals are judicially equal, they should be regarded as equals and have equal results to show for equal exertions and from the mere fact of equal existence. The kind of equal result that most recommends itself to most democrats is in material well-being or comfort". (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:LXVII)

Tocqueville distinguished between the theoretical liberal principles, formal by design in order to protect each individual in his own right, and real-life liberal society, where the liberal principle of freedom inescapably must be subjected to the principle of equality. Traditional liberalism declares that all men are created equal, but they are only equal in the state of nature before they have consented to civil society and its inevitable inequalities. Tocqueville's objection is that the theoretical justification of equality in the state of nature tends to become a practical justification of equality in society as well, where the formal principle of equality has a constant uniforming and conforming effect. Formal liberalism relies on institutions and a legalistic understanding of duty and rights – in which Immanuel Kant is the ultimate proponent - instead of civic virtue and mores.¹⁷ Tocqueville believes that the working of institutions requires virtue, not lofty virtue, but the virtue available in democracy ranging from raw intractability to active self-interest to moderate ambition. The modern liberalism of John Rawls or Robert Nozick does not recognize, or at least not emphasize, that formal practices and institutions in a democracy have to be defended against the idleness and indifference of a democratic people, or that the

¹⁷ "It only remains for men to create a good organisation of the state [...] the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (as long as they possess understanding)." (Kant, *Perpetual Peace, First Supplement: On the Guarantee of a Perpetual Peace*. 1991:112) However, the argument above is not employed to illustrate some degree of 'immorality' or 'utilitarianism' of this particular pedigree of liberalism. On the contrary, Immanuel Kant and the political thinkers influenced by him are highly moral in their theoretical postulations. In this regard, I interpret Tocqueville as adherent of formal rights and duties in order to guarantee the individual from arbitrary law and state. Nevertheless, Tocqueville sternly believed that formal rights were insufficient by their own force in order to create/maintain liberal society; as frequently pointed out during this thesis, a deeper understanding of virtues and their practice are fundamental to support successful formal liberalism.

implementation and maintenance of constitutional arrangements is dependent upon a political culture that supports it. Tocqueville's concern in this regard is not primarily economically motivated, but of an intellectual and moral nature, as his main worry was that deficient *exercise* of political liberty would degrade and deflate the independence of man and his potential to be an active and virtuous political citizen. Tocqueville feared that this was particularly a hazard in democracies, since the principle of equality would exert greater attraction to democratic man than freedom:

Freedom has manifested itself to men in different times and in different forms; it is not attached exclusively to one social state, and one encounters it elsewhere than in democracies. It therefore cannot form the distinctive characteristic of democratic centuries.

The particular and dominating fact that makes those centuries unique is equality of conditions; the principal passion that agitates men in those times is the love of this equality. (DA II, 2.1 p. 480)

Following the logic of equality of conditions as a dominant normative aspiration, individuals are theoretically positioned in the equal judicial and political echelon in the democratic social state. Every individual is considered a basic entity of this social body, theoretically equal and equivalent to every other. As a result, the social bonds between citizens are hypothetically disengaged, in the sense that all hierarchies are dissolved and all obligations are voluntary. The only natural social bonds exist within the family, and even these bonds have become increasingly redundant, particularly the notion that a child naturally grows up with a mother *and* father. As equal beings, there is no natural point of reference for the democratic man to identify himself with, except the society that is comprised of those like him:

It follows that what moves democratic man can be immediately generalized to the whole of the social body. What moves everyone else is immediately beloved capable of moving any particular individual. The emotional motive in such a situation is the presumptive identification of each with all and all with each. Everything that prevents or appears to prevent, hinders or appears to hinder, this identification is a source of anxiety. What threatens this identification is inequality and all that calls it to mind or anticipates it. (Manent 1996:62)

2.3.2 Equality as Justice

Tocqueville's understanding of the equality of conditions was complex; he understood that for liberty to prevail in a democratic society, some answerability and sense of responsibility to one's related peers in society is required. A functioning democratic state – as a single dominion that is a theoretical, ideological and political construct – is dependent upon the allegiance and loyalty

of the citizenry. If significant constellations of the citizenry is adherent toward some ethnic, religious or tribal faction whose loyalty and culture is distinctive by their exclusiveness in relation to other beliefs, groups or individuals, the premises for a democratic state beyond institutional and formal structures are feeble and improbable.

Tocqueville's emphasis on the equality of conditions reflects his understanding of democracy: modern societies have a "principle" to which everything that characterizes them must be referred, and equality of conditions is not a single characteristic among others, it is the "generative fact" from which other normative principles are deduced.¹⁸ The principle of equality is the normative epicentre of democratic societies, and it prevails in them all, more or less.

The gradual development of equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact, and it has the principal characteristics of one: it is universal, it is enduring, each day it escapes human power; all events, like all men, serve its development. (DA I, introduction, p. 6)

Yet, why is this necessarily so? This perception of equality originates from Tocqueville's interpretation that the democratic social state comprises those like oneself (*semblables*), which is the general and inclusive theoretical abstract idea of mutual classification and recognition of democratic individuals through the principle of equality. With the notion of *semblables*, the equal and sovereign individual of 'the state of nature' transmutes from philosophical abstraction to political fact. The universalistic nature of democratic humanism renders equality of conditions not defined or constricted by social groups or national borders; if one's countrymen are like oneself, so too are persons in all countries.

Since all individuals in a democracy regard themselves and are accepted as equal, other individuals are not really different from oneself but similar. They are not really *other* in the deep sense implied by the dichotomy of self-other to be found in Hegel's theory or its variants [...] The democrat considers others to be like himself, and of they are truly different, he *sees* them to be himself regardless. He ignores or flattens out any differences that might call equality into question. (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:XLVII)

What truly separates democracy from other political regimes and makes it unique and incomparable, is democracy's primary principle of unlimited inclusiveness; it lacks a "principled justification for exclusion." (Wolin 2001:61) Every human being, regardless of race, gender, age, social status, *any* discriminating feature, is entitled to a basic set of human rights. This is the

¹⁸ Undeniably, this may seem as an inflexible and somewhat 'exaggerated' argument. What is implied here, is that no argument can in its consequence normatively legitimize inequality as a guiding principle of justice.

essence of the *semblable*; it encompasses everyone, and given its abstract nature, it has no logical end-point. There can never be *sufficient* equality; there will always be new inequalities to condemn, always some group ('minority') who can claim injustice referring to prior historical discrimination and appealing to the principle of equality. Its movement is perpetual, and the greater the level of measurable equality becomes (measured in economic terms that is, which is the democratic currency of just distribution), the more will trivial and minor inequalities be considered agonizing and excruciating.

The hatred that men bear for privilege is increased as privileges become rarer and less great, so that one would say that democratic passions are more inflamed in the very times they find the least nourishment [...] When all conditions are un-equal, there is no inequality great enough to offend the eye, whereas the smallest dissimilarity appears shocking in the midst of general uniformity; the sight of it becomes more intolerable as uniformity is more complete. It is therefore natural that the love of equality grows constantly with equality itself; in satisfying it, one develops it. (DA II, 4.3 p. 644-45)

Given the eternal discovery of new inequalities, it entails an escalating system of rules that aims to regulate and supervise the equalization of inequalities. Jack Lively asserts that "For it is only within such systems, as rule-following or rule-obeying units, that men can hope for equality."¹⁹ (Lively 1962:241) The only acceptable supervisor that democratic man can subordinate himself to in following these regulations, is the common representative of the people – the central state – that grows proportionately to the institutionalization of righteous equality.

Concerning the theoretical principle of the sovereign individual, Tocqueville maintains that this principle is practically unsustainable; the premise that each individual can judge everything for himself is simply artificial. Nevertheless, given the appeal that the rationality of the democratic doctrine wields, individuals are trapped by a contradiction; since democratic man is presumed equal and equally competent of rationally calculating how to live one's life, everyone is also equally incapable of approaching any common, transcendent moral authority for directional assistance.²⁰ Thus, the paradox that arises is that in the modern democratic state, where everyone theoretically is equally free to implement choices of his own, and the

¹⁹ In a Weberian sense, the scientific method and bureaucratic rationality that characterizes Western democracies enables minute and detailed regulations that will be executed in a disciplined manner without commotion by the majority of the citizenry.

²⁰ The only legitimate sources of authority, which will be examined later, is either public opinion – the general expression of opinion held by the greatest numbers of sovereign individuals, and the central state – the general expression of political will held by the greatest number of sovereign individuals.

abundance of choices is wider than any one time in history, modern democratic man has fewer guiding principles for making moral choices. This follows from the assumption that since I am a sovereign being with equal rights, and these rights are equal to all, and my choices are the result of my sovereignty, no one has the right to criticise my choices by any moral standard, this would be an infringement on my sovereignty as an *equal* and free being. Objectively, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of life, there are only different 'lifestyles', which are 'selected' according to subjective measures; all 'lifestyles' – the voluntary choice of the independent individual – are equally tolerable and hence any criticism of them are tantamount to the cardinal vice of democratic societies: intolerance.

Men who live in democratic times of equality are therefore only with difficulty led to place the intellectual authority to which they submit outside and above humanity. It is in themselves or in those like themselves that they ordinarily seek the sources of truth. (DA II, 1.2 p. 408)

"All human bonds are politicized at the same time that the political bond is naturalized. To say the same thing more precisely, the influence of one individual over another (in whatever kinds of relationship) can be exercised legitimately only if it conforms to the principles that govern relations between equal citizens." (Manent 1996:9) The gravitational centre of the liberal rights tips to the side of equality. To affirm the equal liberty of all citizens amounts to affirming equality first;

One can imagine an extreme point at which freedom and equality touch each other and intermingle. Let me suppose that all citizens concur in the government and that each has an equal right to concur in it. Then with none differing from those like him, no one will be able to exercise a tyrannical power; men will be perfectly free because they will all be entirely equal; and they will be perfectly equal because they will be entirely free. This is the ideal toward which democratic peoples tend. (DA II 1.1 p. 479)

It follows that, in Tocqueville's eyes, the ideal of democratic liberty is simultaneously fulfilled and put in danger in democratic society. It is fulfilled regarding its strongest inclination, equality, and it is put in danger regarding its weakest, liberty.

2.3.3 The Classless Society?

The proletariat was the logical extension of the bourgeoisie, and its demand for the abolition of the last remaining inequality, the inequality of property, is simply the logical extension of the struggle against other inequalities. (Kahan 2001:54)

The principle of equality in the West has established rules that by ambition are universally applicable, and a central state whose vital function is to enforce these rules justifiably. The arrangement and assortment of formal rules and regulations that aims at implementing equality of conditions in Western democracies is unprecedented in human history. In this sense, Tocqueville visualized a 'classless' society. However, this visualization is dissimilar to a Marxist interpretation, where the notion of class renders that disparity in outlook and manner is determined and explained by economic function. What Tocqueville perceived as inherently democratic, was that democracy, based on the principle of equality, would demolish the hierarchical society that was separated into factions with distinguishable and distinct outlooks and mores. Tocqueville acknowledged that democratic society would advance general economic prosperity and equality, but this was not what caused the evaporation of classes. In the democratic society there would still be differentiation regarding economic and social position, there would still be privileged and disadvantaged strata; "what would go would be the division of society into groups with *distinctive mores*." (Lively 1962:244) A comprehension of Tocqueville's insight concerning this subject requires acknowledgement of pre-democratic society, where the separation between classes was located in an idiosyncratic difference in areas such as manners, hereditary social positions, sense of obligation, social influence, identification and perception of rights. Hence, although there are economic differences, economic ownership in its own right does not constitute *explanans* in the *explanandum* of what defines and characterizes 'class.' Tocqueville deducts empirically from a comparative analysis between feudal classes, and between feudal and democratic times.

Feudal institutions rendered one very sensitive to the ills of certain men, but not to the miseries of the human species. They gave generosity rather than mildness to mores, and although they prompted great devotion, they did not give birth to genuine sympathy; for there is real sympathy only among people who are alike; and in aristocratic centuries, one sees those like oneself only in the members of one's caste.²¹ (DA II, 3.1 p. 536)

²¹ Tocqueville comments that members of a class lack genuine comprehension of the difficulties of other classes; there is no real sense of identification with other individuals if they belong to another class: "When the chronicles of the Middle Ages, who all belonged by their birth to or their habits to the aristocracy, relate the tragic end of a noble, it is with infinite sorrow; whereas they recount the massacre and

Equality of conditions as a normative understanding of justice comprises the common identification and understanding between democratic citizens; yes, there are rich and poor people in Western democracies, but these do not constitute a separate *class* in the sense that they have normatively different outlooks and sense of justice from that of the middle class, which forms the substantial majority of all Western democracies. There is virtually a unanimous consent in the West that all citizens are entitled to equal political rights, and that every human being has the *right* to be equally treated as a sovereign being independently of any discriminating feature. *This* common perception is what Tocqueville identifies as inherently democratic and distinct. Furthermore, equality of conditions fosters a common understanding and identification between citizens (*semblables*) and enables men to feel compassion for others:

When ranks are almost equal in a people, all men having nearly the same manner of thinking and feeling, each of them can judge the sensations of all the others in a moment: he casts a rapid glance at himself, that is enough for him. There is therefore no misery that does not conceive without trouble and whose extent a secret instinct does not discover for him. It makes no difference whether it is a question of strangers or of enemies: imagination immediately puts him in their place. It mixes something personal with his pity and makes him suffer himself while the body of someone like him is torn apart.

In democratic centuries, men rarely devote themselves to one another; but they show a general compassion for all members of the human race. (DA II, 3.1 p. 538)

Now, it can be argued that numerous social groupings in democratic society does not match the 'classless' democratic society, i.e. on one side 'subcultures,' radical 'protest-groups' (environmentalists, feminists, 'anti-globalists') and wealthy, productive clusters on the other are perceived and characterized as a class (given the fact that there is an wide acceptance within Western democracies that wealth is an significant determinant in measuring social status and individual merit). However, this is beside the point; Tocqueville himself described through the concept of individualism that democratic mentality facilitates for democratic man to "establish themselves in some form of immediate social community, in circles whose very value lays in their exclusiveness." (Lively 1962:244) Tocqueville rejected the notion that groupings of this nature constituted "classes properly so-called," or that "the prestige given to wealth simply reconstructed an old hierarchy on new standards." (Lively 1962:245) Wealth as a sole criterion

tortures of men of the people all in one breath and without frown. It is not that these writers felt a habitual hatred or a systematic scorn for the people. War between the various classes had not yet been declared. They obeyed an instinct rather than a passion; as they did not form a clear idea for themselves of the sufferings of the poor man, they had a weak interest in his lot. (DA II, 3.1 p. 536)

does not involve social or political responsibilities, or by design alter political consciousness and conduct.

A coherent group that has similar normative, political, social and economic outlooks in common defines the Tocquevillian perception of class. Further, recognition entails assessment of public status and function, identifiable power and duties.²² Coherency implies that a class does not appear or disappear conditioned by fluctuating taste and opinion. To do so, would be to equalize the definition of 'class' and 'political movement.'

To conclude that we live in a classless society would be a misinterpretation of Tocqueville; although the middle-class in Western democracies is predominant, perhaps even constitutes the 'democratic class,' Tocqueville's 'classless society' is first and foremost a warning of the dangers of exaggerated equality and sameness:²³

It was through the egalitarian insistence that men are alike and that this likeness should be recognized in similar political, legal and economic treatment and in similar social behaviour that the classless society should arise. And it was this pressure towards conformity that constituted the root danger to liberty. (Lively 1962:245)

Exaggerated democratic equality could also cause a phenomenon that at first hand seems to be the antonym of equality: individualism. Conceptually these terms at first glance seem contradictory; the modern notion of individualism incorporates both the liberal perception of the free individual (in relation to the state), and the radical view of an overly egoistic individual. However, Tocqueville sees individualism in light of the enlightenment's emphasis of the rational and sovereign individual - fully capable of making its own decisions - and the democratic principle of equality.

²² The mainstream entertainment establishment, by making them widely accessible to consumers and thereby making them profitable, usually quickly absorbs the so-called sub-cultures that continuously emerge in 'opposition' to 'conventional' society and 'the system'. The 'hippie' movement, punk-rock, hip-hop, house, etcetera have all become non-provoking, streamlined and acceptable to the consuming masses. It is noticeable that the fashionable 'sub-cultures' of every young generation is increasingly consolidated in or associated with the entertainment industry. Young people are rarely involved with an independent political movement that questions the politically acceptable values (governed by the principle of equality and egalitarianism). On the contrary - and almost without exception - the loudest and most radical movements (before becoming consumers *an masse*) appeal for *more* equality, based on justice and 'fairness' while declaring that individual freedom and manoeuvrability should wield as much importance as equality is generally considered 'unjust' and associated with 'egoism', greed and lack of 'solidarity'.

²³ Tocqueville commented in *Recollections* that in France after 1830 the "triumph of the middle class was decisive and so complete that the narrow limits of the bourgeoisie encompassed all political powers, franchises, prerogatives, indeed the whole government, to the exclusion, in law, of all beneath it and, in fact, of all that had once been above it. Thus the bourgeoisie became not only the sole director of society, but also, one might say, its cultivator. It settled into every office, prodigiously increased the number of offices, and made a habit of living of the public Treasury almost as much as from its own industry." (*Recollections*, p. 5)

2.4 Individualism and Materialism

Materialism is a dangerous malady of the human mind in all nations; but one must dread it particularly in a democratic people because it combines marvellously with the most familiar vice of the heart in these peoples.

Democracy favours the taste for material enjoyments. This taste, if it becomes excessive, soon disposes men to believe that all is nothing but matter; and materialism in turn serves to carry them toward these enjoyments with an insane ardour. Such is the fatal circle into which democratic nations are propelled. (DA II, 2.15 p. 519)

2.4.1 Individualism

Equality is a presupposition of individualism, because everyone, regardless of social status or group identity, is held to reason well enough about his own affairs. (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:LXVI)

I consider this topic as one of the principal subjects in the discussion on Tocqueville. Especially in volume II of *Democracy in America* Tocqueville contemplates on how democracy will continue to transform men's thought and sentiments and virtues, and thereby politics and government, not just in America, but everywhere. The term 'individualism' signifies the ambiguity of democracy; its principle of individual sovereignty contains both the potential of the independent and politically engaged 'lawgiver-citizen' and of the narrowly self-centred citizen who lacks any sense of communal responsibility. The latter is a result of individualism, which represents democracy's latent, shattering consequence on civil life. First, it is important to underline the fact that when Tocqueville uses the term "individualism", it must be distinguished from selfishness:

Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of oneself which brings man to relate everything to himself and to prefer himself to everything. Individualism is a deliberate and peaceful sentiment which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellow men and withdraw apart with his family and friends. In such a way, after having created a small society for his convenience, he voluntarily abandons society at large to itself [...] Selfishness is a vice as old as the world. It scarcely belongs more to one form of society than to another. Individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions become more equal. (DA II, 2.2 p. 482-483)

Individualism is a particular feature and constant potential of the democratic social state in which individuals are sovereign and consequently theoretically independent of one another on the societal level. "It is the reflection and affirmation in the soul of each of his social condition. It is the affirmation by the individual of his self-sufficiency." (Manent 1996:54) Ideologically, individualism is a progeny of the Enlightenment's notion of man's autonomy, which constitutes

the sovereignty of every individual. Hence, as 'individualism' is not synonymous with selfishness or egoism, but rather the democratic man's inward focus and the cause of a society of atomized individuals, it must be understood in light of the philosophical heritage of Descartes. In this view, democratic man is rationally disposed to "reject any obligation or article of faith that has not been subjected to personal inquiry." (Zetterbaum 1967:60)

In the sixteenth century, the reformers submit to individual reason some of the dogmas of the ancient faith; but they continue to exclude all others from discussion. In the seventeenth, Bacon, in the natural sciences, and Descartes, in philosophy properly so-called, abolish the received formulas, destroy the empire of traditions, and overturn the authority of the master. The philosophers of the eighteenth century, finally generalizing the same principle, undertake to submit the objects of all beliefs to the individual examination of each man. (DA II, p. 404-405)

However, Tocqueville's concept of individualism must not be confused with *individuality*, which asserts a self-governing and self-conscious individual. Tocqueville's concept of individualism has two dimensions; first, it is actually intertwined with the principle of equality; it is the description of a society in which "each individual perceives himself as the basic unit of society, similar and equal to all other basic units." (Manent 1996:54) Second, in a democratic society where individualism is a salient feature, it does not insinuate 'egoism', but an atomistic society, comprised of socially 'detached' individuals with voluntary and casual social bonds to other individuals. Atomism signifies the retreat from social responsibility by the individual, where he "becomes the centre of a tiny private universe consisting of himself and his immediate circle of family and friends." (Zetterbaum 1987:765) Secondly, it incorporates Tocqueville's fear that within this private sphere the democratic individual's passion for private well-being will become dominant in the perception of 'the good life,' and hence neglecting the political responsibility of the democratic citizen, which connotes apathy and disinterest.

2.4.2 Materialism and the Passion for Well-being

We shall see that among all the passions that equality gives birth to or favours, there is one that it renders particularly keen and that is sets in the hearts of all men at the same time: the love of well-being. The taste for well-being forms the salient and indelible feature of democratic ages. (DA II, 1.5 p. 422)

What attaches the human heart most keenly is not the peaceful possession of a precious object, but the imperfectly desire to possess it and the incessant fear of losing it. (DA II, 2.10 p. 506)

The philosophical doctrine of democratic society, as developed by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, presumes that in order to deliver man from the evils that belonged to differences of opinion (religious opinion, above all), it was “necessary to ground social maxims on a principle that no man could deny, which would escape doubt and contradiction because it would not be based on an opinion of man and the world, but a passion, the strongest and most universal passion, the preservation of one’s life, and preferably in the most comfortable way possible.” (Manent 1996:55) This doctrine paves the way for the passion of well-being. What is distinctive of the search for well-being and materialism in democratic nations is not its presence; the “desire for well-being is universal”, and thereby not a particular feature of democracy, rather, it is the intensity and the nature of materialism which takes place. (DA II, 2.18 p. 525)

I seek a passion that is natural to men who are excited and limited by the obscurity of their origin or the mediocrity of their fortune, and I find none more appropriate than the taste for well-being. The passion for material well-being is essentially a middle-class passion; it grows larger and spreads with this class, it becomes preponderant with it. From there it reaches the higher ranks of society and descends within the people. (DA II, 2.10 p. 507)

Two threads intertwine and reinforce each other in Tocqueville’s arguments: first, the now universal pursuit of material self-interest, and second, the pervasive psychological effects of the passion for equality itself. He observes that the desire for well-being, present in every human society, takes on a cultural and social preference in democratic times that is unprecedented.

Tocqueville’s scepticism towards materialism was not an aristocratic condescension of profit, nor did he find it morally ‘debasing’ to aspire for material well-being. His warning is that materialism in democratic societies is potentially disposed to – and inclined to – becoming the primary attraction in the hierarchy of goals for human activity. Its threat lays in the perception of an exclusive predominance of materialism in democratic times, which “makes individual advantage the citizen’s guiding rule and society’s dominant principle,” and thereby fosters a

narrow self-interest and a rigorous attentiveness in the accomplishment of status by wealth. (Hereth 1986:60) Constricted to achieve this goal alone, citizens are left with "little time or inclination for deliberating about shared long-term interests, such a focus saps for the mental energy necessary for political engagement." (Welch 2001:75)

When the taste for material enjoyments develops in one of these people more rapidly than enlightenment and the habits of freedom, there comes a moment when men are swept away and almost beside themselves at the sight of the new goods they are ready to grasp. Preoccupied with the sole care of making a fortune, they no longer perceive the tight bond that unites the particular fortune of each of them to the prosperity of all. There is no need to tear from such citizens the rights they possess; they willingly allow them to escape. The exercise of their political duties appears to them a distressing contretemps that distracts them from their industry. If it is a question of choosing their representatives, of giving assistance to authority, of treating the common thing in common, they lack the time; they cannot waste their precious time in useless work. (DA II, 515)

This passage further illuminates the connection between individualism and materialism; individualism is the psychological prerequisite of the de-politization of society, where the citizen withdraws into the private sphere and materialism, the ideology that reigns within it. The connections to politics are primarily determined by self-interest, which – logically shaped by materialism – are of an economic nature. The politically detached citizen is not a new phenomenon; the portrayal fits the *idiots* described by Plato and Aristotle, the private man who has nothing to do with politics. It is important to bear in mind that Tocqueville's notion of materialism represents more than the desire of physical possession of goods, it contains a metaphysical dimension; the belief that "nothing other than physical matter exists," and this extends into ideological hedonism or "philosophical materialism." (Manent 1996:54)

Yet, what are the theoretical preconditions that explain individualism and materialism in democratic societies? To comprehend Tocqueville's thesis, we must connect it to the equality of conditions and the unique role the middle-class and its values that dominates the Western democracies: the equality of conditions renders that citizens are no longer interdependently connected in the manner that characterized aristocracies, "by a host of duties, obligations, and legal relations of a specific kind, determined by tradition." (Hereth 1986:61) One owes "nothing to anyone, they expect so to speak nothing from anyone; they are in the habit of always considering themselves in isolation, and they willingly fancy that their whole destiny is in their hands." (DA II, 2.3 p. 484)

2.4.3 The Democratic Middle Class and Commerce

I know of nothing more opposed to revolutionary mores than commerce. Commerce is naturally the enemy of all violent passions. It likes even tempers, is pleased by compromise, very carefully flees anger. (DA II, 3.21 p. 609)

I have shown how Americans are unceasingly impelled towards commerce and industry. Their origin, their social state, the political institutions, the very place that they inhabit, carry them irresistibly in this direction. (DA II, 3.18 p. 593)

The simultaneous and interrelated progress of democratization, industrialization, social mobility and equality of conditions, and an increasingly dominant middle-class (the manufacturing and financial class) altered the hitherto conception of hierarchy and individual identification and belonging within a distinct class with a familiar set of norms and rules. According to Tocqueville, the acknowledgement of principle of equality as a just principle disentangled and levelled the rigid social hierarchy, opened the doors to greater material prosperity (in conjunction with capitalism) and laid the foundation of middle-class materialism, a

[p]assion that is natural to men who are excited and limited by the obscurity of their origin or the mediocrity of their fortune, and I find none more appropriate than the taste for well-being. The passion for material well-being is essentially middle-class passion; it grows larger and spreads with this class; it becomes preponderant with it. From there it reaches the higher ranks of society and descends within the people. (DA II, 2.10 p. 507)

What is interesting with Tocqueville's observation is not materialism's strong existence in democratic nations. Given the historical, economic culture of the middle-class and its traditional role as the commercial and financial class, they transmitted their values and way of thinking into the political system which would grant them dominance – democracy – and coupled with the superlative economic system of production that corresponded to their culture – capitalism – it was evident that democratic society would lay greater emphasis on trade and industry.

It seems to me that among the free governments, government of the middle class will be, I shall not say the most enlightened, but the most economical. (DA I, 2.5 p. 200)

According to Tocqueville, the dynamics of democratic nations is to be found in their economic system; education and science principally serve to enhance efficiency and

productivity, while the flexible hierarchy within society is not determined by heritage, but by meritocracy.²⁴

Most men who compose these [democratic] nations are very eager for present material enjoyments; as they are always disconnected with the position they occupy and always free to leave it; they dream only of the means of changing their fortune or of increasing it. For minds so disposed, every new method that leads to wealth by a shorter path, every machine that shortens work, every instrument that diminishes the cost of production, every discovery that facilitates pleasures and augments them seems to be the most magnificent effort of human intelligence. (DA II, 1.10 p. 436)

In the contemporary debate, 'materialism' is by and large used in a negative manner, frequently in concurrence with an 'environmental' and 'politically correct' criticism of capitalism and its ill effects. The perpetual source of torment for the most ardent supporters of a state-regulated undertaking to guarantee justifiable equality, is that while capitalism is held to be utterly competitive and creates unjust social difference (measured financially) and debasement of the individual, they are simultaneously dependent upon an effective economic system that can provide cover for the high financial expenditure their venture demands. Tocqueville predicted that democracy, which would annihilate the rigid social class-system of feudal times, would introduce a time of "the competition of all" and that this would be a source of conflict since the "constant opposition reigning between the instincts that equality gives birth to and the means that it furnishes to satisfy them is tormenting and fatiguing their souls." (DA II, 2.11 p. 513)

What Tocqueville undertakes to portray, is that materialism is a *natural* feature of Western democracy:

In democracies, there is nothing greater not more brilliant than commerce; it is what attracts the regard of the public and fills the imagination of the crowd; all energetic passions are directed toward it. (DA II, 2.19 p. 528)

The mores and values of the predominantly middle-class majority favour scientific rationality and method, productivity, efficiency, cooperation, regulations, uniformity, and 'work-ethic;' actually, these features corresponds to a substantial segment of the mores that constitutes the outlook of the middle-class. Nowhere is this more apparent in the largest democracy in the

²⁴ "If democracy does not bring men to cultivate the sciences for (the sciences') sake, on the other hand it increases immensely the number of those who cultivate them." (DA II, 1.10 p. 437)

West, which has no historical experience with aristocracy, and where the middle class has been predominant since its foundation:

It is not that there are no rich in the United States as elsewhere; indeed, I do not know a country where the love of money holds a larger place in the heart of man and where they profess a more profound scorn for the theory of the permanent equality of goods. (DA I, 1.3 p. 50)

The Western democratic states represent the most productive economic system in world history, and its middle class outlook delineates the fundamental ingredient in this system, not the ownership of raw-goods such as precious metals, oil or agricultural products, or high-tech production facilities. Furthermore, little indicates that Tocqueville considered capitalism other than in the strict sense: as a mode of economic production where the relationship between employer and employee is determined by wages and contract, as opposed to the feudal system. Although Tocqueville was aware and explicitly sceptical to aspects of the industrial age and the conditions of the industrial worker, he believed – contrary to Marx and Engels – that their condition would gradually improve; “one can say that the slow and progressive rise in wages is one of the general laws that regulate democratic societies. As conditions become more equal, wages rise, and as wages go higher, conditions become more equal.” (DA II, 3.7 p. 556) Another aspect concerning materialism is the fact that its strong presence in the current democratic society has been explained as a product of capitalism itself.²⁵ However, Tocqueville would probably disagree with this notion, as he conveys that the Western middle class is historically productive, materialist and commercial by *disposition*; “It is not commerce and industry that prompt a taste for material enjoyments in men, but rather this taste that brings men to industrial and commercial careers, where they hope to satisfy themselves more completely and more quickly.”²⁶ (DA II, 2.19 p. 527)

The productive efficiency of capitalism has been attributed to a free market, but this does not necessarily entail that other forms of freedom – such as intellectual, political, or religious – is a *crucial* prerequisite for capitalism to thrive; Tocqueville accentuates the demand and preference

²⁵ This conjures with the view that capitalism is something more than just a mode of production; it has been attributed an ideological dimension. This is of course the socialist interpretation, where capitalism reflects the subjugation of ‘the people’ by the class that own and controls the means of production; in the historical epoch which we are in according to the Marxist view on historical development this means the capitalists.

²⁶ Tocqueville elaborates further in the same passage that the democratic, middle-class notion of equality supports the strong existence of materialism in democracies; “All the causes that make love of the goods of this world predominate in the human heart develop industry and commerce. Equality is one of these causes. It favors commerce not only directly in giving men a taste for trade, but indirectly fortifying and generalizing the love of well-being in their souls.” (DA II, 2.19 p. 527)

for order and stability as the main ingredient that supports the desire of material well-being of the middle-class.²⁷

The particular taste that men of democratic centuries conceive of material enjoyments is not naturally opposed to order; on the contrary, it often needs order to be satisfied. Nor is it the enemy of regular mores; for goods mores are useful to public tranquillity and favour industry. Often, indeed, it comes to be combined with a sort of religious morality; one wishes to be the best possible in this world without renouncing one's chances in the other. (DA II, 2.11 p. 509)

Tocqueville understood that democracy's principle of equality and democratization of property would marginalize revolutionary politics and alter the social structure by levelling income and wealth.²⁸ In the chapter *Why Great Revolutions Will Become Rare*, he foresees that modern democracies would be comprised of "a multitude of similar men who, without being precisely either rich or poor, possess enough goods to desire order and do not have enough of them to excite envy."²⁹ (DA II, 3.21 p. 607) The democratic materialism is moderate, determined and yet restricted; its purpose is

[m]aking life easier and more comfortable at each instant, preventing inconvenience, and satisfying the least needs without effort and almost without cost. These objects are small, but the soul clings to them [...] What I reproach equality for is not that it carries men away in the pursuit of forbidden enjoyments; it is for absorbing them entirely in the search for permitted enjoyments. Thus there could as well be established in the world a sort of honest materialism that does not corrupt souls, but soften them and in the end quietly loosens all their tensions. (DA II, 2.11 p. 509)

What is of importance to democratic man, then, is that the political system that he lives in provides security that ensures comfort and welfare. Politically, few subjects outside the realm that addresses these areas of priority will arouse his attention or engagement.³⁰ This is of course the psychological prerequisite for the intellectual ideology of materialism: the satisfaction

²⁷ As I interpret Tocqueville, he would probably agree that the higher the degree of all freedoms in a society, the higher the overall economic prosperity. However, capitalism is not necessarily dependent upon political and individual freedom, the state-capitalism of China or the cartel-capitalism of 18th century Germany are examples of this.

²⁸ Tocqueville's contemporary and friend John Stuart Mill stated that under the dominion of middle-class opinion, "the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind." (Mill 1991:81). Indeed, the natural effect of democracy was to "give everyone the desire of changing places without suggesting to anyone the idea of going much farther; to make personal ambition a universal feeling and to diminish the number of great ambitions," a tendency that was encouraged by the increasing specialization of modern life. (Tocqueville to Louis de Kergolay, February 2, 1838, quoted in Kanan 2001:49)

²⁹ Resembling both Kant and Montesquieu, Tocqueville asserts that the middle class are "naturally enemies of violent movements" and that "there is no revolution that does not more or less threaten acquired property [...] there is none in which the passions to which property give rise are more fierce and more tenacious than in the middle classes." (DA II, 3.21 p. 607-08)

³⁰ Later in life, during the despotism of Napoleon III, Tocqueville indignantly commented upon the bourgeoisie's submissiveness in political matters: "It is quite a amusing spectacle to observe these men who find despotism good for everything except regulating their material interests: they regard the confiscation of all liberties with pleasure; but when one comes to touch their liberty of enriching oneself, they give vent to loud cries." (Tocqueville to Corcelle, December 17, 1852, quoted in Kanan 2001:56)

of the self by material matter. Also of interest is Tocqueville's idea that the affection for democracy among its citizenry is not founded in an admiration of its officials; "In the eyes of democracy, government is not a good; it is a necessary evil. Officials must be accorded a certain power; for without this power, what use would they serve?" (DA I, 2.5 p. 194) Tocqueville's description of government officials illustrates them as somewhat mediocre; "the most remarkable men are rarely called to public offices." (DA I, 2.5 p. 188) Given the status of the material in democracies, what attracts democratic man in his ambition for recognition and public status is achieved through the commercial sector, not the public sector.

Great talents and great passions generally turn away from power in order to pursue wealth; and it often happens that one takes charge of directing the fortune of the state only when one feels oneself barely capable of conducting one's own affairs. (DA I, 2.5 p. 195)

The 'rich' do not constitute a distinct class in the conventional sense of the term 'class', rather, it is an economically successful extension of the middle class, its values are basically very similar to those the middle class claims as its own; its characteristics and status are based in economic terms, not as a distinct class with a coherent, exclusive and separate system of values and culture, nor does it transcend a political or social agenda on its own different from the middle-class, as did its pre-democratic upper-class predecessor; the aristocracy.³¹ The 'rich' are simply what the term describes: rich.

[t]his aristocracy does not resemble those that have preceded it [...] although they are rich, the class of the rich does not exist; for the rich have neither a common spirit nor objects, neither common traditions, nor hopes. There are then members, but not corps [...] there is no genuine association. (DA II, 2.20, p. 531-32)

How can narrow-minded individualism and excessive materialism be constrained within democracy? Tocqueville recognized that democracy's natural and dominant class would be the productive, rational, scientific and meticulous middle-class, and that order, tranquillity and equality of opportunity and rights was imperative. Yet, democratic man could be 'attached' to an appreciation of liberty through 'enlightened self-interest' and 'the art of association'.

³¹ "The rich in democracies never form a corps that has its own mores and policing; the particular ideas of their class do not stop them and the general ideas of their country push them ahead." (DA II, 2.19 p. 528)

2.5 Self-interest Well Understood and Associations.

After the freedom to act alone, the most natural to man is that of combining his efforts with the efforts of those like him and acting in common. The right of association therefore appears to me to be almost as inalienable in its nature as individual freedom. (DA I, 2.4 p. 184)

There is nothing, according to me, that deserves more to attract our regard than the intellectual and moral associations of America. (DA II, 2.5 p. 492)

2.5.1 Self-interest Well Understood

The validity of the concept 'individualism,' which comprises an assemblage of self-consciously timid individuals, appears fragile considering the *de facto* corporation that takes place between individuals. How can this be explained? The doctrine of 'self-interest well-understood' answers this question according to Tocqueville, who was struck by the high level of civil engagement of the Americans through associations of political, economic, social and intellectual character (both permanent local associations as well as provisional political and civil groups created freely by citizens). The principle of this doctrine is that democratic citizens submit some of their private interests to public interests. The rationale behind this is not a virtuous disposition of the citizens, but the usefulness regarding such associations. "In the United States it is almost never said that virtue is beautiful. They maintain that it is useful and they prove it every day." (DA II, 2.8 p. 501) It is the moral doctrine best suited to democratic times - neither complete nor self-evident – but it is "clear and sure"; and since "it of all philosophic theories the most appropriate to the needs of men in our time [...] marvellously accommodates to the weaknesses of men, it obtains a great empire with ease." (DA II 2.8 p. 502)

The doctrine of self-interest well understood does not produce great devotion; but it suggests little sacrifices each day; by itself it cannot make man virtuous, but if forms a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted, masters of themselves; and if it does not lead directly to virtue through the will, it brings them near to it insensibly through habits. (DA II, 2.8 p. 502)

The concept does not generate "extraordinary virtues," but nevertheless harmonizes with democracy since it is within reach of everyone and serves as a guide to rational behaviour that

amends both individual interest and public interest; "Consider some individuals, they are lowered. View the species, it is elevated" (DA II 2.8 p. 502)

"Tocqueville adopts this utilitarian language to describe a crucial self-equilibrating principle of American Democracy, recapturing it first as *égoïsme intelligent* and then as *intérêt bien-entendu*. (Welch 2001:89) What Tocqueville argues, is that the Americans pursuit of self-interest (which is consistent in democratic societies) through associations, benefits the interests of the whole community. Since the search for material well-being is the chief motive of democratic individuals, associations serve a utilitarian purpose in this sense. "Associations make transparent to individuals the link between public purposes and private well-being; they allow for the transference of the habits of responsible action back and forth between civil and political spheres." (Welch 2001:89)

Even though Tocqueville's doctrine resembles utilitarianism, there is a crucial distinction that separates the two; Tocqueville viewed the convenient synthesis of private and public interest as a "complex social and psychological artefact, rather than as the automatic result of individual pleasure-seeking," and furthermore the doctrine examined the means which causes citizens to pursue and aspire what is in their long-term interest. (Welch 2001:89) The doctrine of self-interest well understood and its appeal to the proper interest of democratic man is not so much recognition of Hobbes' naturally selfish individual as it is an effort from Tocqueville to remind his readers that despite the inevitable effects of individualism and materialism that democracy produces, there are remedies that can counteract them. There is cause to be cognisant of the fact that the idea of the sovereign individual as a universal principle was still novel and in its founding in Tocqueville's time, and that he, rightly in my opinion, anticipated a greater focus upon the individual and his rights in the coming democratic times.

There is no power on earth that can prevent the growing equality of conditions from bringing the human spirit toward seeking for the useful and from disposing each citizen to shrink within himself. One must therefore expect that individual interests will become more than ever the principal if not the unique motive of men's actions; but it remains to be know how each man will understand his individual interest. (DA II, 2.8 p. 503)

Hence, if some part of this interest can be diverted to participation in political associations – not solely restricted to political parties, but in the widest sense of the term – and vigorous local self-governing groups, they supply the milieu where citizens discover the utility of corporation,

and, most importantly; develop an understanding of the union connecting private and social interest, where the fate and condition of the whole community is attached to and dependent upon the citizen;

Only with difficulty does one draw a man out of himself to interest him in the destiny of the whole state, because he understands poorly the influence that the destiny of the state can exert on his lot. But should it be necessary to pass a road through his property, he will see at first glance that he has come across a relation between this small public affair and his greatest private affairs, and he will discover, without anyone's showing it to him, the tight bond that here unites a particular interest to the general interest. (DA II, 2.14 p. 487)

The crucial element in this argumentation – and this is a recurrent theme throughout *Democracy in America* – is that association and corporation are necessary for the development and maintenance of freedom. Not a limited meaning of freedom as 'doing as one pleases,' but primarily freedom of the mind, which enables individuals to take an active responsibility for their lives and protects them "from being overwhelmed by their needs and succumbing to dependence on a schoolmaster government that might otherwise be understood as serving them." (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:LXXXI) When citizens become accustomed to practising politics in common, it facilitates a participatory culture in civil and political life:

The more the number of these small common affairs increases, the more do men, even without their knowing it, acquire the ability to pursue great ones in common. Civil associations therefore facilitate political associations; but, on the other hand, political association singularly develops and perfects civil association [...] politics generalizes the taste for and habit of association; it makes a crowd of men who would otherwise have lived alone desire to unite, and teaches the art of doing it. (DA II, 2.7 p. 496)

In this manner Tocqueville starts from a seemingly utilitarian viewpoint, where he acknowledges that people are calculating and rational beings, to the concept of enlightened self-interest where people choose to associate, and finally to the metaphysical notion of virtue and freedom as the results of this process. What Tocqueville tries to achieve by this argument, is that notwithstanding the societal structure surrounding a given individual – in democracy's case that of individualism and materialism – it is possible to fulfil one's interests through the public sphere, and that it is possible for democratic man to understand "the influence that the well-being of the country has on his own, [...] and he interests himself in the prosperity of his country at first as a thing that is useful to him, and afterwards as his own work." (DA I, 2.6 p.

225) Therefore the unintentional consequence of participation can serve as an education in the practice of freedom, and thus the development of the virtues necessary to appreciate this freedom.

2.5.2 Associations

In much the same way as Hobbes envisioned the modern polity as an artificial leviathan made up of the strength of many individuals, Tocqueville saw the democratic polity as a mass of associations. Artificial constructs combining the force of their individual members for offensive and defensive actions. (Welch 2001:95)

Civil society was both the repository of Tocqueville's hopes for political vitalization and the source of his fears. The idea of association, in which the practise of civic ideals would be preserved and the despotic tendencies of egalitarianism resisted. (Wolin 2001:343).

Tocqueville's observations of this topic are well known, but of interest here is not so much associations themselves, but why they are of importance and the consequences they generate. Again, Tocqueville uses the concept of associations to demonstrate the inherent and conflictual nature of liberty and equality, and displays the "art of association" as a remedy against the negative aspects of equality, individualism, materialism, and an overly centralized government. What one must bear in mind is that Tocqueville's arguments are of a civic rather than administrative character; he emphasized the civic and intellectual benefits rather than efficiency and productivity. Tocqueville distinguished clearly between the motives and purposes that comprise the rational foundation for associations. In a democracy, associations that have their progeny in financially viable interests will come about naturally through democratic materialism, and through democratic compassion, social associations will emerge. These associations do provide genuine needs, but their existential rationale is often based on an immediate and functional foundation.

Those who serve moral and intellectual ends are the type of associations which Tocqueville defined as decisive to the protection of liberty and the practical political education of democratic man; "In bringing to the public eye new, uncommon sentiments and ideas, individuals influence one another, persuade others, perhaps even change mores and ultimately laws" (Mansfield & Winthrop, p. 73, 2000)

What Tocqueville accentuates, is that the most significant purpose of association is not formally political (as functional political parties) or financial, but educational; the development of man's political intellect and the creation of ideas arises from voluntary cooperation; "Political association can therefore be considered great schools, free of charge, where all citizens come to learn the general theory of associations." (DA II, 2.4 p. 497) The importance of association was not that they were sacrosanct or miraculous devices that guaranteed the safety of liberty, but that they pushed men to contemplate and articulate the substance of freedom; in other words, they were a mechanism that shaped popular mores which counterweight the political passivity that dominated the individualistically orientated private sphere. (Lively 1962:67)

The embryonic, destructive consequences of narrow self-interest (individualism) are subsequently counter-balanced by participation in local institutions and associations. "Voluntary association with others presents itself as an obvious and efficacious remedy to the limitations of individual action. The patterns themselves become instinctual and internalized; they eventually form new *mœurs*." (Welch 2001:92) Initially, democratic man act out of self-interest, but can gradually develop a deeper sense of insightfulness;

One is occupied with the general interest at first by necessity and then by choice; what was a calculation becomes instinct; and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens, one finally picks up the habit and taste of serving them. (DA II, 2.4 p. 488)

Maintaining the citizen's interest in public affairs and actively engaging them in political matters, would contribute to the acceptance of the duties that freedom inheres. The freedom to choose is essential to the exercise of freedom, and the loss of freedom to choose is not by definition negatively and exclusively confined to the external prevention of choice, but also positively and inclusively to the internal rejection of choice. Why this is a potential danger in democratic nations, is by Tocqueville attributed to the distinction between equality, which is a natural sentiment in democracies, and liberty, which is not. Freedom has been a feature of societies throughout history, and "it is not attached exclusively to one social state." What *is* unique to democracies however, is "equality of conditions; the principal passion that agitates men [...] is the love of this equality." (DA II, 2.1 p. 480) According to Tocqueville, the effects of freedom and equality do not correspond similarly:

The evils that freedom bring are sometimes immediate; they are visible to all, and all more or less feel them. The evils that extreme equality can produce become manifest only little by little; they insinuate gradually into the social body; one sees them only now and then, and at the moment when they have become most violent, habits has already made them no longer felt.

The goods that freedom brings show themselves only in the long term, and it is always easy to fail to recognize the cause that gives birth to them.

The advantages of equality make themselves felt from now on, and each day one sees them flow from their source. (DA II, 2.1 p. 480-81)

Thus, the principal menace innate in democratic society is the deteriorating will of its citizenry to burden itself with the practice of liberty in the public sphere. Participation in local political and civic associations proves the ideal antidote to it. However, the predicament that riddles social scientists is *how* such discernment is to be implemented into civic practice, and postulating its necessity almost becomes a tautologous statement, in the sense that the theoretical is discouragingly disconnected from the practical. In aristocratic times, according to Tocqueville, there is a perception of duty as a moral imperative, but this is absent in democracies, where “the idea of acting for personal benefit has become socially respectable.” (Lively 1962:198) Appealing to an ‘altruistic’ and righteous nature of humankind in democratic times may sound politically correct, but its effects are probably unsuccessful:

Rather, they [moralists] had to show that men’s personal advantage lay in acting for the general good, to discover and publicise the instances where self-interest and the general interest coincided, to nourish the view that men best served themselves in serving others. In other words, the morality of democratic society should be based in the idea of enlightened self-interest. (Lively 1962:198)

That ‘enlightened self-interest’ should form the basis of moral action in a democratic society seems to reveal a certain lack of confidence in the democratic man as a moral being capable of acting out of disinterest and virtue; “One must therefore expect that individual interest will become more than ever the principal if not the unique motive of men’s actions; but it remains to know how each man will understand his individual interest.”³² (DA II, 2.8 p. 503) Tocqueville seems to regretfully accept that democratic man by temperament is *homo economicus*, but his hopes are that through public exercise of freedom he can cultivate an

³² Tocqueville described his impressions upon arriving in America in a letter to his friend Ernest de Chabrol: “people having different languages, beliefs, opinions: in a word, a society without roots, without memories, without prejudices, without routines, without common ideas, without a national character yet a hundred times happier than our own; more virtuous? I doubt it. That is the starting point: What serves as the link among such diverse elements? *Interest. That is the secret.* The private interest that breaks through at each moment, the interest that, moreover, appears openly and even proclaims itself as a social theory.” (Letter to Ernest de Chabrol, June 9, 1831) (Italics added)

interest in political liberty and evolve, if not completely, then at least to some extent into *homo politicus*. (Wolin 2001:214)

Yet, there are glimpses of optimism situated in his work; the utilitarian and interest-based advantages of association are obvious in his arguments, but there is something more, I think. By using his understanding of freedom, one can see that associations are vital in creating in society multiplicity and diversity, a differentiation of opinions and beliefs. It is by *practicing* our right to argue and converse, and by defending our viewpoints, that we develop and understand the necessity of freedom of speech and association; they become more than democratic slogans and abstract rights, they become praxis. These are the apparent advantages of association, but association also thwarts something else; the negative consequences of individualism and materialism. If democratic society is dominated by excessive individualism and materialism, they are likely to engineer an atomistic society of politically isolated individuals, where the primary links of interaction to the civic sphere is public opinion and the centralized state. In this sense, Tocqueville is trying to illustrate that this state of isolation robs men of the will to freedom and adds to the modern symptom of *purposelessness* (this topic will be further examined in Chapter 3). Jack Lively has interpreted and expressed this state in the following manner:

Isolation robbed men of that contact with others, that mutual co-operation, that feeling of involvement and personal responsibility, which nurtured intellect and character. Subservience to a monolithic public opinion bred a combination of arrogance and timidity, arrogance in enforcing the commonplace and timidity in opposing it. It was false to hope that the state could be the source of moral and intellectual improvement. Such development came through controversy, through the clash of opinions and values, through the posing in life of real intellectual and moral problems. But the state was fitted to establish rules not to create controversy. It could provide a system of education, but once it started aiming more positively at intellectual or moral improvement it was bound to fail. For it was not in the nature of political authority to improve men as men. It could give them the means of self-improvement such as education. Any more positive attempt to moralise men meant only that the state would throw its weight behind some one doctrine or attitude, and this would kill the social dialectic on which moral improvement depended. It was through voluntary organised associations alone that variety and diversity of opinion could be created." (Lively 1962:130)

Lively's view transcends the classical perception of the free man as a self-governing and vigorous contributor to the local sphere of civic and political interaction. The premises for such a perspective is the distinction between the good *man* and the good *citizen*; the Aristotelian concept that accentuates that "politics in the widest sense was the condition of the individual's realisation of himself as a social being whose full potentialities could be brought to fruition only

in a world of public assertion and not in a life of private retreat." (Lively 1962:227) The prerequisite for political activity is diversity and voluntary obligation, and although municipal politics indisputably is minor politics, it is perhaps the most important sphere of activity. Given the precondition that involvement may actually influence results outside or *through* the purely administrative sphere, local politics can stimulate the citizen's ethical and political abilities, as well as a deeper awareness of political rights and duties. "Men could see that their political involvements made a difference. Because communal politics drew men out of the confines of the household and economy, and, above all, because it encouraged them to work together, politics became the single most important force in combating the disconnectedness of modern life." (Wolin 2001:215)

Therefore, one must distinguish between associations whose primary objectives are material, in the sense that their existence is based on profit, political or financial. Given the freedom of association, and the incitement to material growth which is inherent in Western democracies, associations of this nature will naturally manifest itself in the domains of private and economic life as an effect of this freedom. However, this is not necessarily synonymous with freedom itself; it is only when citizens cluster and participate in associations whose motivation is political activity itself, that a sense of community and civic responsibility can be developed; "freedom is freedom for political citizens to act and perform." (Hereth 1986:21)

Given the critical observations by Tocqueville concerning a "centralistic concentration of power" and his preference and fondness for local democracy and distribution of power, it is easy to categorize him as a rather traditional, conservative critic of the state. However, as noted previously, he does not easily fit the nexus of the classical liberal view of 'the individual versus the state' conflict, or the significance of separation of powers. Questions concerning separation and distribution of public power in a democratic society transcends more than institutional aspects of the formal, juristic structure of a given constitution. Tocqueville comprehends that democracy's true characteristics are not definable by institutions *per se*, but needs to be diagnosed on the level of civic participation and activity conducted by the citizens. It is the quality and vitality of the political surroundings in which the citizen dwells in daily life that determines whether the rationality and purpose behind the state of affairs is predominantly motivated by politics and civic responsibility, or administrative effectiveness and bureaucratic rationality. This is what forms the background of Tocqueville's argumentation for genuine power

on the communal level, not primarily because it is financially effective in the short-term perspective, but because man as a political being can mature if he actively practices his political duties, as well as rights. However, this is in practice a difficult task; the combination of materialism and a strong central state that provides welfare without any demands regarding political partisanship by the citizens hardly provides for a voluntary milieu of participation:

Why should a person develop a sense of civic responsibility for public affairs, when experience tells him that public and common concerns of his city or region are decided by civil servants, who answer to the central authority and not to him? How should dwellers in a community learn the political virtues of justice, prudence, adherence to reality, love of freedom, and regard for the common cause, if the practice of these virtues are impossible? (Hereth 1986:30)

For this reason, a genuine sense of identification, responsibility and community by the citizens in a democratic state is in a Tocquevillian sense inadequately satisfied through representative government and elections alone; an understanding of self-interest well understood and the importance of local associations and individual practice contribute to a common sentiment of loyalty to the republic and a remedy for indifference and disconnectedness towards their political system. Only when citizens wish to maintain their free institutions, for the sake of political activity itself, do their basic attitude and practical activity correspond with order in the republic, whose purpose for Tocqueville lies in freedom of political activity. The lesson to be learnt from the Americans, at least in the past, is an understanding of delegating authority to the local communities, because this will include the citizens in the political process:

The legislators of America did not believe that, to cure a malady so natural to the social body in democratic times and so fatal, it was enough to accord the whole nation as a whole a representation on itself; they thought that, in addition, it was fitting to give political life to each portion of the territory in order to multiply infinitely the occasions for citizens to act together and to make them feel every day that they depend on one another. (DA II, 2.4 p. 486-87)

Tocqueville's theory on the importance of associations enjoys a prominent status within the academic society, and has been employed as an inspirational guide to examine institutional and associational patterns in modern society. The next topic that Tocqueville emphasised as an imperative remedy against excessive individualism and materialism is – as an academical subject – more delicate and disputed. Where associations and self-interest well-understood

deals with the physical and concrete aspects of democracy, religion deals with its metaphysical and intangible features.

2.6 Religion

One must recognize that equality, which introduces great goods into the world, nevertheless suggest to men very dangerous instincts [...] it tends to isolate them from one another and to bring each of them to be occupied with himself alone. It opens their souls excessively to the love of material enjoyments. The greatest advantage of religions is to inspire to wholly contrary instincts. (DA II, 1.5 p. 419)

Initially, there is cause to remind ourselves that Tocqueville's considerations upon religion did not constitute a theological discussion, in regard to the validity of 'objective truth' in Christianity itself; "one must distinguish very carefully the principal opinions that constitute belief and that form what theologians call articles of faith." (DA II 1.5 p. 422) What is at stake is not the truthful substance of religious dogmas, but the social and intellectual influence it can exert on the democratic social state. Incorporating religion as a potentially positive factor in an explanation and understanding of democracy's normative foundations may seem archaic and speculative in the secular and rational political science of today, the secularity of science being per definition opposite to the spirituality of religion. Furthermore, religion, being by a bearer of values and norms, is in the tolerant Western democracies usually considered a private matter, and outside the sphere of politics. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to exclude religion as a factor that influences politics, society, culture, and norms. Categorically denying *a priori* that Christianity has been a significant influence on Western culture and thought seems unfruitful, and this influence should be dealt with in an objective manner, to comprehend the social, psychological and normative assessment of religion without necessarily believing in its spiritual truth. The secular development – particularly in science and political thought – and the tight bond between the church and the state in pre-democratic Europe, is a disadvantage for religion as an academic subject within political theory. In America - where religion has tighter cultural relations to the formal political structure, and yet separated from the state institutionally - religion as an

academic subject is more accepted in the discussion of Tocqueville particularly and political philosophy generally.³³

Among Tocqueville scholars, there is an ongoing debate whether Tocqueville's analysis on religion was solely sociologically utilitarian in its approach to religious faith. Now, it has been argued that this argument is of purely academic interest, and bears no imperative importance regarding his theories. However, judging from his private letters, I believe that Tocqueville's sincerity about the necessity for religious belief in democracies is genuine, and that the need for religion is closely connected to the concepts of virtue, materialism and pantheism. Even though he belongs to the tradition of modern, liberal and humanist thinkers, there is throughout *Democracy* recurring references to the importance of mores and virtue, which are reminiscent of Aristotle and the teleological notion of man.³⁴ I think Tocqueville's concern is rooted in the belief that democratic politics – if dominated by individualism, materialism and pantheism – represents a threat to the moral virtues he deemed indispensable to the active, reflective and independent political citizen, and that religion can combat these effects (defined as negative by Tocqueville).

An accurate understanding of Tocqueville's view on the relationship between religion and democracy is of importance. Religion, essential to the prospects of democracy, concerns matters outside of its definition and its nature. Religion lies outside democracy and is its limit.³⁵ "Among all dogmatic beliefs, the most desirable seem to me to be the dogmatic belief in matters of religion [...] When religion is destroyed in a people, doubt seizes the highest realms of intelligence and half-paralyzes all others." (DA II 1.5 p. 417-418)

³³ "Religion, which, among the Americans, never mixes directly in the government of society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions." (DA I, 2.9 P. 280)

³⁴ In *Democracy*, there is an almost distanced and objective relation to religion and its utility by Tocqueville. Privately, he struggled with questions on religion and faith, but gradually became a religious believer.

³⁵ There is a continual debate among Tocqueville scholars as whether he simply view religion in an utilitarian sense, meaning as an social utility, or if he was a truly religious man. Part of the explanation lies in the ambiguous statements from Tocqueville concerning this matter.

2.6.1 Religion and Democratic Man

If the doctrine of self-interest well understood had only this world in view, it would be far from sufficient, for there are a great number of sacrifices that can find their recompense only in the other world; and whatever effort of mind that one makes to prove the utility of virtue, it will always be hard to make a man who does not wish to die live well. (DA II, 2.9 p. 504)

Despotism can do without faith, but freedom cannot. (DA I, 2.9 p. 282)

Religion serves as a valuable prospect for moderating the passion for material well-being and “the theoretical possibility of securing access, in the framework of a democratic society, to an outside, to a thing *other* than democracy, to pure nature, but by naturally religious man, free from all convention, even the convention of equality.” (Manent 1996:106) Although he was somewhat evasive, I interpret Tocqueville’s recommendations on religious practice as a remedy against ‘spiritual’ humanism, that is, the belief in the innate goodness and innocence in man. Accompanied by secular scepticism about divine authority, then, according to Tocqueville, it is rational that man finds meaning by material satisfaction, a sort of ‘materialistic hedonism.’ (Zetterbaum 1967:63) What it boils down to, is man’s primordial source of authority. Rousseau’s famous statement that “man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains”, exemplifies the faith in the innocent man that was typical of the ideas behind the French Revolution. If man is an innately innocent being, capable of moral insight by the use of rationality, but corrupted by ‘sanctimonious’ society and its artificial conventions, then to realize the goodness of man, it is *society* that must be altered back to its natural state of the classless and un-dogmatic society of complete equality and without authorities that suppresses man’s true potential, as later described by Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

This is very much the philosophical principle from which Marxism, an artefact of the radical Enlightenment, derives its rationale to alter social, political and economic structure. However, Marxism is only the most explicit elocution of this philosophical doctrine; scientific secularism is a prevailing faith in modern democracy, and Tocqueville treated the subject in *Democracy* under the heading *How Equality Suggests to the Americans the Idea of the Indefinite Perfectibility of Man*;

One cannot believe how many facts naturally flow from this philosophic theory according to which man is indefinitely perfectible, and what prodigious influence it exerts on those who, always being

occupied only with acting and not thinking, seem to conform their actions without knowing it. (DA II, 1.9 p. 428)

Contrasting this notion is Aristotle's and Christianity's view that what is to be improved and developed for man to realize his potential are the *virtues* of man.³⁶ Given the immense appeal that the principle of sovereignty of the individual exerts on democratic man, Tocqueville's hope was that religion could serve as a transcendent source of authority, since "all religions draw from man himself an element of strength that can never fail them, because it depends on one of the constituent principles of human nature." (DA I, 2.9 p. 284) Religion may therefore diminish the threat of mild despotism by reminding citizens of the significance of life outside the busy search for material well-being in democratic society, as there "is no religion that does not place man's desires beyond and above earthly goods and that does not naturally raise his soul toward regions much superior to those of the senses." (DA II, 1.5 p. 419) However, when religion loses its authority as a moral source, when there is no longer a coherent source of moral authority outside the independent and sovereign democratic man, then the validity of morality is either left to Kant's seemingly optimistic notion of the enlightened rational man, or to the fluctuating and arbitrary expression of public opinion. Nevertheless, no one can discipline democratic man in the education of virtues on a moral basis, since he is sovereign and independent and the principle of equality renders all individuals the right to express their interpretation of what is morally just. As a result, in its uttermost consequence, morality is progressive, subjective and relative.

Religion is *mutually* similar and dissimilar to democracy; Christianity's perception of the equality of all believers coincides with the principle of equality, yet it is not similar to democracy because of its otherness; religious man is free from the beliefs in individualism and materialism in democratic society, religion offers a spiritual alternative:

The principal business of religions is to purify, regulate, and restrain the too ardent and too exclusive taste for well-being that men in times of equality feel; but I feel that they would be wrong to try to subdue it entirely and to destroy it. They will not succeed in turning men away from love of

³⁶ Tocqueville uses the terms 'religion' and 'Christianity' simultaneously, but he clearly – and somewhat 'politically incorrect' in the present vocabulary of political science – distinguished between Christianity and Islam as of their prospects in corresponding successfully with democracy; "Mohammed had not only religious doctrines descend from Heaven and placed in the Koran, but political maxims, civil and criminal laws, and scientific theories. The Gospels, in contrast, speak only of the general relations of men to God and among themselves. Outside they teach nothing and oblige nothing to be believed. That alone, among a thousand other reasons, is enough to show that the first of these two religions cannot dominate for long in enlightened and democratic times, whereas the second is destined to reign in these centuries as in all others.(DA II, 1.5 p. 419-20)

wealth; but they can still try to persuade them to enrich themselves only by honest means. (DA II, 1.5 p. 422)

Accordingly, while religion exerts a positive influence on mores, Tocqueville underlines that religion can never serve as a political alternative to democracy as such. It can remedy some of democracy's negative aspects, but not replace democracy as the source of authority in the temporal world; "As men become more and more equal, it is more important that religions, while carefully putting themselves out of the way of the daily movement of affairs, not collide unnecessarily with the generality accepted ideas and permanent interests that reign among the mass." (DA II, 1.5 p. 422-23) In fact, Tocqueville explicitly warns that the stabilizing effects of religion can only come into function when it is liberated from state sponsorship; a strict separation of church and state is necessary because if the religious doctrine is amalgamated with secular power, the appeal will diminish; religion must be perceived as immutable and eternal, in "allying itself with a political power, religion increases its power over some and loses the hope of reigning all." (DA I, 2.9 p. 284)

2.6.2 American Puritanism and Universal Christianity

In Puritan America, in effect, religion ruled over the details of social life. But insofar as the power of religion was exercised by all members of the social body on each and each on all, it could be described not as the power of religion over society but, more judiciously, as that of society over itself by means of religion. (Manent 1996:94)

Tocqueville considers that the character of its Puritan founding, with its distinctive blend of religion and politics, in the main determined the nature of the American Revolution. "Puritanism was not only a religious doctrine; it also blended at several points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories." (DA I, 1.2 p. 32) In his description of the Puritan founding, he invites readers to see "the key to almost the whole work" (DA I 1.2 p. 28). The New England township, with its practice of local democracy, was the political extension of the Puritan movement. The township was an indispensable factor in the practice of political freedom, where the "legislator are above all preoccupied with the care of maintaining moral order and the care of maintaining the good mores of society." (DA I, 1.2 p. 38) Furthermore, Tocqueville emphasises the character and strong position of local democracy in America by pointing out that "the

institutions of a township are to freedom what primary schools are to science" (DA I, 1.5 p. 57) and the unique influence it exerted on the organizational structure of America since "the township had been organized before the country, the country before the state, the state before the Union."³⁷ (DA I, 1.2 p. 40)

What distinguishes American democracy is the amalgamation of "two perfectly distinct elements" that in the emerging period of Enlightenment in Europe would come at odds with each other, but which defined the very essence of the political and societal system of the Americans:

I have already said enough to put the character of Anglo-American civilization in its true light. It is the product (and its point of departure ought constantly be present in one's thinking) of two perfectly distinct elements, that elsewhere have often made war at each other, but which, in America, they have succeeded in incorporating somehow into one another and combining marvellously. I mean here *the spirit of religion* and *spirit of freedom*. (DA I 1.2 p. 43)

Where religion was in the main perceived as a reactionary and suppressive representative of the 'Old Europe' by the Enlightenment thinkers, Tocqueville was inspired by the American experiment, where "religion [...] leads to enlightenment; it is the observance of divine laws that guides man to freedom." (DA I, 1.2 p.42) Foreshadowing Max Weber's sociological thesis on how Protestantism advanced the rise of modern capitalism, Tocqueville considers the puritan movement as a distinct contribution – and as conditional – to American democracy. However, he distinguishes between the unique Puritanism of the Americans and Christianity in its universal appearance; Tocqueville's promotion of the necessity of faith in democracies lies in its capacity to promulgate values and an understanding of virtue which facilitate beliefs that act as contraceptives to excessive materialism:

The principal business of religions is to purify, regulate, and restrain the too ardent and too exclusive taste for well-being that men in times of equality feel, but I believe that they would be wrong to try to subdue it entirely and to destroy it. They will not succeed in turning men away from love of wealth; but they can still persuade them to enrich themselves by honest means. (DA II 1.5 p. 422)

³⁷ Tocqueville continuously compared political culture between France and America throughout the first volume of the *Democracy*: "In France, the tax collector of the state levies the taxes of the commune; in America, the tax collector of the township levies the tax of the state. Thus, among us, the central government lends its agents to the township; in America, the township lends its agents to the government. That alone makes understandable the degree to which the two societies differ." (DA I, 1.5 p. 63)

Religion, then, can serve as a deterrent against materialism. Moreover, as I perceive to be the principal concern for Tocqueville, religion can be a valuable ally in the practice of freedom; "the reign of freedom cannot be established without that of mores, nor mores founded without beliefs." (DA I, introduction, p. 11)

2.6.3 The Universality of Democracy and Christianity

Indeed, in democratic times, there is a special need for individual minds to compensate for the total lack of structure – the frightening immensity of limitless desires within and unlimited choice without – by gravitating towards some set of beliefs that are transcendently based and beyond dispute. In this way they find a haven that allows them to function in a heartless world. (Welch 2001:98)

Tocqueville clearly emphasized the universal appeal of democracy, and in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* he explored more deeply the causes of its nature. The French revolution distinguished itself from all previous political revolutions, and the reason for this was the universal nature of its appeal to mankind; it

[d]id not have a territory of its own [...] It has unified or divided people despite their laws, traditions, characters, and languages, turning compatriots into enemies, and strangers into brothers; or rather it established, above all particular nationalities, a common intellectual homeland where men of all nations could become citizens. (*The Old Regime*, p. 99)

The universal appeal of Christianity lay in the same reasons:

Religions usually consider man in himself, without regard for what the laws, customs, and traditions of a country have added to the common base [...] The rules of conduct which religions prescribe relate less to the man of a particular country or time, than to the son, the father, the servant, the master, the neighbour. These rules are based on human nature itself; they can be equally accepted by all men and they are equally applicable everywhere. (*The Old Regime*, p. 100)

Finally, Tocqueville compares the similarities of the two:

The French Revolution operated, with respect to this world, in precisely the same manner that religious revolutions have acted respect to the other world. It considered the citizen in an abstract manner, outside of any particular society, the same way that religion considers man in general, independently of time and space. The Revolution did not only ask what the particular rights of French citizens were, but what were the general political rights and duties of men [...] itself became a new kind of religion, an incomplete religion, it is true, without God, without ritual, and without a life after death, but one which nevertheless, like Islam, flooded the earth with its soldiers, apostles, and martyrs. (*The Old Regime*, p. 100–01)

Now, what I have attempted to illustrate in this thesis, regarding Tocqueville's observations of democratic man and democratic mentality, is that democracy - as an ideal conception - is an all-encompassing system of values, morality, order, and *outlook*. As noted earlier, it is not simply a political regime among others; its effect is effectively cultural, social and normative as well. One of Tocqueville's chief concerns, was that equality of conditions paves the way for individualism and uniformity; these are features which in turn endangers the liberty; i.e. the will to freedom and intellectual diversity. Religion offers an alternative, not to democracy *per se*, but to some of the features inherited in democracy, particularly the 'sacrosanct' aspects of its universality:

The idea of unity obsesses [the mind]; it seeks it on all sides, and when it believes it has found it, it willingly wraps it in its bosom and rests with it [...] If I encounter a philosophic system according to which the things material and immaterial, visible and invisible that the world includes are considered as no more than diverse parts of an immense being which alone remains eternal in the midst of the continual change and incessant transformation of all that composes it, I shall have no trouble concluding that such a system, although it destroys human individuality, or rather because it destroys it, will have secret charms for men who live in democracy, all their intellectual habits prepare them to conceive it and set them on the way to adopting it. (DA II, 1.8 p. 426)

While the principle of the sovereign individual stipulates that democratic man is rationally capable of moral insight and directing oneself as an autonomous being in a society comprised of those like him, it proves insufficient as man is dependent upon identification and meaning in the value-laden reality he navigates in. Tocqueville feared that democratic man would turn to an increasingly uniform majority of opinion as guideline of thought and conduct.

2.7 Public Opinion and the Will of the Majority

The moral empire of the majority is founded in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in many men united than in one alone, in the number of legislators than in their choice. It is the theory of equality applied to intellects. (DA I, 2.7 p. 236)

A cause vast enough to be applied to millions of men at once and strong enough to incline all together in the same direction easily seems irresistible; after having seen that one yields to it, one is quite close to believing that one cannot resist it. (DA II, 1.20 p. 471)

2.7.1 What is Opinion?

The present-day usage of the term 'public opinion' brings to mind specific preferences of attitude or conviction in a population on a specific matter conducted through a quantitative examination or survey, and whose data are expressed statistically. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that Tocqueville's term opinion differs significantly from the familiar usage and understanding; it represents the profound fundamental currents of thought and conceptions that govern a society, indicators of what is perceived as 'right and wrong,' 'just and unjust,' and 'politically correct', and acceptable expression concerning the democratic ideals. In other words, 'opinion' reflects the generally accepted ideas of a society's philosophical, normative and political foundation. It is the faith or ideas that reign within the democratic society and resembles religious conviction in its character; opinion is the particular preferences by which a majority of a society's citizenry relates to in matter of a comprehensive understanding of society and by which its actions and values transcends meaning and purpose.

While the concept of 'tyranny of the majority' will be examined later in the thesis, it might be useful to ponder what Tocqueville meant by 'majority,' since the term also is of relevance in the discussion of 'public opinion.' Now, 'majority' in the Tocquevillian sense does not typically refer to a specific faction composed of either fixed or temporary acknowledgeable political interests. What 'majority' refers to is in effect more of a conceptual and *felt* entity, which transcends the central outlook of social accordance; ergo the public opinion. "For Tocqueville, the majority in its most essential guise was a commanding moral authority." (Schleifer 2000:270) So what Tocqueville sets out to accomplish in his elaboration on public opinion, is to unveil the source of influence and force on shared beliefs that composes the democratic mentality and *raison d'être*.

It is something more than political ideologies; it echoes the common set of ideas that all Western ideologies agree upon as legitimate; sovereignty of the people. ³⁸

There are a great number of theories on matters of philosophy, morality, or politics that everyone thus adopts without examination, on faith of the public, and if one looks very closely, one will see that religion itself reigns there much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion. (DA II, 1.2 p. 409)

An example of a strong democratic opinion is the principle of equality; the once revolutionary concept of men having equal political rights has changed from a liberating dynamic to a reflection considered 'natural'. It has been established as a normatively undisputable truth, and analogous to justice. It is not an opinion that is explicitly 'held', but implicitly operative in the undertakings of politics and taken for granted as truthful. (Wolin:2001:125) It logically correlates with the Enlightenment's maxim on reason; "A general belief in equality and the similarities of temperament and opinion if a society without caste divisions were necessary for a general faith in the supremacy of the individual reason." (Lively 1962:54)

What Tocqueville sought to describe was the powerful democratic combination of its captivating ideas of equality and individual assessment, and the immense passions with which democratic people hold these ideas. What Tocqueville refers to as tyranny of the majority over thought, is ideologically based on the belief in intellectual equality; it logically follows that if all can equally discover the truth, then truth must correspond with the belief of the greatest number. "As the truth's arbiter, the majority tends to shape what democrats feel, think, and honour." (Kessler 2000:XXXI)

Being a strong advocate of intellectual freedom of mind, his gravest fear was in this regard democracy's potential for self-censorship, a collective state of mind where unpopular assertions and criticism would be subdued, particularly those that contradicted the majority;

The moral empire of the majority is founded in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in many men united than in one alone, in the number of legislations than in their choice. It is the theory of equality applied to intellect. (DA I, 2.7, p. 236)

³⁸ National Socialism and Bolshevik Socialism diverts in some respect from this perspective, but only to a certain degree; even these extreme ideologies – whose being would have been unattainable without the Enlightenment's notion of equality and universalism – sought to justify its existence and authority by claiming to represent the general will and good of the people.

The voluntary transfer of free will and sovereignty of the individual to the majority are contrary to the ideas of communism, which stipulate a collectivism (initially state-regulated prior to the classless society) logically and ontologically preceding individual emancipation. Democracy's reverse progression is collectivism rising out of excessive material individualism, a flock-mentality where democratic man blissfully mimics public opinion.³⁹

Tocqueville is sociologically aware that societies are functionally dependent upon common beliefs and symbols. He points out the fact that there is no society that can prosper without such beliefs (common dogmatic beliefs), for without common ideas there is no common action, and without any common action men still exists, but a social body does not." (DA II, 1.2 p. 407). Tocqueville is speaking less of religious articles of faith, than of beliefs (*croyances*) in a broader sense of common parlance, and means that what people commonly think is true and right.

If each undertook himself to form all his opinions and to pursue the truth in isolation down paths cleared by him alone, it is not probable that a great number of men would ever unite in any common beliefs. Now it is easy to see that there is no society that can prosper without such beliefs; or rather there is none that could survive this way; for without common ideas there is no common action, and without common action men still exists, but a social body does not. (DA II, 1.2 p. 407)

Therefore, given the fact that individuals have limited time and resources, they are simply incapable of contemplating upon all the consequences and truthfulness of the majority's wisdom or justice, and are therefore inclined to capitulate to its pressure in addition to the liberation it brings from the demanding burden of intellectual independency. and Tocqueville recognized the impracticability of each man verifying the truth behind every assumption.

If man were forced to prove himself all the truths he makes of every day, he would never finish; he would exhaust himself in preliminary demonstrations without advancing; as he does not have the time because of the short span of his life, not the ability because of the limits of his mind, to act that way, he is reduced to accepting as given a host of facts and opinions that he has neither the leisure nor the power to examine and verify by himself, but that the more able have found or the crowd adopts. (DA II, 1.2, p. 407-408)

³⁹ Though Tocqueville dreaded the terror of the French Revolution, his anxieties concerning democracy was not revolution and brutality, but intellectual stagnation and docility. As he explains in the chapter *Why Great Revolutions Will Become More Rare*: "Violent passions have little hold on men who have so attached their whole soul to the pursuit of well-being. The ardour they put into small affairs calms them in great ones [...] I do not claim that men who live in democratic societies are naturally immobile; I think on the contrary, that an eternal motion reigns in the heart of such a society and that no one knows repose in it; but I believe that men in it are agitated within certain limits that they scarcely ever exceed. They vary, alter, or renovate secondary things every day; they take great care not to touch the principal ones. They love change, but they dread revolutions." (DA II, 3.21 p. 609-10)

The legacy of the Enlightenment is in this regard internally conflictual; while upholding the individual's rights, ostensibly supporting dissimilarity and variety, it also creates a "difference-denying culture of equality. The power of the ideology lies in this double creation: the democrat acts as though he was wholly self-centred, yet he is, at the same time, a fervent believer of collectivities." (Wolin 2001:352) Public opinion offers a relief to the burden of choice in an increasingly complex society where orientation and verification of a rapidly changing environment for many seems progressively difficult. The principle of equality provides logically that a majority (composed by sovereign and independent individuals) in a given issue supports the credibility of public opinion, which serves as indicators of direction and adaptable convictions. Likewise, public opinion cannot be attributed to be the responsibility of a single person; therefore, nothing is at stake in adopting and approving them. The inclination according to which man submits to anonymous public opinion, the generalization of politics through 'de-ideologization', and the vulgarization and simplification of political language where the principal objective is to please the electorate in a 'sellable' manner, provides for a uniform *and* atomistic society:

In times of equality, because of their similarity, men have no faith in one another; but this same similarity gives them an almost unlimited trust in the judgement of the public; for it does not seem plausible to them that when all men have the same enlightenment, truth is not found on the side of the greatest number.

When the man who lives in democratic countries compare himself individually to all those who surround him, he feels pride that he is the equal of them; but when he comes to view the sum of those like him and places himself at the side of this great body, he is immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and his weakness.

The same equality that makes him independent of each of his fellow citizens in particular leaves him isolated and without defence against the action of the greatest number. (DA II, 1.2 p. 409)

Subsequently, what the democratic man values or recognizes is not a given quality of opinion, but that he holds an opinion in conjuncture with the social body as a whole. Democratic man has more choices than anyone in history has ever had, yet he has fewer guidelines and points of reference for making choices. A resolution for this predicament is by seeking sanctuary in public opinion, where the anonymity of the mass ensures both a course of action and freedom from the risk of actually reflecting upon commonly held truths. This tendency, characterized as 'pantheism' by Tocqueville, where not only the particularness and the intellectual sovereignty is lost from sight by individual men, but by mankind as well:

As conditions become more equal and each man in particular becomes more like all the others, weaker and smaller, one gets used to no longer viewing citizens so as to consider only the people, one forgets individuals so as to think of only the species.

In these times the human mind loves to embrace a host of diverse objects at once; it willingly seeks to enlarge and simplify its thoughts by enclosing God and the universe within a single whole...[S]uch a system, although it destroys human individuality, or rather because it destroys it, will have secret charms for men who live in democracy, all their intellectual habits prepare them to conceive it and set them on the way to adopting it [...] Among the different systems with whose aid philosophy seeks to explain the universe, pantheism appears to me one of the most appropriate to seduce the human mind in democratic centuries. (DA II 1.7 p. 426)

The concept of individualism claims that the democratic man is inclined to retreat to a closed circle in the private realm consisting of friends and family, while pantheism claims that democracy is neglecting the individual. "The individual described under 'individualism' has, in his weakness and vulnerability, lost his individuality. He seeks his identity in the very universal, mass forces to which he regards himself as subject. Democracy creates individuals, then leaves them unprotected so that, abetted by pantheism and 'democratic historians', they easily fall into individualism." (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:LXV) As a community, the danger of an overly strong emphasis on equality of conditions can cause democracy to be anti-social; it severs individuals from one another by pronouncing each of them equally free, equally independent and equally similar.⁴⁰ Where sovereignty of the people was intended to express politically the common will of the greatest number, but where the individual was protected physically – both life and property – from its arbitrariness through constitutional guarantees, its modern version has been transformed into the intellectual authority of the greatest number, but where its expression is primarily societal and where the individual enjoys little psychological protection from its attraction and pressure upon the independent mind.

⁴⁰ John Stuart Mill, who was influenced by Tocqueville and a great admirer, echoed Tocqueville in *On Liberty*: "Comparatively speaking, they now read the same things, listen to the same things, see the same things, go to the same places, have their hopes and fears directed to the same objects, have the same rights and liberties and the same means of asserting them [...] All the political changes of the age promote it, since they all tend to raise the low and lower the high. Every extension of education promotes it, because education brings people under the same influences. Improvement in the means of communication promotes it [...] Increase of commerce and manufacture promotes it [...] The ascendancy of public opinion [...] forms so great a mass of influence hostile to individuality (88-89) [that] in this age the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service." (Mill 1991:82-83)

2.7.2 Democratic Man's Lack of Faith in Himself

Obedience to the power of majority is the only thing that allows men to entertain the illusion that they are obeying their own will. (Manent 1996:22)

The paradoxical result of the liberation of reason is greater reliance on public opinion for guidance, a weakening of independence. Although every man in democracy thinks himself individually equal of every other man, this makes it difficult to resist the collectivity of equal men. If all opinions are equal, then the majority of opinions, in the psychological analogy of politics, should hold sway. It is very well to say that each should follow his own opinion, but since consensus is required for social and political life, accommodation is necessary. (Bloom 1998:247)

To Tocqueville, the power of public opinion is a form of the sovereignty of the people – unregulated, wild, but effective. He acknowledged that social power in the American democracy was unprecedented compared to the still rigid and formal power structure that dominated Europe. The power of public opinion is also a result of the more psychological consequences the passion for equality imposes on the human mind. Tocqueville described the democratic man as weak and isolated (everyone is the same; hence none are better or worse than one is). "He can believe only in himself, but has no faith in himself. It follows that he does not trust himself or another, but a third that they form together, at one with all others. They trust in the masses." (Manent 1996:40)

As citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant to each to believe blindly a certain man or mass decreases [...] Not only is common opinion the sole guide that remains for individual reason among democratic peoples; but it has infinitely greater power among these peoples than among any other. In times of equality, because of their similarity, men have no faith in one another; but this same similarity gives them an almost unlimited trust in the judgement of the public; for it does not seem plausible to them that when all have the same enlightenment, truth is not to be found on the side of the greatest number. (DA II, 1.2 p.409)

There are common opinions in all societies, but in democratic societies it prevails in the main unopposed, for other potential providers of opinions have lost their validity and credibility. "Society is not simply a reality and force external to thought. Rather, it tends to become the constitutive theme, the texture of thought itself. The democratic social state transforms the very substance of ideas that occupy the spirit of men. It produces new and particular ideas and modifies the rule and the matter of men's intellectual activity" (Manent 1996:42)

Tocqueville asserted that the apparatus that was best suited for commissioning the will of the majority was the political expression of the sovereignty of the people; the centralized state.

2.8 Administrative and Governmental Centralization

The government centralizes its action at the same time that it increases its prerogative: a double cause of force. (DA II, 4.5 p. 655)

Considering the government their own, they can allow it to extend its power indefinitely as long as it treats them equally and promotes their economic well-being. The more dependent the people become on government, the more willing they are to sacrifice their rights to its political designs. (Kessler 2000:XXXII)

Tocqueville theoretically distinguished between two categories of centralization. 'Governmental centralization' is the indispensable and necessary aggregation of the state's authority; the affairs that are "common to all parts of the nation." (DA I, 1.5 p. 82) This includes foreign relations and legislation on a national level.⁴¹ However, what is unnecessarily subject to central governance, are politics that are distinctly local, as "the undertakings of the township." (ibid.) Conversely, 'administrative centralization' was a phenomenon that worried Tocqueville, since in combination with governmental centralization it could render the citizenry inert in political practice, compliant in thought and conform in manner.

It is understood that governmental centralization acquires an immense force when it is joined to administrative centralization. In this manner it habituates men to make a complete and continual abstraction from their wills; to obey not once and on one point, but in every thing and every day. It then not only subdues them by force, but it also captures them through their habits; it isolates them and afterwards fastens them one by one onto the common mass [...] I think that administrative centralization is fit only to enervate the peoples who submit to it, because it constantly tends to diminish the spirit of the city in them. Administrative centralization, it is true, succeeds in uniting at a given period and in a certain place all the disposable strength of the nation, but it is harmful to the reproduction of strength [...] and it diminishes the power in the long term. (DA I, 82-83).

Furthermore, given the attraction that the principle of equality exerts in the democratic social state, egalitarian inclinations among the democratic citizenry supports and promotes centralization as a means to achieve equality, while centralization as an organizational principle itself encourages equality.

I am convinced [...] that no nations are more at risk of falling under the yoke of administrative centralization than those whose social state is democratic [...] The permanent tendency of these nations is to concentrate all governmental power that directly represents the people, because beyond the people one perceives no more than equal individuals confused in common mass (DA I, 1.5 p. 91-92)

⁴¹ "To concentrate the power to direct the first [foreign policy, legislation] in the same place or in the same hand is to found what I shall call governmental centralization." (DA I, 1.5 p. 82)

Theorists of civil society are inclined to hold the centralized state responsible for the deflation of free associations and the declining interest of participation. Nevertheless, this is a diagnosis that merely treats the symptoms, not the cause. Tocqueville's cause of distress was not located in the state itself; the democratic state's source of power was society, and if the citizenry desired protection from the state – in the form of security and welfare – then it was the psychological and ideological underpinnings of these desires that needed attention. What the citizenry could not, or overlooked to foresee, was that a society where the principle of administrative centralization was the foremost standard of political organization, security and welfare could only be achieved at a price; the gradual and almost unnoticeable evaporation of freedom.⁴² Not that freedom is in any way forcefully and brutally *deprived* from the citizenry, it just little by little becomes *unnecessary* to fight for, to practice, and to think of. Tocqueville was alarmed by the growth of centralized administration in his own time;

[e]verywhere it penetrates further into private affairs than formerly; in its manner it regulates more actions, and smaller actions, and it establishes itself more every day beside, around, and above each individual to assist him, counsel him, and constrain him. (DA II, 4.5 p. 653)

Tocqueville's emphasis on local government and decentralization is evident in this setting. However, it is imperative (once again) to remind ourselves that the practice of political freedom Tocqueville promoted does not necessarily accommodate with the conventional understanding of 'participation' in contemporary social science. If the tendency is a process where participation is a part of a noticeably centralized and uniform course, where administrative efficiency, decision-making and planning are recognizable and dominant features, it diverts from Tocqueville's understanding of participation. As Michael Hereth describes in his understanding of Tocquevillian participation and political freedom, local democracy must be genuinely *political* in its nature:

Local self-government by citizens in a free community ensures the freedom of citizens to act in common with other citizens, to confer publicly with each other on their own affairs and to settle them. Its aim is to shape local living conditions and not just to fill areas that the central authorities have

⁴² Of course, there is wide acceptance of the fact, even among libertarians, that the state should provide some degree of security, internally through a police force and a penitentiary system, and externally through military defence. It is beyond this minimum that we can recognize ideological divergence as to which role the state should have regarding security and welfare.

left vacant and that the latter steadily restrict by public subsidies and by technical and legal supervision of communal administration, their instruments of manipulation (Hereth 1986:40)

In order for democratic man to develop a consciousness of, at least a sense of responsibility to partake in the local political surroundings, and at best an awareness of the necessity of virtue, then local democracy cannot represent a prolongation of a centralized vision of uniformity and sameness. This reveals the weakness of theoretical models of 'participation' and 'implementation' of democratic structure; if the premises of participation constitute involvement in an organizational structure which is set up to implement political and administrative goals previously undertaken centrally, then it is difficult to see how citizens can develop a sense of political attentiveness beyond "interest politics". Thus, the hypothesis on the rational actor becomes empirically tautological; when selfishness is presupposed, as by Hobbes, and when the social sciences which are responsible for working out structural models of participation assumes that man ultimately is driven by rational and calculating self-interest, then political mentality becomes one of material interest ('Left' and 'Right' alike) and a focus on distribution of the material. Allan Bloom compares ancient and modern concepts of virtue and notions of what facilitates the motives of man;

All interesting generalization must proceed from the richest awareness of what is to be explained, but the tendency to abstractness leads to simplifying the phenomena in order more easily to deal with them. If, for example, one sees only gain as a motive in men's actions, then it is easy to explain them. To the extent that men begin to believe in the theory, they no longer believe there are other motives in themselves. And when social policy is based on such a theory, finally one succeeds in producing men who fit the theory [...] Hobbes's mercenary account of the virtue, which won out in psychology, needs to be contrasted with Aristotle's account, which preserves the independent nobility of the virtue. Curiously, in a democracy, the freest of societies, men turn out to be more willing to accept doctrines that tell them that they are determined, that is, not free. No one by himself seems able to be, or have the right to control events, which appear to be moved by impersonal forces. (Bloom 1988:255)

2.8.1 Centralization: Why Does the Democratic State Become so Powerful?

Hence democratic individuals are at once pulled away from independent self-governing activities and pushed towards the acceptance of state regulation, even where formal civil and political rights exist. (Welch 2001:78).

The promise of freedom, sanctified as the keystone of liberal democratic society, and which was a prerequisite for the individuals ability to arrange a cohesive society of rights and responsibility, has transformed itself into an atomistic society of competitors and special interest

groups with claims to justice and rights in all segments of society. The apparatus for producing these good deeds – which are generally measurable financially – required a strong centralized state that could reproduce economic security on the political level. Reasonably, this state requires a multitude of public servants to execute the accumulating number of public responsibilities:

In democratic peoples as in all others, the number of public posts in the end has bounds; but in the same peoples the number of the ambitious has none; it increases constantly by a gradual and irresistible movement as conditions are equalized; it is bounded only when men are lacking. (DA II, 3.20 p. 605)

The centralized state in democracies will naturally become an arena where special interests groups seek out entitlements and support from the democratically elected representatives. The central issue in democratic conflict is 'who gets what', and this process is not regarded as illicit, since the government is professed as the extension of public will.

Men who live in centuries of equality naturally love the central power and willingly extend its privileges; but if it happens that this same power faithfully represents their interests and exactly reproduces their instincts, the confidence they bring to it has almost no bounds, and they believe that all that they give they accord to themselves. (DA II, 4.4 p. 649)

Tocqueville portrays a democratic future where increasing materialism and centralization correspond with decreasing political interest and attentiveness:

On the one hand, the taste for material well-being constantly increases, and on the other hand, the government takes hold more and more of all the sources of well-being. Men therefore come by two diverse paths of servitude. The taste for well-being turns them away from being involved in government, and the love of well-being puts them in an ever stricter dependence on those who govern. (DA II, 4.4 p. 654)

The government of liberty proved itself too feeble and without sufficient appeal to breed and maintain a political culture, an arrangement of mores for a society of citizens, or a vibrant public space for debate of 'ideas' or 'men' rather than economic interest. What concerned Tocqueville was not primarily that the central power easily becomes a commanding and penetrating force in its influence upon civil society, but that it transforms and alters active pattern of social interface, thus exhausting the citizenry of its capacity and will for self-government. While Tocqueville's description of democracy gone awry in the first volume of the *Democracy* was painted by a state where the immense pressure for conformity of opinion by the majority, the second volume

outlines an even darker vision of democracy's potentially devastating effects upon diversity and the subjugation of free will; democratic despotism.

2.9 Tyranny of the Majority and Democratic Despotism

Under the absolute government of one alone, despotism struck the body crudely, so as to reach the soul; and the soul, escaping from those blows, rose gloriously above it, but in democratic republics, tyranny does not proceed in this way; it leaves the body and goes straight for the soul.
(DA I, 2.7 p. 244)

The government of man will be replaced by the administration of things.
– Henri de Saint-Simon

The distinction between the state and society can be said to have become distorted under the modern, democratic state. The sovereign king or aristocracy has ceased to symbolize the incarnate symbols of authority; now it has become anonymous, yet nonetheless commanding. "Its form is cultural, its agent the unconscious majority, its expressions intangible rather than material, its power more the conditioning result from simultaneity of belief rather than self-conscious concerted action." (Wolin 2001:199) The private sphere that once constituted society, family, church, and work is at present, if not subjugated, profoundly influenced by governmental institutions and regulations. Democratic society is a *mélange* of political societies, where governmental and administrative decisions are all-encompassing in their consequences.

As previously mentioned, tyranny of the majority was a predominant concern in the first volume of *Democracy*. In democratic nations, where all are formally and ideologically equal, and all may participate in public offices, the central power is perceived as a legitimate extension of the public will (expressed through the electoral process directly, and through polls indirectly). Tocqueville was not the first to recognize the phenomenon of tyranny of the majority. Aristotle observed it in ancient democracy, and his perception of democracy equates rule of the many, for their own advantage, with tyranny. However, Tocqueville did not equate tyranny with arbitrariness; he limited tyranny to the exercise of power not "in the interest of the governed". At the same time, he finds the seed of tyranny in "the right and the ability to do everything", presumably even in the alleged best interest of the governed.

2.9.1 The Concepts of 'Tyranny of the Majority' and 'Democratic Despotism'

The essence of despotism turns out to be the evils of banality rather than Hannah Arendt's 'the banality of evil'. (Wolin 2001:342)

As for me, when I feel the hand of power weighing on my brow, it matters little to me who oppresses me, and I am no more disposed to put my head in the yoke because a million arms present it to me. (DA II, 1.2 p. 410)

Considering the conventional understanding and usage of the terms 'tyranny' and 'despotism,' their employment in the contemporary theoretical debate on democracy seem somewhat surreal and instinctively contradictory. Tocqueville himself struggled to furnish an adequate linguistic description of the phenomenon:

I think therefore that the kind of oppression with which democratic peoples are threatened will resemble nothing that has preceded it in the world; our contemporaries would not find its image in their memories. I myself seek in vain an expression that exactly reproduces the idea that I form of it for myself and that contains it; the old words despotism and tyranny are not suitable. (DA II, 4.6 p. 662)

Tocqueville's description of "mild despotism" in democracies is incontestably divergent in its inoffensiveness and mildness from a merciless and totalitarian regime. However, while the schoolmaster state that he describes does not tyrannize the people physically, its influence is nonetheless forceful and in attendance.

Now, the usage of tyranny and despotism has been common political terms since classical Greece. Aristotle's description portrays passionate political activity by the Many - usually poor - in dissent against the unjust actions by the aristocrats or wealthy oligarchs, and hence the result of awakened political awareness.⁴³ The modern despotism Tocqueville undertook to define was in many respects the reverse: the citizenry losing its ardour for political liberty and civic responsibility, resulting into a recessive mental state of indifference and disenchantment. (Wolin 2001:345) Accordingly, where tyranny and despotism in the ancient and Middle Ages was recognizable by activity and disorder, its modern version is distinguishable by inactivity and order.

In his time, Tocqueville was not the first to recognize the phenomenon of tyranny of the majority, but his reflections upon the matter adds a new perspective of it and his premises

⁴³ "Thus suppose the poor use their numerical superiority to make a distribution of the property of the rich: is not that unjust? 'No, by Zeus' it may be said, 'it has been done justly by a decision of the sovereign power'" (*Politics*, 1281a 15-19)

diverges from the main current of philosophical and political thought. *The Federalist* describes majority tyranny as “a faction [...] who are united and actuated by some common *impulse or passion*, or of *interest*, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggravate interest of the community.” (*The Federalist*, No. 10, p.123) What Tocqueville focuses upon is not a *specific* faction as such, but more the *mindset* of the majority, i.e., the normative fundament in a democratic society that incorporates norms, mores, the commonly accepted ‘conduct of thought’ as well as deliberation upon the democratic regime.⁴⁴ In a democratic society the principle or doctrine behind this normative underpinning, which justifies its capability to execute its influence, is of course the sovereignty of the people. His fear was that this would signify a mentality of inertia and conformity where the citizens preferred political seclusion to political participation and public concerns, corresponding with the centralizing tendencies of state authority.

To discriminate democratic despotism from former historical classifications, he compared it with “the time of the greatest power of the Caesars”:

[t]heir tyranny weighted enormously in some, but it did not extend to the many; it applied itself to a few great principal objects and neglected the rest; it was violent and restricted. It seems that if despotism came to be established in the democratic nations of our day, it would have other characteristics: it would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without tormenting them. (DA II, 4.6, p. 662)

A comprehension of democratic despotism requires us to alter our image of what democratic despotism consists of; there is no *despot* in despotism, no *tyrant* who tyrannizes, it is faceless and nameless and cannot be located in the state directly. To discover it, we must turn our centre of attention towards society: the despotism Tocqueville struggled to describe was a condition that was a result *of* democracy gone awry and subsequently the people itself. “Democracy originates a new form of despotism, society tyrannizing over itself.” (Zetterbaum 1987:770) It cannot be described in sheer institutional terms; its instruments are the omnipresent bureaucracy and the mediocre politician, which are set to administer an atomized society composed of content and inactive individuals who are ‘unburdened’ with the troubles of active political responsibility. However, these are merely indicators, not the cause. Rather, what

⁴⁴ By ‘deliberation’ it means critique or questioning of the fundamental normative premises of democracy, such as its notions of justice (the principle of equality) or tolerance (respect for minorities).

is essential to understand its being and condition, is the effective evaporation of the culture of participation and intellectual attentiveness on freedom, and its substitution by “the culture of privatism, isolation, and what Tocqueville could not have foreseen, consumerism.” (Wolin 2001:570) Thus, the preconditions of democratic despotism are not solely dependent upon the affirmative contributions that are empirically recognizable, but also a metaphysical element of *loss* – a condition where the citizens are deficient of *meaningful* identification with the political.

Sheldon S. Wolin has described the sensation of democratic despotism in a perceptive Tocquevillian manner:

But what if, instead of being enslaved, men were formally free; instead of economic misery and bleakness there was a vibrant economic life; instead of a single person indulging in his pleasures, all enjoyed the prospect of endless gratifications? What if, instead of cruelty, there was benevolence; instead of fear and uncertainty, there was security; and instead of personal caprice, there was order and predictability? How, amid such contradictory evidence, was it possible to declare despotism? Where was the despot, where the un-freedom and the invasion of private sanctities? Where was the oppression, if tyranny, instead of appearing as the opposite of the normal, appeared to be its embodiment – the tyranny of norm-all? (Wolin 2001:340)

It is a state of intellectual conventionality, but not perceived as such by the people – on the contrary – individualism is considered as the prominent characteristic that expresses diversity and freedom. Furthermore, the ‘Right’, the political phenomenon that has been accredited as upholding personal freedom and the right to ‘choose’, has ideologically adopted individualism as a positive force. However, this realm of choice is generally condensed to freedom of choice in the economic sphere, as an essential criterion for the free market and prosperity. Conversely, the ‘Left’ scorns individualism (perceived analogous to ‘egoism’), since it contradicts a vision of collectivism and egalitarianism. On both accounts, the understanding of individualism is commonly based on material terms, since both liberalism and socialism as ideologies has gradually lost their belief in *ideas*, and their relationship increasingly has become that of opponents in the field of economic distribution.

Democracy’s authority is not vindictive or brutal, but sedative and peaceful. What characterizes it is not austerity, but mildness. Its resemblance is closer to the lavishness and prodigality of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* than the bleakness and drabness of George Orwell’s *1984*. Freedom comes to represent freedom from the burden of political responsibilities and duties, a state of tranquillity and order where the citizens are encouraged to public compliance and the pursuit of private and risk-free pleasures in which they can indulge. “Its evil

does not lie in the ethical or aesthetic shortcoming of ordinariness but in a mentality that individualism breeds and allows despotism to take hold insensibly, almost effortlessly." (Wolin 2001:342)

Of the dangers democracy that embodies, is that good faith of its citizenry towards the democratic regime – which, according to its principles is an expression of public will – can be deluded and exploited by political actors; political populism is particularly dangerous in democracies because of the appealing promise of expanding popular rule. Individuals with little time – or interest – to reflect upon the consequences of increasing power of the majority's will have difficulties in assuring its wisdom or justice. What he feared from this was that the will of the majority comes to exercise a kind of "moral empire", previously unknown. (DA I 2.7) A strong advocate of intellectual freedom of the mind, Tocqueville dreaded democracy's potential self-censure, where unpopular truths and criticism will no longer be spoken, especially those that criticise the habits, opinion and tastes of the majority and the 'people.'

No writer, whatever his renown may be, can escape the obligation of singing the praises of his fellow citizens. The majority, therefore, lives in perpetual adoration of itself. (DA I, 2.7 p. 245)

The more conditions become equal, and the less men are individually strong, the more they easily let themselves go with the current of the crowd and have trouble holding alone an opinion that is has abandoned. (DA II, 2.6 p. 495)

The concepts of democracy and centralization do not – rationally or ideologically – form a natural symbiosis; hierarchy, an austere and rigid structure, symbolizes the centralized state, which diametrically combats the logic of pluralistic and liberal democracy. The connecting attribute Tocqueville discovered between these two concepts was uniformity; equality of conditions as a normative imperative facilitates the state to administrate more resourcefully than would be the case if it were obliged to relate to genuine dissimilarities on the societal level, such as aristocracy, class, religious factions or tribalism.

[t]he vices to which despotism gives birth are precisely those that equality favours. These two things complement and aid each other in a fatal manner. Equality places men beside one another without a common bond to hold them. Despotism raises barriers between them and separates them.

Equality disposes them not to think of those like themselves, and for them, despotism makes a sort of public virtue of indifference.

Despotism, which is dangerous at all times, is therefore particularly to be feared in democratic centuries. (DA II, 2.4 p. 485-86)

There is no malignant and observable, concrete force which we can identify behind democratic despotism, rather the opposite; what separates it from all other forms of tyranny, is its abstractness and “apparent rationality and good intentions”. (Mansfield & Winthrop 1999:5) What defines the size of the government, is not the liberal notion of a government restricted by limited ends, but the universal promise of *equal* right to ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all,’ which is logically limitless. If ‘happiness’ is materially defined in terms of a certain level of equal material well-being – politically defined or commonly supposed – it requires a powerful, resourceful and immense government.

It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its subject to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood; it likes citizens to enjoy themselves provided that they think only of enjoying themselves. It willingly works for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent and sole arbiter of that; it provides them for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living? ⁴⁵ (DA II, 4.6 p. 663)

2.9.2 The Abdication of Political Freedom

Love of public tranquillity is often the sole political passion that these people preserve, and it becomes more active and powerful in them as all the others are weakened and die: this naturally disposes citizens to give the central power new rights, or allow it to take them; it alone seems to them to have the interest and the means to defend them from anarchy by defending itself. (DA II, 4.3 p. 644)

Tocqueville predicted an entirely new genus of servitude, a society where citizens *freely* submitted their sovereignty to a common representative of their voluntary will, and this differs fundamentally from the well-known discussion of the relationship between individual and state.⁴³ The centralized state is not analyzed as a contrasting theoretical subject that opposes the freedom of the individual, but as its voluntary extension representing and protecting its interests, which Tocqueville identifies as the pursuit of material well-being and the guardianship of egalitarian justice. Alas, the Hobbesian state becomes self-fulfilling; as mentioned; democratic

⁴⁵ Tocqueville's conception of a paternalistic government resembles Kant's description: “Under such a *paternal government* (*imperium paternale*), the subjects, as immature children who cannot distinguish what is truly useful or harmful to themselves, would be obliged to behave purely passively and to rely upon the judgement of the head of the state as to how they *ought* to be happy, and upon his kindness in willing their happiness at all. Such a government is the greatest conceivable *despotism*,” (Kant: “Theory and Practice: On the Relationship of Theory and Practice” in *Political Thought*. 1991:74)

⁴³ The transaction of freedom for security and welfare is generally not perceived as a dilemma, since – given the principle of sovereignty of the people – this transaction is deemed as voluntary. “Nowhere has the law left a greater part to arbitrariness than in democratic republics, because in them, what is arbitrary does not appear fearful.” (DA I, 2.5 p. 197)

man covets tranquillity and security provided by a benign Leviathan in order to enjoy a sheltered existence of material well-being and welfare. Political freedom has become a catchphrase, a democratic maxim whose original connotation as a valuable idea of individual consciousness and self-government that gradually has been hollowed out. What matters now, is *personal* freedom, the right to choose a 'lifestyle.' Unlike Hobbes' rational and conscious transaction of freedom to the Leviathan for security, there are no attentive and recognizable actors that represent the state and the citizen in the current transaction. The democratic state is not, as described by the libertarians, a foe that cynically and rationally aims at depriving the people of their constitutional rights. The political rights of speech, organization and religion are accessible to all democratic citizens in the West, but what Tocqueville warns us is that these rights and freedoms needs attentiveness and consciousness from its citizens. It is the political priorities and ambitions of democratic man that decides whether rights are perceived as instruments for achieving entitlements and accomplishment of personal interests founded in materialistic desires, or as means to develop into an independent and freethinking political being. If democratic man chooses the former, the democratic future is dispiriting according to Tocqueville:

Men who have a passion for material enjoyments ordinarily find out how the agitations of freedom trouble their well-being before perceiving how freedom serves to procure it for them, and the least noise from public passions that penetrate into the midst of the little enjoyments of their private lives, they wake up and become restive; for a long time, fear of anarchy holds them constantly in suspense and always ready to throw out their freedom at the first disorder.

I shall acknowledge that public peace is a great good; but I nevertheless do not want to forget that it is through good order that all people have arrived at tyranny [...] A nation that demands of its government only the maintenance of order is already a slave at the bottom of its heart; it is a slave to its well-being, and the man who is to put it in chains can appear. (DA II, 2.14 p. 516)

Democratic despotism is perhaps the gravest and most pessimistic of Tocqueville's fears of democracy's latent perils. "His concern is not so much about the despotism hostile to liberalism as about *democratic* despotism." (Mansfield & Winthrop 2000:35) The schoolmaster state he describes is overwhelming, and democratic citizens are likely to feel incapable on their own and therefore seek the protection of – while becoming its dependents – a state that gradually suffocates them with its mildness and a plethora of minute, detailed regulations, rather than oppressiveness and brutality. It will care for its citizens, always alert and attentive to satisfy their unsatisfiable and perpetually emerging material desires. However, by relieving individuals of the

necessity of thinking and acting on their own, it gradually “rob’s each of them of several of the principal attributes of humanity” and finally “reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.” (DA II, 4.7 p. 663)

Underlying the train-of-thought in Tocqueville’s arguments is the fear that the passion for equality becomes particularly dominant, and that the exercise of intellectual freedom becomes dormant and redundant. Where the first volume of *Democracy* was concerned that the conformity of opinion held by the majorities would suffocate individual independence and intellectual diversity, the second volume paints a bleak, numb society of subservient sameness where the equal but an atomized and compliant citizenry is guided and nurtured by an apparently benevolent central state, and the pursuit of material well-being is the norm-for-all. The prerequisite for this potential despotism is the “new links between a society of equals and the forces of political centralization.” (Welch 2001:72)

From the premise of representing a majority of sovereign individuals, it follows logically that a democratically elected government can declare itself the broadcaster of the majority’s will and the protector of its interest. The perception of the state apparatus as the natural representative of the people and that its inclination to formulate uniform laws and regulations are recognized as just and necessary to attain democratic justice, is truly unique in world history. This partially explains the stability and high level of ideological loyalty (towards the concept of democracy) in Western democracies; the government is the representative of the people, and although there is disagreement upon political issues, there is wide acceptance of democratic decisions.⁴⁶ Bluntly expressed, this can be explained by allegiance to the democratic process and majority verdicts. However, when the people are merely content and comfortable with the polity that operates as a habitual and somewhat mechanical process, requiring only their consent by routinely elections, the separation of the private man from the political man becomes disconcertingly *uncomfortable*.

The principal causes of this intellectually desolate and sedated society Tocqueville portrays can be located in the notions of individualism, materialism and excessive egalitarianism; a democratic society that has become disillusioned and disengaged by political life, where the citizenry’s principal focus is on security and material well-being. In this condition, the centralized

⁴⁶ “[a]s long as the majority is doubtful, one speaks; but when it has irrevocably pronounced, everyone becomes silent and friends and enemies alike then seem to hitch themselves together to its wagon.” (DA I, 2.7 p. 243)

state provides order and welfare; order by securing the bourgeoisie's necessity for stability in the creation of welfare and material progress, welfare by yielding the same class its desire for material security. The immediate effects of a strong centralized state are widespread and popular, but the hazard is that political dialect quickly becomes dominated by general truths of unity and consistency, and that this vernacular "comes naturally to efficient centralizers and administrative rationalizers." (Welch 2001:78) The sources of the expanding centralized democratic state are located in internal and external causes. Internally, centralization is stimulated by the natural aspiration "of all governments to wish to enlarge its sphere continuously." (DA II, 4.3 p. 644) Externally, the causes are more complex and intertwined; the democratic principle of equality facilitates uniformity, which eludes the government of "the examination of an infinity of details which it would have to occupy itself if it were necessary to make a rule for men, instead of making all men pass indiscriminately under the same rule." (DA II, 4.3 p. 645) The principle of 'one-man-one-vote' renders that the government represents the majority, and can therefore be perceived as the legitimate arbitrator of the general will. Another reason is that the central government facilitates security and welfare; security in the sense that it is "the sole power that appears to them in itself strong enough, intelligent enough, stable enough to protect them against anarchy [...] this general instinct [...] bring[s] particular persons, more and more, to sacrifice their rights to their tranquillity." (DA II, 4.4 p. 649) Ideologically, the *raison d'être* of the Welfare State is not only located in the material desire of the people, but also in a notion of the individual as somewhat vulnerable and in need of assistance to manage the unjust hardships of modern society;

As conditions are equalized in a people, individuals appear smaller and society seems greater; or rather, each citizen, having become like all others, is lost in the crowd, and no longer perceives (anything) but the vast and magnificent image of the people itself.

This naturally gives men in democratic times a very high opinion of the privileges of society and a very humble idea of the rights of the individual. They readily accept that the interest of the former is everything and that of the latter, nothing. They willingly enough grant that the power representing society possesses much more enlightenment and wisdom than any of the men who compose it, and that its duty as well as its right is to take each citizen by the hand and lead him. (DA II, 4.2 p. 641)

What I believe to be the focal point of concern for Tocqueville, is not principally the institutional and structural effects of democratic despotism, but the loss of intellectual freedom, which is the prerequisite for the exercise of virtue.

One forgets that it is above all in details that it is dangerous to enslave men [...] Subjection in small affairs manifests itself every day and makes itself felt without distinction by all citizens. It does not make them desperate; but it constantly thwarts them and brings them to renounce their wills. Thus little by little, it extinguishes their spirits and enervates their souls, whereas obedience, which is due only in a few very grave but very rare circumstances, shows servitude only now and then and makes it weigh only on certain men. In vain will you charge these same citizens, whom you have rendered so dependent on the central power, with choosing the representatives of this power from time to time; that use of their free will, so important but so brief and rare, will not prevent them from losing little by little the faculty of thinking, feeling, and acting by themselves, and this form gradually falling below the level of humanity. (DA II, 4.6 p. 665)

Tocqueville's rhetoric is severe and piercing, and although the critique of the administratively centralized state resembles criticism of the pessimistic traditionalist type, its object is to warn against the potential advance of conform individualism and materialism in democracies where "the taste for material enjoyments develops in one of these peoples more rapidly than enlightenment and the habits of freedom". (DA II, 2.14 p. 515) "The description and criticism are designed to sharpen and win over the mind of the reader to the alternative of the democratic republic." (Hereth 1986:69) Democratic despotism is not the product of any specific political configuration; its causes are located in the reigning democratic mores, and are not dependent upon any outline of majority in power. I believe that Tocqueville's narrative of the 'tyranny of the majority' and even more of 'democratic despotism' revitalizes the discussion of the good man and the good citizen as discussed by Aristotle. What Aristotle argued, was that these two concepts are not analogous, since being a good citizen only necessitates obedience to the rule of beliefs that are dominant in the given political regime. This incorporates an instrumental notion of disregard to whether the regime is 'good' or 'bad', since the degree of acting in accordance with the rules of the regime logically defines whether the citizen is functionally 'good' or 'bad.'⁴⁷ Opposite to the notion of the 'good citizen' is the idea of the 'good man.' The prospect of becoming a 'good man' calls for a free society and intellectual climate that facilitates and encourages the realization of man's latent virtuous and moral potentials.⁴⁸ According to Aristotle,

⁴⁷ For example, if there is a widespread consensus of paying a high rate of one's income in taxes, doing so will be 'good', or if there is a prevalent accordance of a five-year compulsory military service, serving it is 'good.' These are banal examples, but what is attempted to demonstrate, is that the normative aspect of the 'good citizen' is defined by the common principles of the political regime, while the 'good man' is defined by his capacity for virtue.

⁴⁸ Of course, a good man can develop under an authoritarian regime, but this would in a Tocquevillian perspective be contradictory to the natural tendency of that political regime.

[t]he virtue of the citizen must be in relation to the constitution; and as there are more kinds of constitution than one, there cannot be just one single and perfect virtue of the sound citizen. On the other hand we do say that the good *man* is good because of one single virtue which is perfect virtue. Clearly then it is possible to be a sound citizen without having that virtue which makes a sound man. (*The Politics* 1276b 31-38)

Aristotle, then, considered that the *type* of citizen was largely dependent upon the *politeia* – the whole order of social and political relationships in a polis – in which the citizenship is held. ‘Constitution’ is perhaps an insufficient translation of *politeia*, since *politeia* encompasses the entire social, political and economic organization of the state, as well as *arête* – virtue. A citizen can be ‘good’ by performing the anticipated functions of citizenship, a man can be ‘good’ only when he is ruling himself, that is, when he is using and developing his noble and intellectual faculties. Given the opportunity to use them, there is a moral imperative to do so.

Chapter Three

Democratic Man and Democratic Mentality

Initially, this thesis claimed that Tocqueville's understanding of democracy has explanatory relevance, and that modern democratic society of the liberal form struggles with difficulties as examined and elaborated by Tocqueville. First, I think what needs to be addressed is what do we *expect* of a democratic political order?

There seems to be a sense of disillusionment and increasing indifference towards the *politeia* among the citizenry in Western democracies, and the ambition of this chapter is to elucidate upon some of the problems I find central in the contemporary democracies by using a Tocquevillian perspective. As a preliminary observation, I believe that the cause of this apolitization is not primarily to be located within the political, but rather that the political reflects developments in Western society that can be traced internally in conflicting ideas of what democracy *is* and *should* be, and externally in the cultural and historical evolution of the West. The categorization of these causes is somewhat artificial, as ideas are constituted and developed within a historical reality, but what is emphasized here is nevertheless the importance of ideas and their impact on both the political and society. Ideas form the foundation of a society's outlook on justice, meaning, political organization, the rights of the individual, and so forth. Ideas of justice that we recognize as natural and self-evident are not necessarily universal and eternal. Ideas are shaped and fought for *within* the framework of a specific historical and cultural evolution, an explicit philosophical tradition, and the interpretation of ideas in hindsight as normatively obvious truths does not inevitably make them so. An example of this is the claim that the liberty, value and rights of any given individual are *self-evident* and universal. If this were the case, one would think that this would be a natural feature of all human societies.

The universality of the rights of man is originally not a political idea, but a philosophical and moral one, and it can be exemplified by Kant's moral philosophy, who rationalized morality – proclaiming that every individual is capable of understanding morality, with the aid of knowledge – and that this universal morality is logically independent of circumstances and conditions (i.e. culture and history). (MacIntyre 1985:44-45)

These ideas are, historically, comparatively recent in their origin and dramatic in their consequences. However, this does not imply that democratic ideas are 'relative' or unsustainable. I believe that the rights of man are defensible from a normative standpoint. On the other hand, this does not necessarily indicate that they are universally applicable through institutional implementation. Culture is given significant explanatory weight in this chapter regarding the metaphysical outlook of the West, and democracy will be understood as a specific philosophical and historical artefact of Western culture. The *traditional* and *common* social organization of other cultures and civilizations is more often than not authoritarian and hierarchic, and what needs elucidation is not so much why other societies are not yet democracies, but why the West is democratic.

To describe democracy as a clear-cut and easily defined phenomenon would be overly simplifying; there are different and opposing interpretations of democracy and its meaning. In the West, the normative conflict-lines within democracy are not reducible to opposing party lines; there is a continual struggle to define the West's culture and identity. This struggle is largely a struggle of ideas and definition: what is justice, what is the cause of democracy's problems, what rights should the individual hold and why, what are the responsibilities of the state? To address this aspect one must turn to what constitutes the democratic idea and the normative basis of it. I argue that in order to understand Western democracy, Western culture provides essential insight.

3.1 Culture Matters

3.1.1 What is Culture?

Culture is the unity of man's brutish nature and all the arts and sciences he acquired in his movement from the state of nature to civil society. (Bloom1988:181)

This thesis claims that Western democracy and its values and norms are closely linked to its cultural and philosophical past. First, I will discuss what culture is, secondly, I will attempt to shed light on what I perceive as an internal struggle in the West as to what part political culture, or mores – and thereby democracy – normatively should symbolize and represent.

Culture is not an autonomous, independent variable; geographical circumstances and climate exerts influence. Political change through institutions can also influence a nation's culture. Moreover, culture is a sensitive and difficult object to deal with in the social sciences; not solely because of the methodological difficulties in defining and measuring it, and "cause-and-effect relationships between culture and other variables like policies, institutions, and economic development run in both directions." (Huntington 2000:XXXII) Most importantly, culture is the frame of a nation's values and outlook, and incorporating culture as a normative explanatory variable in this sense can activate allegations of prejudice and intolerance of other cultures. According to David Landes, culture

[f]rightens scholars. It has a sulphuric odor of race and inheritance, an air of immutability. In thoughtful moments, economists and other social scientists recognize that this is not true, and indeed they salute examples of cultural change for the better while deploring changes for the worse. (Landes 2000:2)

By emphasising culture as an underlying variable in a consideration of Western Democracy, i.e. that there are certain specific traits in the historical and philosophical development in the West that are not only particularly favourable towards the democratic regime, but also that democracy in its Western form is very much a product of its culture, implicitly addresses the validity of democracy's universal claims. This is not to say that there is an unbridgeable divide between the West and 'the Rest', but that every civilization and culture embodies certain values and a normative outlook that transcend specific notions of justice, social organization, the idea of the individual and the rights of man. What I argue to be a Tocquevillian perspective is that in order for democracy to have any realistic ability of functioning in a given nation, there must be sufficient correspondence between this nation's culture and the values and philosophical and anthropological view of the individual that democracy encompasses. Tocqueville had clear notions of different cultural traits between Western culture and other cultures, but he also made distinctions as to the shape democracy could take within the West;

Among people who have lived free for a long time before becoming equal, the instincts given by freedom combat up to a certain point the penchants that equality suggests; and although the central power increases its privileges among them, particular persons never entirely lose their independence. But when equality develops in a people that has never known freedom or that has not known it for a long time, as is seen on the continent of Europe, the old habits of the nation come to be combined suddenly and by a sort of natural attraction with the new habits and doctrines to which the social state has given birth, and all powers seem of themselves to rush toward the center; there they accumulate

with surprising rapidity; and all at once the state attains the extreme limits of its force while particular persons let themselves sink in one moment to the last degree of weakness. (DA II, 4.4 p. 646)

As previously mentioned, Tocqueville's primary methodological tool was the social state, and particularly how mores and ideas influenced the political and social structure of a nation. Therefore, in order for democracy to wield a positive effect on the political and the social, there must be a culture that supports the proper implementation of a democratic constitution. An example of this is Tocqueville's comparison between the United States and Mexico;

The Constitution of the United States resembles those beautiful creations of human industry that lavish glory and goods on those who invent them, but that remain sterile in other hands. This is what Mexico has made visible in our day.

The inhabitants of Mexico, wishing to establish a federal system, took as a model and copied almost entirely the federal constitution of the Anglo-Americans, their neighbours. But in transporting the letter of the law to themselves, they could not at the same time transport the spirit that enlivened it. (DA I, 1.8 p. 156)

Nor do physical causes determine the political culture of a nation. It is true, says Tocqueville of the success of American democracy, that they did not have any enemies, blessed with an abundance of natural recourses, and were "alone in the midst of wilderness like an island in the ocean." (DA I, 2.9 p. 292) However, this was also true of the "Spanish of South America" and he somewhat pessimistically describes the situation there as "no nations on earth [are] more miserable than those of South America." (ibid.) Tocqueville concludes that

[p]hysical causes therefore do not influence the destiny of nations as much as one supposes [...] The laws and mores of the Anglo-Americans therefore form the special reason for their greatness and the predominant cause that I seek [...] I am convinced that the happiest situation and the best laws cannot maintain a constitution despite mores, whereas the latter turn even the most unfavourable positions and the worst laws to good account. The importance mores is a common truth to which study and experience constantly lead back. It seems to me that I have placed in my mind a central point; I perceive it at the *end of all my ideas*. (DA I, 2.9 p. 292-95. Italics added)

Within the West, there are conflicting views on how democracy should be defined both internally and externally.⁴⁹ The very term 'democracy' is employed extensively and habitually in a political setting that often aims to justify the intentions of the actor using it. 'Democracy' has a

⁴⁹ By this I mean that there is a twofold conflict; internally, within the West, the debate is primarily concerned on specific and tangible issues; 'just' economic distribution through the state and society, public participation, voter confidence, the rights of the individual versus the rights of the state and so on. Externally, the conflict is centred upon whether democracy is universally applicable both as a political regime institutionally and morally, or if it is a specific expression of Western culture and history. Internally, the conflict lines are traditionally divided between the 'Left' and 'Right', while externally the conflict lines does not adhere to these characteristics, though proponents of universal democracy differs on *how* the world is to be made 'safe' for democracy.

sacrosanct aura of unquestionable justice; promoting it can, bluntly speaking, only be for the best. I believe that those who use 'democracy' indiscriminately as a normative good that should in its own right be implemented in all societies – 'making the world safe for democracy' – not regarding the current political culture, does so because democracy is regarded as universal and is based on a rational morality that is objectively unbiased.⁵⁰

The debate concerning the democratic moral principles of rights and justice evokes strong emotions and passionate arguments from its participants. It would be overly simplifying to present the varied notions in this debate as a divide between those that supports morality and virtue in the political and civic sphere, recognizable by a morally rich and meaningful philosophy, versus proponents of a utilitarian, rational actor or those who support a humanistic view where the subjective well-being of the individual is the ultimate standard. The conflict between adversaries of moral authority in the democratic debate is not a disagreement between a side that earnestly promotes 'truth' versus another that cynically or unknowingly practises a twisted or diluted version of that truth. The conflict is between groups that carry deep-seated and diametrically opposed views of the world. (Hunter 1991:63) The sincerity and good intentions of the opposing views are unquestionable; however, they differ fundamentally in their opinion on what the normative foundation of democracy is and what it should be. Moreover, the opposing views are not easily categorized into political labels of 'Left' versus 'Right', or socialism versus liberalism. As James Davidson Hunter points out, a 'politization' of the debate can lead to a situation where "one can easily forget that they trace back to prior moral commitments and more basic moral visions: we subtly slip into thinking of the controversies debated as political rather than cultural in nature. On political matters one can compromise, on matters of ultimate moral truth, one cannot." (Hunter 1991:46) The struggle is in its essence a confrontation of diametrically contrasting notions of what constitutes moral authority, "over different ideas and beliefs about truth, the good, obligation to one another, the nature of community, and so on." (Hunter 1991:49)

We can attribute certain political and sociological features of thought to certain political regimes or forms of government; however, within democracy there is a growing disparity of views about what constitutes the common normative foundation of justice. This debate has

⁵⁰ By 'neutral' I insinuate that the 'inherent truths' of democracy is perceived as 'self-evident', and given that the recipient of these truths is sufficiently enlightened, he can rationally discover the morality of them, independently of culture or prior political regime.

generally centred on the state vs. the individual, communitarianism vs. individualism, or socialism vs. liberalism. However, are these 'conflict-lines' sufficient in satisfactorily describing the dilemmas of democracy? A Tocquevillian perspective holds that it is the ideas and philosophy behind these opposites that we must turn our attention to. In the end, these are questions of virtue, justice, morality, of what constitutes our world-picture, and what gives us meaning and purpose, on both the political level and the social level. Politics conveys more than economic distribution; it is the arena where different conceptions clash regarding the outline and function of the state, society and the individual.

A Tocquevillian perspective acknowledges that democracy is the political regime where the individual can optimally influence the ramifications that determine the boundaries and rights of his private and public sphere. However, whether this influence is primarily motivated by financial gains or by a genuine sense of obligation and civic duty can only be explained by examining the current mindset and mentality of the democratic age we wish to describe. I believe that Tocqueville's relevance is significant in this respect, and a Tocquevillian analysis underlines that there are no uncomplicated solutions to the problems democracy faces; apathy, individualism and materialism are not solely mended by institutional or constitutional clauses, civic duty and public virtue cannot be 'implemented' by the government because they are *ideas* of what the political should be, and the democratic government itself mirrors the prevailing ideas.

The current language of relativism and subjectivism makes it inherently difficult to impose a common sense of morality, since this conflicts with the democratic principle of the sovereign and rational individual who – in theory – is free to make his own choices for himself, and the fact that Western politics is the politics of compromise where no single political party has monopoly to shape society in its own image (as was, and is, the situation in totalitarian countries).

3.1.2 Conflicting Views on Culture and Democracy

Liberal democracies do not fight wars with one another because they see the same human nature and the same rights applicable everywhere and to everyone. Cultures fight wars with one another. They must do so because values can only be asserted or posited by overcoming others, not by reasoning with them. Cultures have different perceptions, which determine what the world is. They cannot come to terms. There is no communication about the highest things. (Bloom 1988:202)

There are both material and immaterial aspects of a culture. The material aspects include elements such as its technology (tools, weapons, and infrastructure), formal institutional organization, and mode of production. These aspects of Western culture 'diffuse' rather easily; meaning, they are commodities that are relatively easy to 'export' and can be implemented into a different culture without necessarily fundamentally altering its value-system. However, immaterial and religious elements are what gives a culture its "distinctive character" and these elements in the West consist of its "Christian heritage, its scientific outlook, its humanitarian elements, and its distinctive point of view in regard to the human rights of the individuals, rather than in such material things as firearms, tractors, plumbing fixtures, or skyscrapers." (Quigley 1966:12) If Western democracy is principally a result of its cultural and philosophical heritage, then ambitions of 'exporting' it as a just form of political organization may, by a reluctant recipient, be perceived as an attempt to force Western values and culture upon them.

What constitutes the heart of disagreement in the West, are different conceptions of what freedom and justice are and should symbolize. Behind the rhetoric of just distribution, the role of government, equality and rights, I believe that there is an effort to achieve domination of definition, meaning the right to define moral authority and norms. This struggle goes beyond Realism's explanation of power; it is not only the power to influence reality, but to define reality. Since culture encompasses normative guidelines that order our experience by attaching specifics and the empirical to meaning and purpose – and consequently composes a significant part of our identity – it is ultimately a struggle to define Western identity and who we are. James Davidson Hunter has described this struggle as one between 'cultural conservatism' and 'cultural progressivism':

Where *cultural conservatives* tend to *define freedom economically* (as individual economic initiative) and *justice socially* (as righteous living), *progressives* tend to *define freedom socially* (as individual rights) and *justice economically* (as equity) [...] However true or false the account may

be, history tends to be reduced to ideology, a means through which the social and political interests of each side of the cultural divide are legitimated." (Hunter 1991:115-16)

In the examination of culture, it is beneficial to discriminate between private and public culture. Private culture consists of meanings and symbols that constitute comprehensiveness within the domain of personal life, both inwardly as the self-understanding of individuals and outwardly as one's personal social network. Public culture, on the other hand, encompasses the meanings and symbols of society altogether, from the community to the nation; it can be understood in our day and age as the "repository of the symbols of national life and purpose." (Hunter 1991:55) The organization that conveys the society's political culture, the state, articulates through formal judicial procedure and normative maxims its own limits and functions, but also the tolerable boundaries of individual conduct and individual rights. In addition, the state stipulates the character and scope of public responsibility, through its distributive system of economic subsidies and prerogatives.

3.1.3 Faith and the Sacred in Democracy

Rhetorical symmetry does not necessarily imply moral symmetry. One might argue theologically, philosophically, or politically that one side is morally superior to the other, but the truth of such claims cannot be established in a social scientific or an ethically neutral frame of reference. Such arguments can only be put forward in language that itself is vulnerable to the polarizing tendencies of the contemporary cultural division. (Hunter 1991:157-58)

The very term 'faith' brings to mind religious connotations, but here it is used in a wider sense; as a formal system of belief in a comprehensive set of values, ideals and interests concerning man's and society's inherent function and purpose. Therefore, 'faith' includes political ideologies as Marxism, Fascism and more 'pure' philosophical views such as Humanism, and they call for alternation in how we perceive the individual, society and the state, and their functions and purpose. In addition, what all faiths have in common is an attempt to satisfy man's requirement for meaning by claiming insight into truth about the world. By postulating the affiliation between the individual and society, and further between society and state, faiths represent "the fundamental link between public and private culture." (Hunter 1991:58) By placing the individual and society in a larger social order, systems of faith and beliefs provide normative vindication of their existential functionality, in addition to providing

moral guidelines on how they best can function meaningfully according to a set of rules and an understanding of reality and truth. The latter aspect explains phenomenon's such as poverty, unemployment, social structure, conflict, economics, and politics, and stipulates principles of action that specifies "what should be done" to solve the perceived problems.

[t]hese faiths lay out the moral significance of different social institutions and institutional arrangements. They set forth the social and moral meaning of marriage and the family, the needs and objectives of education, the principles of law, the role of government, and so on, and the interrelationships of these institutions. Here again, systems of belief not only define 'what is' but also 'what should be.' Faith and culture, then, are inextricably linked. (Hunter 1991:58)

In an analysis of public culture and its symbols, 'faith' reflects a nation's identity, its meaning of citizenship and individual rights, its common ideas of public virtue and public good, as well as the normative and moral foundation it aspires to transmit. (Hunter 1991:55) A coherent public culture conveys shared paradigms that express its beliefs on justice, rights, and the role of the individual, morality and meaning. Emile Durkheim's idea of the 'sacred' – the "life-orienting principles of individuals and larger community" – is constructive in this perspective. (Hunter 1991:131) The 'sacred' does not necessarily symbolize divine faith, but it does represent a society's shared myths that define its history, culture and values. Knowledge and understanding of the sacred provides insight into a society's moral principles, both regarding what it approves and disapproves of as right or acceptable. Allan Bloom argues that the West has become uncertain of itself and its values:

A shared sense of what is sacred is the surest way to recognize a culture, and the key to understanding it and all of its facets [...] What a people bows before tells us what it is [...] The West has been demythologized and had lost its power to inspire and its view of the future. Therefore, it is evident that its myths are what animates a culture, and the makers of myths are the makers of cultures and of man (Bloom 1988:204)

The view set forth here, is that within the West the 'sacred' has not necessarily been lost, but there are ambiguities and conflicting views on what the sacred is, as well as disenchantment. Charles Taylor draws attention to the increasing "disengaged, instrumental mode empties life of meaning," which "threatens public freedom [...] and practises of self-government." (Taylor 1992:500) What is at stake, are not merely difference of 'opinions', but profoundly different ideas about meaning and morality, while a significant part of the citizenry is at best tentative concerning their political identity, at worst indifferent or apathetic, the 'anomie' that Durkheim

described. However, while Durkheim believed that a new, modern social order would rise out of the ashes of traditional society, Tocqueville feared democracy's potentiality of unravelling social structure, where common traditional sources of authoritative identification and beliefs would not habitually be replaced by new, shared beliefs. Instead, the materially fixed and independent democratic man would find it arduous to locate new beliefs whose source of authority originated outside him and the democratic regime. Accordingly, an authoritative and moral void would be filled by self-referential authorities, arbitrary to each isolated man and defined by his fluctuating 'emotions.' The underlying motivation for Tocqueville was ultimately to warn democratic man of this development. The remedy? Consciousness of virtue.

3.2 Virtue, Morality and Meaning

Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks – no form of Government, can render us secure. To suppose that any form of Government will secure liberty or happiness without any form of virtue in the people is a chimerical idea.

– James Madison⁵¹

3.2.1 Virtue

There are no great men without virtue; without respect for rights, there is no great people: one can almost say that there is no society; for, what is a union of rational and intelligent beings among whose force is the sole bond? (DA I, 2.6 p. 227)

The underlying dedication to virtue within traditional Liberalism stems from the idea that liberty is a way of life, concerning both conduct and thought. In addition, this liberty requires of individuals practicing it certain qualities of mind and character, considered as virtues. Examples of virtues that traditional Liberalism emphasizes as of the essence in an open, vibrant and liberal society are moderation, reflective judgement, practical intelligence, open-mindedness, ability to cooperate and valour. The potentiality for virtue is innate in human character, but must be developed through education and cultivation. The Aristotelian notion of happiness is "an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue" which is synonymous with "the good *for*

⁵¹ Madison, James, 'The Virginia Convention Debates, Friday, 20 June 1788,' in *The Documentary History of Ratification of the Constitution: Virginia*, vol. 10, edited by John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino (Madison, Wis.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1993), p. 1417 (Quoted in Hunter 2000:236)

man." (*Ethics* book 1.7) What traditional Liberalism also accentuates, is that the liberal state requires citizen's that can

[e]ffectively and fairly administer liberalism's characteristic political institutions, who can keep government within limits, who can exercise their rights in a manner respectful of others and in harmony with the common good, and who can sustain the voluntary associations that compose civil society. (Berkowitz 1999:XI)

Virtue as a superior quality in the *politeia* was more prominent in classic and Christian philosophy, "where virtue, or the promotion of human excellence, was generally held to be the ultimate aim of politics." (Berkowitz 1999:4) Tocqueville's postulation that democracy was a matter of habits of heart and mind – as well as the mechanics of governance – is in my opinion another description of virtues, and unequivocally a petition for the requirement of insight into transcendent authority combined with freedom as necessary for a vibrant democracy:

I expect people to serve the cause of democracy, but I want them to do so as moral and independent beings who, while pledging their support, retain the use of their liberty; that people see in the majority the most tolerable of powers, I understand; but I would like them to be its counsellors and not its courtiers...⁵²

Although Tocqueville accentuates the value of free will, he recognized that social structure and history exert influence on the reality and range of choices of the individual; "providence has not created the human race either entirely independent or perfectly slave. It traces, it is true, a fatal circle around each man that he cannot leave; but within its vast limits man is powerful and free; so too with peoples." (DA II, 4.8 p. 676) Tocqueville thereby divides the human condition in (democratic) society into two dominions; one is exterior to democratic man, in the sense that man cannot determine its *form*; this is the inevitable progress in democratic societies towards equality, individualism and materialism. However, in the other dominion – which is interior – the qualitative shape and *matter* of democracy, meaning how democratic society and its citizenry will be comprised; there are explicit possibilities for democratic man to influence its outcome. By separating the inevitable democratic process and man's capability of free will, Tocqueville establishes the necessity of virtues and accountability in the democratic process. Consequently, the focus of a Tocquevillian perspective is not so much a normative discussion of the

⁵² Unpublished manuscript in draft for the second volume of *Democracy in America*, entitled 'Concerning the Particular Causes Which Might Be Harmful in America to the Free Development and to the Generalization of Thought'. (Quoted in Schleifer 2000: 229)

benevolence of a democratic regime per se, but how to establish its shape and function in a best possible manner. What Tocqueville accentuates, is the necessity of virtuous consciousness among democratic citizens in matters of influence and participation. ‘Only when citizens recognize this realm as their own sphere of action, if they accept the aforementioned progress toward equality and devote themselves completely to matters that can be influenced by their actions, will the practice of freedom be possible.’ (Hereth 1986:108)

The individual and society are mutually dependent upon each other. For the individual to become a self-governing and political being – in an Aristotelian teleological sense – it must exercise virtues in and through society, not in a utilitarian manner, but in a truly virtuous manner. Therefore, a vibrant and dynamic society is dependent upon individuals that claim responsibility and exercise their rights and obligations in society. If human nature is to transcend a socio-biological, rational role-playing perception as consumers of goods – political or otherwise – then awareness of virtues and morality are indispensable values that cannot be dismissed out of hand. The Tocquevillian notion of democracy’s proper function is when citizens realize that freedom – available formally and normatively through the principle of sovereignty – must be exercised as a value in itself, and that this exercise in turn leads to accomplishing one’s own potentialities of human excellence as a political being. This is why democracy is ultimately the most ‘just’ political regime; not because of the material advantages and relative stability it inherently fosters, but because we are social beings that naturally form societies, rules, norms and organization, and democracy offers each social being – the individual – the opportunity to shape his own destiny in this society.

3.2.2 Free Will or Determined Interests?

Everyone now has a stake in preserving the status quo. No one is tempted to heroics because the stakes are Lilliputian: there is little that is worth snatching and all fear loss of their property. The paradox of a free society takes shape: individuals who are at liberty to form and express their own beliefs hold tenaciously to the same convictions while around them intellectual creations change as rapidly as fashions. (Wolin 2001:377).

Many scholars have commented on Tocqueville’s emphasis on the importance of associations as a means for citizens to participate in the democratic process. However, Tocqueville renounced the idea that associations were an institutional universal remedy for an

indifferent and passive citizenry that democracy can invent if materialism and individualism becomes overly dominant. What is of importance, according to Tocqueville, is that “particular beliefs, practices, and institutions” determine the transcendent nature of associations. (Berkowitz 1999:187) If associations are to wield a positive impact on democratic citizens, it requires of them a consciousness of virtue and character. In addition, as Robert Putnam points out, citizens can, through interacting in ‘social networks’ create synergies of ‘social capital’;

[s]ocial capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue.’ The difference is that ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam 2000:19)

Consequently, practicing virtue *through* community not only develops virtue in democratic man, but also creates a ‘radius of trust’ and cooperation throughout society. Following Aristotle, what is good for the virtuous man, is also good for the *politeia*. Nevertheless, in order to create ‘social capital’, there must be “moral capital.” (Berkowitz 1999:188)

Development of virtue is achievable through the exercise of *choice*, and this requires the encouragement of the use of free will. It is by making choices of our own that we can develop a sense of fulfillment: if we transfer the responsibility of charity and ‘good deeds’ to the state, and focus exclusively on pleasures within the private sphere, it is difficult to see how virtue can be developed.

On the left, a politics that in effect aims to impose a particular kind of character and a specific conception of the good life wants government to emancipate citizens from all kinds of oppression and all types of hierarchy. Ironically, by assigning the state responsibility for making life meaningful and guaranteeing that individuals become fully autonomous, this ambitious politics thrusts government back into the center of business from which liberalism first sought to remove it, the business of caring for souls. (Berkowitz 1999:190)

The idea of virtue, as it is normally understood, presupposes that human nature has predisposed psychological and innate traits, which are not exclusively socially determined, and that the human mind is not a ‘tabula rasa’ arbitrarily and empirically filled with social norms and rules. Aristotle suggests that virtue is not something naturally bestowed in human nature, but it is not unnatural either; “none of the moral virtues is engendered in is by nature, since nothing that is what it is by nature can be made to behave differently by habituation.” (*Ethics* 1103a14-

b1) In other words, while man is not born inherently good nor bad, there are potentialities of becoming either. Given that man is properly introduced into an education of virtues, the opportunity for man to become a good man – by the use of his free will – increases. Of course, socialization influences the individual and his or her habits, but the individual is not sociologically *determined* by it. On the other hand, individuals are not atomized beings in a state of nature who rationally choose to participate in society; humans are brought up in society, and the reason for this, according to this line of thinking, is that we are social beings, it is our natural state. The Aristotelian concept of virtue, which influenced Tocqueville, differs from the perception of the radical Enlightenment that held man to be innately good, born free, but distorted, corrupted and enslaved by the suppressive and malignant institutions and conventions of society (illustrated by Rousseau's statement that "man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains."); therefore, what needs improvement and adjustment, according to the philosophy of the Radical Enlightenment, in order for man to become emancipated from the evils of unjust and suppressive society, is social structure. Moreover, this is where pre-modern and modern conceptions of human nature divert on purpose and meaning for the individual.

Central to the Aristotelian tradition of thought is an understanding of man as having an essential nature and an essential purpose. Aristotle's basis for ethical enquiry is the correlation of 'man' to 'living well' corresponding to that of 'harpist' to "playing the harp well." (*Ethics*, 1095a16) What is to be improved is *within* man, i.e., the source of improvement is internal, while the source of the common good is external; this reflects a transcendent source of authority, well known in Christian philosophy. Furthermore, the achievement of human excellence cannot be regarded as 'selfish' (an expression that will be elaborated upon later), since education in the virtues teaches each individual that what is good for him is "one and the same as good for those others" with whom the individual is associated to in society. (MacIntyre 1985:229) The liberal thought of Tocqueville was in this sense teleological because the "values of liberty and individuality, and diversity were based on an idea of human nature in which these values were fundamental human needs." (Kahan 2001:83) Incarnate in Tocqueville's notion of human nature was the reflection that in order for a human being to achieve its uppermost and fullest potentiality, certain needs had to be satisfied. This accomplishment was a "factual criterion for defining the good and the virtuous." (ibid.) Participation by the individual in society was one of the given needs, therefore meaningful participation was regarded as good in itself.

Hobbes' introduction of the *naturally* egoistic and selfish individual represents a distinctly modern view on human nature, and it had significant influence on The Enlightenment. If one proclaims that the source of (principal) authority is within man himself, what needs improvement is external structure, i.e. by improving society man can live up to his fullest potential, and this humanistic philosophy was the anthropological underpinning of the French Revolution.

3.2.3 Meaning

Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow itself on all sides – John Stuart Mill

Moral thinking [...] is a branch of social thinking, articulating standards which necessarily arise on dealing with the chronic conflicts endemic to human life. (Midgley 2001:96)

By meaning, I refer to both a psychological and philosophical understanding of the term; psychologically, meaning is “the way in which facts connect to form [...] world-pictures – that is the underlying systems of thought by which we order our experience.” (Midgley 2002:15) Meaning is essential, since every individual needs to attach empirical impressions and occurrence (information, data, concrete experience) to a larger ‘world-picture’, and meaning is the theoretical ‘tool’ that serves as the intermediary in this process. By this, I mean that all humans order experience in a dispositional understanding of phenomena. Moreover, the facts that we assemble do not occur within a theoretical void, but within a comprehensible understanding of reality that serves to promote further apprehension of the world. If we do not have prior assumption to understand experiences, they become practically meaningless. Meaning can originate on a number of different levels; naturally, it is found in the social environment that is close to us – family, friends and work. However, “if we ask for a wider context we begin to build wider intellectual systems, either just for greater completeness or to reconcile clashing elements within the system which we have already.” (Midgley 2002:16) Meaning is vital because it provides the required motive to order and organize an understanding and reflection of our surroundings and the world. Therefore, separating human meaning from pure rational thought, dismissing it as prejudiced superfluous intrusion is explanatorily unproductive. Insight into values and morality is not attained in an abstract, theoretical vacuum, detached from the cultural background of a society's common sense of justice and behind a ‘veil

of ignorance'; it only makes sense if we order them in a framework that makes values and notions of morality comprehensible. Without the required moral fabric to orchestrate meaningful sense of the world, we become incapable of managing common dilemmas, more so when they are profoundly moral ones. "Communal conceptual schemes are forged, by which we can carry on moral business. Though they are always inadequate and constantly need change of correction, they are workable." (Midgley 2002:21)

Now, the relevance of meaning that I intend to establish is that when we evaluate something as just or unjust, legitimate or illegitimate, right or wrong, we do not randomly take a normative stand, we do so because we have a consistent moral understanding and assertion. Politically, meaning is particularly necessary in democracies, since the democratic regime, in a Tocquevillian perspective, is dependent on loyalty and identification from its citizenry. Democracy encompasses more than its institutions, constitution and formal set of rules. Subsequently, since democracy ideologically postulates a set of normative 'truths' concerning justice – such as the principle of equality and the sovereignty of the people - there should be a consistency between its postulations and practical implementation and the general understanding of justice of its citizenry in order to conserve the loyalty which it is dependent upon. If the democratic regime transcends normatively something else than what is regarded as justifiable or in juxtaposition with the perceived normative reality of the citizenry, it fails to provide meaningful political identification.⁵³ Also of importance is the fact that if the normative principles are professed as obvious and unambiguous in the democratic regime and require no argument or contemplation, if they are taken for granted as self-evident, democratic man can easily overlook that these ideas were fought for and established with immense endeavour. A comprehension of the values central in democracy requires a sense of free will and intellectual capacity, but more crucially, they must be practically meaningful. This is achieved more easily if there is a reasonable connection from the theoretical postulations to a practical and 'empirical' substance of tradition, culture and history. This part of my thesis addresses conflicting normative principles within the democratic regime, and whether some of them fail or neglect to correspond to practicable actuality.

⁵³ By 'democratic regime' I do not refer to a specific political administration of a given nation, but metaphysically to the nature of democracy, its normative foundation and its principles of justice and rights.

The Tocquevillian perspective regards mores and culture as indispensable variables both in regarding what democracy is, and as determinants of whether democracy is universally practicable. In other words, culture matters.

3.2.4 Materialism as Meaning

What is replacing the classical and Christian outlook in the West is certainly a new Weltanschauung, often more rationalistic in appearance, but we miss its main source of power if we focus narrowly on abstract ideas. What most deeply shapes modern man and guides even his more strictly philosophical efforts is a new way of *imagining* the world. (Ryn 1998:11)

Tocqueville's deliberations on materialism are of relevance to democratic man's pursuit of meaning. There are two levels of materialism: the physical and the psychological. Now, on the physical level, an aspiration to a certain standard of material well-being is not peculiar to democracies. What I want to address here is the psychological aspect of materialism and its connection to the notion of meaning. Tocqueville did not denounce or morally damn the pursuit of gain and love of material well-being. He only wanted to place it within the hierarchy of goals for human activity, which does not set affluence as the highest and all-determining goal. What Tocqueville criticizes is not the existence of the passion for gaining wealth; he knows that no society with dispassionate angels as citizens could serve as the premise for a critique of actual contemporary conditions. Rather, his criticism is directed against the fact that pursuit of wealth has completely eclipsed every other goal. The criticism considers the complete saturation of society by the thought of gain, which subordinates all virtues to calculating expense and attainment, and which makes individual benefit the citizen's guiding rule and society's dominant principle. The prerequisite of this development was the depolitization of society, whereby citizens no longer experienced political activity, as all powers of decision were gathered in central government. The citizens withdrew into their own private affairs, and were connected with politics solely through their own interests, which brought them into politics.

If materialism is the primary means to individual fulfilment, it seems rather naïve to expect people to participate in the democratic structure motivated by a sense of obligation. I believe that the criticism against materialism, generally from the 'Left' (anti-globalists, environmentalists, socialists), who oppose material consumption, do so primarily on the 'physical' level. The

material consumption in the Western democracies do not, in my opinion, by design pose a threat to the environment, its growth is not synonymous to extortion of the Third World, and it does not necessarily create misery among the working classes.⁵⁴

The philosophical heritage of Marxism is recognizable in how materialism has become an accepted reference point within political terminology; this linguistic materialism is employed in the definition of those who are “well-off” and those who are “unfortunate.” The philosophical consequence is that in our perception of what constitutes a ‘good life’, material well-being is the common determinant; a meaningful connection between ‘the good life’ and the ‘right life’ is decreasing; what we are left with is outward perceptions of different ‘lifestyles’ that are defined and recognizable by their unimpeded external characteristics – the *persona* – but gives little indication of the character.⁵⁵

Moreover, by defining the reality of democracies in materialistic terms, by defining the differences between people in economic terms of those who *have* and *have not*, by understanding individual behaviour by innately materialistic and egoistic motivations, there is a hazard that this thinking becomes the dominant *lingua franca* in the description of the political and the social. Tocqueville realized the coming tensions in the Western democracies; “Soon, the political struggle will establish itself between those who possess and those who do not; property will be the great battlefield, and the principal question will turn on the more or less deep modifications to be made in the rights of property owners.” (*Souvenirs*: 1970:37)

By defining and understanding the conditions of the West in materialistic terms, we have become increasingly detached from the ‘culture of virtue’ and the notion of human nature as equipped with free will and the ability to improve itself through conscious choice and deliberation, not merely determined by social structures and biological functionalism.

⁵⁴ For an critical overview that challenges extensively held beliefs that the environmental situations is getting progressively worse, see Bjørn Lomborg's *The Sceptical Environmentalist. Measuring the Real State of the World.* (2001) Cambridge University Press

⁵⁵ It might be argued that the ‘Left’ criticizes materialism in the sense that it perceives material ‘abundance’ among groups that are high-income earners as proportionately ‘unfair’ or ‘unbalanced’. However, this rather strengthens than weakens the argument above: the *a priori* classification of social groups is above all based on material terms, and a socialist understanding of justice is by large defined in materialistic notions of the individual, society, state and the world.

3.2.5 The Information Society and Meaning

He who has confined his heart solely to the search for the good for the goods of this world is always in a hurry, for he has only a limited time to find them, take care of them, and enjoy them. His remembrance of the brevity of life constantly spurs him. (DA II, 2.13 p. 512)

Information and meaning are not synonymous; meaning is the process of connecting separate sections of experience into a larger, integrated relation, while information is the opposite. Information is ideally intermediated as logical, binary code, while meaning is intermediated symbolically. Information is 'processed' or managed while meaning is interpreted. It would be overly simplifying to claim that there is a given 'contradiction' between information and meaning; information is vital in the functionality of society, and as Tocqueville commented, it is impossible to interdependently assert if every 'truth' or information we receive is 'factual' or not. Rather, what is addressed here, is the claim that information in the technological age and consumerism may lead to individuals as passive recipients, and this contributes to a 'deficiency of meaning. (Svendsen 1999:30-31)

The Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz provides the definitive view on why [democratic man] degrade himself with mass culture: "Today man believes that there is *nothing* in him, so he accepts *anything*, even if he knows it to be bad, in order to find himself at one with others, in order not to be alone." Of course, it is because people find so little in themselves that they fill their world with celebrities. (Kaplan 1997)

The philosophical and psychological consequences of materialism on meaning in modern society is a mental state previously unknown to man: boredom. Orin Klapp's observations of boredom's extensivity by the growth of 'social placebos' in the entertainment industry that aims to satisfy the need for personal meaning is relevant in this context. (Klapp 1986:24) Democratic man's philosophical approach to phenomena is increasingly determined by an emphasis on whether it is 'interesting' or not, rather than if it has any 'value', this is to view the phenomena from an aesthetical perspective. The aesthetical view implies an external and superficial approach, and the externality decides whether phenomena are interesting or boring. (Svendsen 1999:29) This is also increasingly the case with the portrayal of individuals in public life (e.g. politicians), with greater emphasis on personality rather than character.

Information technology has provided a significant rise in the level of knowledge, and there are undoubtedly positive effects to be acknowledged. Nonetheless, most information we *receive*

can easily be termed irrelevant noise, a finished article whose purpose is not *communication*, but a monologue that aims to ease the recipient's task of contemplating upon its message and thereby making it effortlessly 'palatable' and 'consumerable'.

Increasingly information is generated by those who wish to promote something or someone – a product, a cause, a political candidate or officeholder – without arguing their case on its merits or explicitly advertising it as self-interested material either. Like the post office – another institution that once served as to extend the sphere of face-to-face discussion [...]it now delivers useless, indigestible information that nobody wants, most of which ends up as unread waste [...] When words are used merely as instruments of publicity or propaganda, they lose their power to persuade. Soon they cease to mean any thing at all. People lose the capacity to distinguish one word from another. (Lasch 1996:174-75)

The 'meaningful' solution to boredom has become sensationalism and the end-less and purpose-less infringement of a rapidly dwindling core of social taboos; as Robert Nisbet comments, boredom is potentially devastating for Western civilization; "Boredom may become Western man's greatest source of unhappiness. Catastrophe alone would appear to be the surest and, in today's world, the most likely of liberations from boredom." (Nisbet 1982:28) The consequences of a decreasing lack of meaning and purpose with the polity pose, in my opinion, one of the gravest threats to modern democracy. Materialism and individualism in tandem render philosophically and psychologically the promise of self-fulfilment through externalities, but when the assurance of identity and meaning is achieved through consuming material products that by advertising promises *individuality*, and when these products becomes increasingly exchangeable *and* alike, genuine and substantial preferences are impossible. Reasonable decisions are conditioned by preferences, and preferences are conditioned by differences. When everything becomes levelled, it becomes significantly more important to create new differences. We are desperate for difference. Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, the advertising business is more than willing to distribute new distinctions. Advertising is in its nature conditioned by its necessity to create new qualitative differences that become real through unreal constructivism. (Svendsen 1999:48-49) Most consumer products are by nature the same, i.e. the inherent purpose of a watch is to show time, but advertising is not focused on the nature of things, but what they *represent*. Superfluous distinctions become what is meaningfully essential, because it is through the constant establishment of new differences that we hope to achieve meaningful existence and confirmation of our individuality.

It has been argued that the world has increasingly become more complex in terms of political, social and economic progress, and therefore more difficult to navigate in for the individual. Technology and science has had an impact on the ways we conduct the interaction between ourselves, but these are changes in form; the matter remains the same. Our need for meaningful social interaction does not decrease with increasing complexity. This need is to some degree satisfied through our social interaction with family, work and friends. Politically, however, it seems that people need both convincing *and* conviction to participate, and this is in my opinion one of the greatest challenges Western democracies increasingly face.

3.3 Tolerance, Rights and Relativism

When every expression is equally permissible, nothing is true. (Lasch 1996:223)

3.3.1 The Relativization of Truth

The principle of the sovereign individual has in its theoretical universe become detached from cultural and political reality. In a way, this is required if democracy aims to become a universal principle of a just political regime, instead of a mere product of Western civilization and culture. As mentioned, this rationality can be employed to connect to the relativization of culture and tolerance. Francis Fukuyama reasons that in the West,

[t]he word *culture* has come to be associated with the concept of choice [...] we are taught, moreover, that in negotiating among these competing cultural claims, none can be judged to be better than any other. In the hierarchy of moral virtues, tolerance ranks high, and moralism – the attempt to judge people by one's own moral and cultural rules – ranks as the vice among vices. This is a lesson taught not just by proponents of multiculturalism on the Left, but by libertarian economists on the Right, who boil down all human behaviour to the pursuit of irreducible individual 'preferences'. (Fukuyama 2000:16)

However, by doing so, some philosophical consequences will be addressed here. Although Tocqueville did not explicitly contemplate on tolerance as a theoretical subject, I interpret his elaborations upon equality and democratic compassion as traits of a view that foresees moral relativism and where tolerance has become uncritical acceptance of nearly every conduct.⁵⁶ In

⁵⁶ In volume II, under the heading *How Mores Become Milder as Conditions are Equalized*, Tocqueville predicts that "In democratic centuries, men rarely devote themselves to one another; but they show a general compassion for all members of the human species. One does not see them inflict useless evils, and when they can relieve the sorrows of another without denying themselves much, they take

some ways, not tolerating conduct on a moral basis has become synonymous with reactionary and narrow-minded thinking, someone incapable of 'understanding' or 'accepting' other people for 'who they are.'

The freedom of speech – the freedom independently to formulate thoughts and to communicate them – has been substituted by the freedom of expression; the freedom to say whatever one 'feels' like, and claim respect for it. Increasingly, there has ceased to be any common, primary source of authoritative accent where democratic citizens can debate on common ground. Truth has become relative, "not a theoretical insight, but a moral postulate." (Bloom 1988:25) There are two modern notions of truth; 'Enlightenment naturalism' – scientific rationalism – whose supposition of truth is confined by the empirically verifiable through scientific method. The other is the heritage of the radical Enlightenment – subjectivism – where truth is progressive and subjectivist.⁵⁷ While political science increasingly has been narrowed down to the empirically demonstrable and statistically probable, thoughts and elaborations on political philosophy and morality have been reduced to an 'opinion' that objectively holds no larger truth than any given meaning.

Alasdair MacIntyre labels this philosophy 'emotivism', which is "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character." (MacIntyre 1985:17) Constructivism implies that the meaning of any word must be defined in the circumstance it is used; and since this circumstance is subjective to every individual, there can be no objective truth; it all depends on 'how you look at it.' Carroll Quigley observed that

The old idea of communication as an exchange of concepts represented by symbols was junked. Instead, symbols has quite different connotations for everyone concerned simply because everyone had a different past experience. (Quigley 1966:1226)

As Allan Bloom pointed out, the progressive and ahistorical trends of contemporary democratic mentality resembles the condition of the first men in the 'state of nature', "spiritually

pleasure in doing it; they are not disinterested, but they are mild [...] as peoples become more like another they show themselves reciprocally more compassionate regarding their miseries, and the law of the nation becomes milder." (DA II, 3.1 p. 538-39)

⁵⁷ Relativism is not a novel philosophical 'concept'; see for example the sophist Protagoras (411-80 BC) doctrine of *homo mensura*, holding that everything is relative to human apprehension and evaluation, nothing is absolutely or objectively good or bad, true or false, and that each individual is therefore his or her own final authority; this belief is summed up in his saying: "Man is the measure of all things." (Also known as *protagoreanism*).

unclad, unconnected, isolated, with no inherited or unconditional connection with anything or anyone. They can be anything they want to be, but they have no particular reason to be anything in particular.” (Bloom 1988:87) Only lack of imagination and a declining core of ‘bourgeoisie’ social conventions restrict the freedom of choice in the private realm of Western democracies. The way we choose to live – so-called ‘lifestyles’ – cannot any longer be asserted ‘un-virtuous’ from a transcendent moral standpoint; only legally impermissible through positive law. The irony of it all is that while democratic man is ‘emancipated’ from all constraints on how to direct his life, the result is not the libertarian or radical dream of people blossoming into sovereign and free-thinking individuals, but an increasing level of conformity and sameness, both physically and psychologically. Physically, the trend is a consolidation of taste and preference; conformity can be recognized in the fact that we increasingly consume the same products in a market that, at least within some sectors, offers a decreasing variety of products from a dwindling number of multi-national corporations. Ideally, capitalism is in favour of the free market and free access, but, in my opinion, there is in reality a tendency of decreasing variety.⁵⁸ The capitalism of today seems further than ever before from Adam Smith’s theoretical universe where increasing competition resulted in increasing choice.⁵⁹ It is this trend that politically correct ‘anti-globalists’ oppose, but for all the wrong reasons, according to this Tocquevillian perspective. By using the materialistic dialectic of Marxism and constructing capitalism into an ideology with a (negative) set of moral postulations of human value and social structure, it defines capitalism as an enemy of democracy and as a cause of poverty and lack of democracy and development in the ‘Third World.’ Socialists less often point out, or admit, that the existence of the extensive and expensive welfare state seems to depend upon a functional

⁵⁸ Of the world’s hundred largest economies, fifty-one are not countries but corporations. While the 200 largest corporations employ less than three fourths of one percent of the world’s work force, they account for 28 percent of world economic activity. The 500 largest corporations account for 70 percent of world trade. (Kaplan 1997) The presentation of these facts does not aim at normatively ‘condemning’ multi-national corporations *per se*, but to draw attention to the fact that diversity in consumer products are dwindling, and that the preferences of democratic man are increasingly alike. Furthermore, free trade and a free market are not necessarily synonymous with capitalism; there are many variants of it. (For an example of different categorizations of capitalism, see Quigley 1966:33-77)

⁵⁹ I feel obliged to add some comments upon Adam Smith, given that he is often portrayed as a proponent of an unrestricted and amoral economic marked by the ‘Left’, while to the ‘Right’ he is often perceived as a source that warns against inefficient regulation and for the advantages of a free market. However, I consider *The Theory on Moral Sentiments* (1759) as important as *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). Underlying Smith’s considerations on economy was a coherent moral philosophy that both emphasized the importance of virtue and cooperation. Ironically, he diverges from the utilitarian perception of both his critics and admirers; ‘How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it’. ‘The usefulness of any disposition... is seldom the first ground of our approbation;’ ‘the sentiment of approbation always involves in it a sense of propriety quite distinct from the perception of utility’ [...] Justice is certainly useful to society, but it is not true that the rules of justice have been *designed* to benefit society. The designer is God, not man. (Smith 2001)

capitalistic mode of production and wealth; no socialist country outside the West, communist or in any other form, has been able to match the level of material welfare in the West, *particularly* among organized workers.

3.3.2 Intolerant Tolerance

In a society where there is no longer a shared conception of the community's good as specified by the good for man, there can no longer either be any very substantial concept of what it is to contribute more or less to the achievement of that good. (MacIntyre 1985:232)

However, this is a digression. The focal points here, regarding tolerance, are some tendencies distinctive in modern democracy. The 'de-culturization' of Western democracy's normative foundation and the rationalization of man by the dissolution of moral authority outside him have rendered democratic man increasingly ambiguous and uncertain of his political identity and cultural heritage. When truth and values are increasingly restricted to a subjective sphere of interpretation, their purpose as common guidelines for interaction between citizens becomes abridged. Moreover, the idea of man's innate selfishness logically implies usage of the terms 'good' or 'evil' unsuitable as an explanatory motivating factor of human action. On the individual level, men's motivation cannot scientifically or psychologically be labelled 'evil', because the cause of the evil *action* performed by man is *outside* him; the philosophical consequence of Hobbes' selfish man and Rousseau's innocent man is that what would be rendered 'evil' in Classical or Christian philosophy is now explained by fixed preconditions or an unjust social structure. On the societal level, when we are to explain horrid conduct against individuals in cultures outside the West, the cause cannot be cultural variables, since these contain normative guidelines of what a society accepts regarding the rights of the individual. Hence actions and conduct that are *normatively* rejected by the West, and that occur systematically outside the West, are explained and 'understood' by variables that are in a sense value-free and general: poverty, corruption, geographical position, unemployment, Western or/and capitalistic exploitation, or the condescending argument that they lack development and democracy. It is a matter of circumstance; 'they' are 'unlucky' or 'unfortunate.' Logically, when nothing actually can be labelled 'evil' then nothing is essentially 'good'.

Now, in this respect it is necessary to emphasise that the political language of the West does not lack a moral dimension, on the contrary, normative denotations are widely used and notions of justice and right are employed to explain or justify certain political standpoints or decisions. What I am trying to call attention to, is the fact that in the political realm the moral source of authority is seldom to be located externally, i.e. in virtue. This is to say, that what is to be justified is understood through a structural and institutional perspective; examples would include a 'just' tax-reform, 'fair' trade, 'solidaric' distribution to the poor, 'equitable' subsidies to minorities, and so on. Of course, the justification of political action lies beyond its institutional setting, but in the end, what calls for explanation is *why* certain views are morally just. Equality and individual rights are expressions of a comprehensive moral order, not justice in their own right.

Moreover, and most relevant in this setting, is that morality in the individual realm has become increasingly relative, in the sense that every individual is free to choose what is right for him or her. Given the necessity of identification and sense of belonging of the citizenry to the polity, it is this escalating gap of moral perceptive between the individual and political realm that is of concern in a Tocquevillian analysis of democracy. An illustration of this divergence is a new interpretation of the liberal principle of tolerance that has emerged in modern democracy. Simon Gregg has categorized three notions of tolerance that are characteristic of Western democracy;

Sceptical tolerance – the idea that by evading any strong beliefs about good and evil, tolerance increases with increasing uncertainty

Quantitative tolerance – the meaning of tolerance is tolerance; therefore, the more you tolerate, the more tolerant you are.

Apologetic tolerance – if you happen to have strong beliefs, the best expression of tolerance is to refuse to express or act upon it; therefore, the more reticent you are, the more tolerant you are. (Gregg 2000:41)

In a sense, the 'traditional' liberal tolerance, as elaborated upon by John Locke and Immanuel Kant, honours diversity, offering the individual the opportunity to pursue his or her

notion of a 'good' life, as long this pursuit does not infringe upon the rights of other individual's to do the same or by violating distinctly defined laws.⁶⁰

However, tolerance is not synonymous with *respect*. As Christopher Lasch points out:

Tolerance is a fine thing, but it is only the beginning of democracy, not its destination. In our time democracy is more seriously threatened by indifference than by intolerance or superstition [...] We are determined to respect everyone, but we have forgotten that respect has to be earned. Respect is not another word for tolerance or the appreciation of 'alternative lifestyles and communities.' This is a tourist approach to morality. Respect is what we experience in the presence of admirable achievements, admirably formed characters, natural gifts put to good use. It entails the exercise of discriminating judgement, not indiscriminate acceptance. (Lasch 1996:89)

The modern enterprise of relocating Western values and philosophical notions of justice to a universal level has contributed to creating a vacuum in Western society where democratic man is left ravenous for meaning and identification. The consequent substitution with the ideas of tolerance effectively obstructs the prospect of articulating a common understanding of guidelines which accentuate that democratic man is to improve himself through virtue, and that the nature of the polity is the responsibility of each citizen. Democratic man is either left to himself in the search for meaning, or to a society that increasingly identifies itself with 'role-models' of the entertainment industry. Any serious debate about morality must – in order not to 'offend' anyone – logically conclude with pointless statements such as 'you have your values, and I have mine', or 'we'll just have to agree to disagree.' (Gregg 2000:41) Such statements would by most philosophers prior to the twentieth century have been perceived as pointless and meaningless, and regarded as a desertion of "any claim to be engaged seriously in the life of the mind." (ibid.) G.M. Tamas observes a decline of political philosophy as a science that seriously deliberates upon the democratic regime:

Philosophy could be a reasonable enterprise as long as the distinction between mere opinion (doxa) and true knowledge (episteme) was thought to be meaningful and relevant [...] In the new dispensation, opinion will coincide with true knowledge, liberty is an condition rather than an idea. Agon, that is, concurrence, contest, competition, is now at the heart of the free individual, but success has no direct relationship to the human good [...] There is no substantive criterion to decide which way of life is superior; philosophy "as a way of life," as it was traditionally conceived, becomes incomprehensible. (Tamas 2000:108)

⁶⁰ Kant's description of freedom is an expression of liberal tolerance: "No-one can compel me to be happy in accordance with his conception of the welfare of others, for each may seek his happiness in whatever way he sees fit, so long as he does not infringe upon the freedom of others to pursue a similar end which can be reconciled with the freedom of everyone else within a workable general law – i.e. he must accord to others the same right as he enjoys himself." (Kant 1991:74)

True tolerance is an imperative element of Western culture, but it cannot be unbiased concerning what is good or evil; the principle of tolerance cannot be uncritical tolerance in itself, becoming a dogmatic principle where disapproval of any 'lifestyle' or cultural inclinations is condemned as excruciatingly intolerable, ironically becoming a moralistic brand of intolerant tolerance. This is not to say that the West *should* in some manner conduct itself intolerantly or 'narrow-mindedly' towards other civilizations or cultures, but there *should* be a clear intolerance, at least with conditions in the West, of ideas and ideologies that incontestably oppose the central principles of individual right and freedom. Tolerance has become an end in itself, a virtue to be exercised without the necessary normative explanation of why something should be tolerated in the first place; it is the philosophical and intellectual reasoning preceding the conclusion of tolerance that is of moral and ethical significance, and that contributes to a stronger awareness about rights and liberty. The appeal of the West is not only its mode of production and the subsequent high level of material standards, but its ideals of pluralism, respect for individual rights and the opportunity to direct one's own life. These ideals are what make true diversity possible, but open-minded political dialogue is steadily impoverished by inflation in the escalating demand for a positive notion of rights, a.k.a. entitlements.

Where the liberal idea of rights constituted an ambition to guarantee the individual opportunity to direct his life responsibly, rights have increasingly become in the modern democratic regime an argument for claiming justice and compensation for unjust and unequal features in society. 'Rights' as an expression has progressively been affiliated with specific interest groups and politically defined minorities, while the ideals of diversity and pluralism are correspondingly fading, given the tendency "to frame every social controversy in terms of a clash of rights." (Gregg 2000:40). Given that the principle of equality has developed into equality of material standard, and the subsequent opportunity of economic privileges, the temptation to seek retribution for articulated injustice or discrimination is quite understandable. According to Christopher Lasch we have become a "nation of minorities" and "the pressure to expand the category, with a consequent loss of precision, has proved irresistible." (Lasch 1996:18) Political debate has increasingly been dominated by 'rights-talk', and the ensuing conflictual environment of opposing claims to economic justice has fragmented any sense of wholeness and common visions in the political.

3.4 Modernity, Rationalism and the Self

These abstract words that fill democratic languages, and of which use is made at every turn without linking them to any particular fact, enlarge and veil a thought; they render the expression more rapid and the idea less clear. (DA II, 1.16 p. 456)

3.4.1 The Politics of Modern Democracy

There are only two alternative modes of social life open to us, one in which the free and arbitrary choices of individuals are sovereign, and one in which the bureaucracy is sovereign. Precisely so that it may limit the free and arbitrary choices of individual. (MacIntyre 1985:35)

Contemporary political debate concerning justice and rights in general encompasses the relationship between the Individual and the State. This reflects a political reality where the individual is defined politically in terms of its relationship to the state. Both those who are perceived as the traditional defendants of the state's prerogative to achieve social justice understood as equality of conditions– the 'Left' – and those who are considered as the conventional protagonists of the individual's right to achieve liberal justice through independent choice, understood as the sovereignty of the individual – the 'Right' – classify themselves respectively politically in categories of 'communitarianism' and 'individualism' that oppose each other ideologically on these perceptions of justice. Although there are real and tangible differences on a number of issues between these political adversaries in the West, there are also some common traits that separate them from pre-modern notions of justice and man.⁶¹ What I wish to attend to, are some aspects of political thought that are distinctly *modern*, meaning that their theoretical and philosophical outlook are idiosyncratic heirs of the Enlightenment. The most illuminating example of this is perhaps the principles of equality and liberty, both doctrines of which the internal relationship and conflictual nature have been the main centre of attention for political theorists since the Enlightenment. This was also the case with Tocqueville. While Tocqueville can rightly be described as a modern political thinker, there are some distinctions that separate him from his contemporaries. He was astutely aware of the fact that he witnessed a period of transition; the nineteenth century symbolized not only the advent of democracy, but also a major philosophical shift in political thought, a new economic

⁶¹ A common philosophical factor of both the 'Left' and 'Right' in this regard, is the belief in the pure rationality of man and a critique of reality outside man; while the left wants to liberate man from the conventions of society by altering its defective and unjust structure, the 'Right' wants to set man free from the inhibiting structures of the state.

mode of production, the abdication of one dominant class – the aristocracy – and the arrival of a new – the bourgeoisie – which signalled a new outlook in values and social structure, rendering all individuals equal in rights and proclaiming its logic self-evident and universal. What Tocqueville recognized, was that the impending democratic movement was in essence different from previous political regimes, and that it broke with the past; it was indissolubly conjoined normatively, psychologically and philosophically to the modernity of the Enlightenment. This symbolized an alternation of the West's identity and its premise for justification; it became progressive, optimistic, scientifically rational, individualistic and secular.

3.4.2 The Promise of Modernity and Rationalism

There is considerable resistance still to changing the seductive notion of 'modernity' which ruled early in this century and still does rule in many areas – a notion of a single dark past, described vaguely as 'medieval', due to be destroyed and give way once and for all to a 'modern' present which will be final and never need changing. (Midgley 2002:29-30)

There is, in my opinion, a divergence in the deliberation on justice and morality between traditional and modern liberal thinkers that symbolizes a change from the concrete to the abstract. Though Modernity as a philosophical outlook considers itself as a progressive movement that breaks with the past, it is not a cohesive intellectual outlook; as mentioned, we can in general speak of two interrelated, but separate outlooks. First, there is what can be considered "Enlightenment naturalism" – of Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes and the Encyclopaedists.⁶² Regarding moral truth, this outlook suggests – in concurrence with contemporary irreligious humanism – that moral truth can to some extent be regarded as a human edifice and consequently both provisional and relative. Accordingly, the functionality of

⁶² This argument requires further explanation. The mentioned philosophers' relation to religion is indeed complex and in some way divergent from one another, but it would be erroneous to claim that their works were based in an irreligious outlook on man or morality. In *Novum organum* IV, Francis Bacon states that "Only let the human race recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest, and let the power be given it; the exercise thereof will be governed by sound reason and true religion." (quoted in Briggs 1996:177) On the other hand, Bacon was a protagonist of modern science and rationality, and wanted to "replace the Aristotelian image of science as a contemplation and organization of eternal truths long since discovered with a conception of science as a discovery of the unknown." (Peltonen 1996:14) Thomas Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* and *De Cive* were burned in Oxford 1683 on charges of atheism, defines religion as "Feare of power invincible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION; not allowed, SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION." (*Leviathan*, chap. 6 p. 42) Patricia Springborg suggests that the evaluation of the early modernists are influenced by secular science itself: "Commentators on Hobbes, religious doctrine have focused largely on the internal consistency of Hobbes' view in *Leviathan* and between *Leviathan* and *De Cive*, without consulting his more personal reflections. In this way Hobbes is rendered more congenial to the modern secular mind, but at considerable cost to the facts." (Springborg 1996:177) Even René Descartes, regarded by many as perhaps the prime advocate of rationality in his time, declared in the preface of the *Principles of Philosophy* that "The first part of philosophy is metaphysics, which contain the principles of knowledge, including the explanation of the principal attributes of God, the non-material nature of our souls and all the clear and distinct notions which are in us." (quoted in Sorell 1996:52-53)

moral truths should be articulated in ethical principles that have the human good as their highest end, "the inner sources of moral authority can be based in what could be called 'self-grounded rational discourse'." (Hunter 1991:125) What justifies moral principles is verification of the human condition, given that this verification is logical and constant. James Davidson Hunter elucidates that

[n]ot only are the nature of reality and the foundations of knowledge established by the adequacy of empirical proofs uncovered and the quality and coherence of the logic applied, but in this frame of reference, autonomous rationality and the empirical method became the decisive criteria for evaluating the credibility and usefulness of all moral claims as well. In the more extreme scientist formulations, it is argued that there is no reality except that which science has shown to exist; no truth except that which is established by the scientific method. (Hunter 1991:125)

The second intellectual outlook – 'Enlightenment subjectivism' – bases moral authority in personal experience; this experience is ordered and moral judgements are made "according to a logic rooted in subjective intuition and understanding." (ibid.) Hence, the focus here is on the emotional needs or psychological temperament as discerned by the individual and a pragmatic view on moral and ethics. In order to make a moral judgement, the individual should be aware of its subjective orientation and emotions.

Modern thinkers such as Richard Rorty are representative of the latter perspective, which in contemporary philosophy is the heir of existentialism, known as 'pragmatic philosophy' or 'expressive individualism.' Rorty stipulates the senselessness of the search for transcendent knowledge or truth. As an alternative, he proposes an

[e]difying philosophy [that] aims at continuing a conversation rather than at discovering truth [...] and thus the cultural role of the edifying philosopher is to help us avoid the self-deception which comes from believing that we know ourselves by knowing a set of objective facts. (Rorty 1980: 373)

John Rawls represents the first outlook, where abstract principles of legal or political philosophy are examined to arrive at a convenient and universally justifiable rationalization of "equal rights for everyone squared with the equal liberty of everyone." (Gress 1998:460) Its philosophical tool is moral rationalism, and it stipulates that if people were provided with a universally valid ethics, they would in an ideal setting acknowledge its truth and consequently follow its logic, independently of irrational human traits such as compassion, envy, devotion, or spontaneity. Where the rights of man as formulated by liberalism was concerned with protecting

the individual from oppression, the modern liberalism of Rawls constructs a conceptual model where the principles of justice are equivalent to those that could be chosen by a rational agent "situated behind a veil of ignorance." (Rawls 1971:136) In order to guarantee an outcome of justice, the rational agent is ignorant of any prior characteristics that constitutes an individual situated in the real world; status, talents, preferences and ability, "what his conception of the good or his aims in life will be, what his temperament will be or what kind of economic, political, cultural or social order he will inhabit." (MacIntyre 1985:247) Behind this 'veil of ignorance', a rational agent will delineate a just distribution of goods, "in *any* social order in terms of two principles and a rule for allocating priorities when the two principles conflict."⁶³ (ibid.) Rawls' philosophical premise that a rational agent would choose just principles of justice and liberty can be deemed invalid for two reasons; first, an individual deprived of any preferences or knowledge of the culture he is accustomed to, would not choose these principles of justice founded on a devotion to liberty, but out of fear and uncertainty; in a word: security. Second, as Charles Taylor points out, Rawls proposal that we evolve a notion of justice starting with merely a 'thin theory of the good' is philosophically incoherent:

If we are to articulate what underlies these intuitions [that make us recognize the principles of justice as good] we would start spelling out a very "thick" theory of the good. To say that we don't "need" this to develop our theory of justice turns out to be highly misleading. We don't have to spell it out, but we have to draw on the sense of the good that we have here in order to decide what are adequate principles of justice. (Taylor 1992:89)

The chief obstacle to a scientific, universal and rational analysis of justice is the individual. Unfortunately, it is not the rationalist individual of the Enlightenment, endowed with pure reason and calm objectivity, but the individual that is culturally socialised, with convictions, judgments, and attitudes that are influenced by varied messengers of social meaning – family, work, school, neighbourhood, church, and community. What obstructs abstract liberalism is the individual burdened with "excess meanings. The Cartesian discipline aimed to unburden it, reduce the self to mind, and then persuade it to submit to an order in the form of procedure and techniques.

⁶³ The first principle is: "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all." The second principle is: "Social economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged, consistent with the joint saving principle, and (b) attached to offices and parties open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity." Internally, the first principle has precedence over the second, and justice over efficiency. Conclusively, Rawls stipulates that "all social primary goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured." (Rawls 1971 302-03)

Accordingly, the self had first to purge itself of the beliefs that were the source of its errors – and of its identity.” (Wolin 2001:80).

John Rawls theory of justice is in essence a Kantian declaration of the individual’s ability to arrive rationally at a set of universal, moral principles. However, as I interpret Rawls, in order to do so, the individual must be depleted of all characteristics that constitute human nature except bare rationality. I therefore perceive his theory as the logical result of the Enlightenment understanding of morality as a denouncement to the predicaments generated by the selfish individual, and that “the content of morality came to be largely equated with altruism.” (MacIntyre 1985:229) The concurrent philosophical idea of man as inherently egoistic by nature – as proposed by Hobbes – provided for the belief that altruism provided by the state becomes necessary to combat individual selfishness. As MacIntyre points out – given that selfish interest drives man, altruism is logically impossible, and when it takes place, it is inexplicable. (ibid.)

3.4.3 The Creation of the Innately Selfish Individual

What bias then, is now misleading us? I am suggesting that it is an unbridled, exaggerated individualism, taken for granted as much by the left as by the right – an unrealistic acceptance of competitiveness as central to human nature. People not only *are* selfish and greedy, they hold psychological and philosophical theories which tell them they *ought* to be selfish and greedy. (Midgley 2002:164)

The selfish individual has been adopted by sociobiologists through the idea of the selfish gene; the predisposition to maximize one’s own gene representation in future generations.⁶⁴ Mary Midgley, who critically exposes the illogical logic of ‘philosophical science’, explains the irrationality of the commonly assumed theory of selfishness:

The fact that ‘selfishness’ in its ordinary sense makes things much worse. To widen the imputation of selfishness is to alter people’s view of the human race. This widening had of course already been deliberately undertaken by various thinkers who have developed theories of psychological egoism, and had given a special political function by Hobbes and his followers in social-contract theory. People in society were then held not to have any motive in their interactions other than self-interest. If this bizarre story had been true, the notion of selfishness could never have arisen. (Midgley 2002:136)

⁶⁴ Richard Dawkins, the author of *The Selfish Gene*, provides an illuminating example; “we, and all other animals are machines created by our genes [...] If you wish [...] to build a society in which individuals co-operate generously towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish.” (Dawkins 1976:2-3) Likewise, altruism is described as calculating behaviour. Edward O. Wilson claims that altruism is “ultimately selfish. The ‘altruist’ expects reciprocation from society for himself or his closest relatives. His good behaviour is calculating, often in a wholly conscious way.” (Wilson 1978:155)

The argument set forth here, is that the rationalization of human nature has contributed to a view of man as naturally indisposed of virtue, and in order to provide 'happiness' for man, society needs to be purged of conventional restraints. This organizing principle, labelled 'triumph of the therapeutic' by Christopher Lasch and 'emotivism' by Alasdair MacIntyre, is derivative of the faith in science and clinical rationality.⁶⁵ The social disciplines that support this faith are psychoanalysis, psychology, educational pedagogy and sociology.⁶⁶ No "non-anthropocentric good", not anything that is transcendentally external to the individual perception of goods, no 'reactionary conventionality' are accepted as moral guidance in the pursuit of 'happiness' and 'self-realization.' (Taylor 1992:507) However, as described by Lasch, 'happiness' is not a prominent feature in modern society;

Plagued by anxiety, depression, vague discontents, a sense of inner emptiness, the "psychological man" of the twentieth century seeks neither individual self-aggrandizement nor spiritual transcendence but peace of mind, under conditions that increasingly militate against it. Therapists, not priests or popular preachers of self-help or models of success like the captains of industry, become his principal allies in the struggle for composure; he turns to them in the hope of achieving the modern equivalent of salvation, "mental health." Therapy has established itself as the successor both to rugged individualism and religion; but this does not mean that the "triumph of the therapeutic" has become a religion in its own right. Therapy constitutes antireligion, not always to be sure because it adheres to rational explanation or scientific methods of healing, as its practitioners would have us to believe, but because modern society "has no future" and therefore gives no thought to anything beyond its immediate needs. (Lasch 1991:13)

In this scenario, the vernacular of morality and politics becomes reduced to relativist subjectivism and self-preferential talk of 'values.' Where Aristotle and the ancients understood passions in their relevance to virtue, and the Enlightenment's endeavor was to submit it to reason alone, modernity increasingly surrenders passions to emotions; we are to *feel* what is wrong or right, submitting our source of normative authority to fluctuating moods and desires.⁶⁷ As portrayed by Charles Taylor;

⁶⁵ The expression employed by Lasch originates from Philip Rieff (1966) *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. New York: Norton

⁶⁶ Considering the scientific community itself, the following sentiments of Albert Einstein is representative of a scientifically naturalistic attitude of mind. He states: "Scientific research can reduce superstition by encouraging people to think and view things in terms of cause and effect [...] This firm belief, a belief bound up with deep feeling, in a superior mind that reveals itself in the world of experience, represents my conception of God. In common parlance this may be described as *'pantheistic'*. Denominational traditions I can only consider historically and psychologically; they have no other significance for me." (Einstein 1954: 262)

⁶⁷ An extreme example of the radical Enlightenment's view on virtue and justice is provided by Marquis de Sade: (nihilism pre-dating constructivism and relativism) "Justice has no real existence, it is the deity of every passion. So let us abandon our belief in this fiction, it no more exists that does the God of whom fools believe in the image: there is no God in this world, neither is there virtue, neither is there justice; there is nothing good, useful, or necessary but our passions, nothing merits to be respected but their effects. (From Marquis de Sade's *Juliette*. Quoted in Hunter 1991:313)

To find the meaning to us of 'our job, social class, family and social roles', we are invited to ask questions like this: 'in what way are our values, goals, and aspirations being invigorated or violated by our present life system? How many parts of our personality can we live out, and what parts are we suppressing? How do we *feel* about our way of living in the world at any given time?' (Taylor 1992:507)

What both outlooks of the Enlightenment embody, is in my opinion a theoretical presupposition of the individual and society that signifies a detachment from culture and practical politics. The notion of the selfish individual is perhaps the gravest, since this holds that there can objectively be no genuine action which is good in itself, untainted by some vicarious or cynical motive. Knowledge has become a rational goal in itself, disconnected from the Aristotelian idea that it is in the nature of the soul to "reach out through contemplation to something greater than itself; knowledge simply was that contemplation." (Midgley 2002:99)

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Cruel ages are put on their guard against Sentimentality, feckless and idle ones against Respectability, lecherous ones against Puritanism, and whenever all men are really hastened to be slaves or tyrants, we make Liberalism the prime bogey – C. S. Lewis

The Consumerist Society

Private life is so active in democratic times, so agitated, so filled with desires and work, that hardly any energy or leisure remains to each man for political life. (DA II, 4.2 p. 643)

The development of modern democracies in the West reveals Tocqueville's elaborations as substantial and relevant; the governance of economic effectiveness in the minds of the governed and the governors does not provide a satisfactory guide for the configuration of a political order that allows democracy to realize its fullest potential. Centralization that is primarily motivated by goals of administrative and bureaucratic efficiency may increase revenue in the short run, but in perspective its effect may contribute to a passive and indifferent citizenry, relieved of wearisome and time-consuming political participation. Jack Lively posed the uncomfortable question over forty years ago whether Western societies are in danger of becoming existential welfare states, where a well-meaning paternal bureaucracy relieves us from responsibility, while its citizenry inactively approves at periodic intervals through the voting franchise. (Lively 1962:222) The political vote is increasingly becoming tantamount to a rational and economic exchange of support for financial gains, the citizens' relationship to the polity that of the consumer to the economy. The political is surrendering to consumerism and economic rationality; economic models of analysis are the favoured tools to understand politics, where interest rates and the stock market has become the barometer to measure political wisdom.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The psychological egoism of Thomas Hobbes has been amalgamated with the rational actor of economic language, rendering that the motivation behind individual behaviour is purely competitive and maximizing. An example of this view is brought by M. T. Ghiselin; "The evolution of society fits the Darwinian paradigm in its most individualistic form. The economy of nature is competitive from beginning to end. Understand that economy, and how it works, and the underlying reasons for social phenomena are manifest. They are the means by which one organism gains some advantage to the detriment of another. No hint of genuine charity ameliorates our vision of society, once sentimentalism has been laid aside. What passes for co-operation turns out to be a mixture of opportunism and exploitation." (Ghiselin 1974:274)

The oracles that provide insights of 'sound' politics are today economists and stockbrokers, while the GNP represents the measurable expression of political accomplishment.

Sovereignty of the people as a philosophical notion of justice has collapsed into "theories of 'rational choice' and 'voter preferences', while voter surveys become indistinguishable from consumer research." (Wolin 2001:571) Equality of conditions as a normative determinant among the majority has in its economic adaptation become the tyranny of the minorities. Self-proclaimed or politically defined minorities are now the principal advocates in demand for democratic justice; political rights within the West are no longer defined in the perspective of the universal individual, but of the specific minority group. By classifying oneself as a member of a minority who claims 'just distribution' referring to the principle of equality and unjust treatment, one can demand some form of compensation for this injustice, usually measurable in financial terms. Only imagination sets limitation to what defines a minority – gender, ethnicity, geography, income, occupation, sexual preference, disability, education, etc. – and given that bona fide equality is unattainable and that the notion of 'justice' is an infinitely flexible term in democracies, the only restrictions are determined by economic productivity.⁶⁹ The logic of economic justice completes its full circle.

Equality has become tantamount to an abstract notion of justice; the justification used by the various interest groups (including political parties) is a reference to an intangible and 'imagined' conception of a fixed, 'median' equality that the given interest group appeals to. This equilibrium of justice is attained by defining one's own minority in comparison to the defined adversary that possess the unfair advantages that this minority is deprived of. Therefore, women define injustice in comparison with men, homosexuals compare themselves with heterosexuals, the poor with the rich, immigrants with the general population, children with adults, and so on.⁷⁰ There is always someone that is comparatively 'better off,' and this conflict with an unrestrained definition of equality.

⁶⁹ Economic analysis demonstrates that significant increase in government consumption and expenditure throughout the 20th century within the West – where welfare reforms constitutes the chief expense – occurred not during recessions, but during times of rapid economic growth and relative political stability. Furthermore, as the British economist Julian Le Grand showed, expensive welfare reforms in the West are not – as one might expect – chiefly directed at the poor, but at the voting middle-class. (The Economist 1997:25)

⁷⁰ Of course, this does not imply that *all* 'members' of these 'minorities' perceive themselves or their rights as described here, but rather that this notion is habitually employed in a self-referential manner. Furthermore, I do not deny that these traits constitute a significant influence on the identity of individuals; what I am trying to point out, is that the different traits on the private or social level tend to become 'politicized'. In a Tocquevillian perspective, this does not necessarily imply something negative: Tocqueville condemned racism and discrimination of others solely based on their given characteristics. However, there is a substantial difference between the claims of equal treatment *as a human being* to the claim of special treatment *as a member of minority*.

Forcing Democratic Man to be Free?

I know of no safe repository of the ultimate power of society but the people. And if we think them not enlightened enough, the remedy is not to take power from them, but to inform them by education. – Thomas Jefferson

All ideologies originate from philosophical ideas about man and society. An ideology does not only systematise and coordinate these ideas into a coherent scheme that explains man and society, but also advocates *how* man and society should be organized. We can label ideologies that hold a positive view of rights and liberty, i.e. propose concrete ideas of action executed through the state to achieve their vision of justice and liberty in an active manner, as authoritarian.⁷¹ This view is recognizable in Rousseau's notion of 'forcing men to be free', meaning, that though this collides with their interests and virtue, they must be forced to act for their good, given the fact that they are not (yet) aware of it. The practical consequences of this theory are most visible in the (former) Communist countries. Through command, humankind can be forced to follow particular paths of conduct and thought that correspond to the given authority's notion of what is for their own good and *ipso facto* according to their 'real' will. (Lively 1962:224) Tocqueville's notion of negative liberty proclaims that no authority – though it can provide the constitutional framework for it – can implement individual liberty unless the individual is given the opportunity to freely exercise and develop an independent idea of it. It is in this context that Tocqueville's emphasis on participation in public life must be understood:

His deepest fears for the future were embodied in one of his most striking images, that of the individual as 'a colonist' in society, enjoying its benefits, following its rules, obeying its government, but without wish or hope of affecting or controlling the terms on which his social life was conducted and without the ability to stamp a personal pattern on his relations with others. (Lively 1962:225)

Tocqueville recognized that materialism and individualism are salient features of modern democracy. Their influence upon democratic man is located in the economy, administrative bureaucracy, culture and sociological arrangement, as well as in institutions oriented toward

⁷¹ This characteristic may seem extreme. Apart from 'pure' anarchism or libertarianism, most ideologies have some notion of a governmental state that reflects principles of just organization both in its form and towards society. The ideologies of National Socialism and Communism are obvious examples of totalitarian regimes that were justified by notions of justice and liberty for man. In the political system of the West, it is practically difficult to define a clear-cut line between ideologies that promote a 'pure' positive notion of justice and liberty through the state versus those that are inspired by 'natural rights' or traditional liberalism, and hence a negative notion of liberty and rights. The elaboration above aims to illustrate a fundamental difference of principle, and while these principles are recognizable in the practical politics of the West, no political movement within the moderate political climate can be attributed as pure proponents of either view.

freedom. It is convenient to advise that men should exercise intellectual and political independence to attain a sense of freedom through social and political experience, which will both develop the virtuous potentialities as well as a more profound perception of their own society and polity. However, every proposal that aims at achieving this must be founded in a tangible political reality in order to subsist. The Gordian knot is how to develop a genuine political culture in a society where the strongest preferences of its citizenry are economic, and where its focus of interest and concern are centred zealously towards the private and economic and not the public sphere. This underlines the paradox of liberty; the individual is free to enter the economic world of finance, industry or commerce. This is what we may define as the objective pursuit of interests. The other sphere is the subjective and private: our freedom to cultivate the concerns and pleasures of private and social life. The third sphere, the political and public, has developed into an arena where the concept of 'rational economic behaviour' has become the paradigm, where competition for public subsidies and legalized advantage is the *sine qua non*. "Politics serves to transmute, materialized interests into immaterial ideals, which can be directed at divided and largely privatized selves in the hope of attracting both 'material contributions' from 'private' citizens and ideal support from 'public' citizens." (Wolin 2001:414). There are no guarantees that freedom of speech will hinder the proliferation of nonsense, that the freedom to act hinders subjection of others or that democratic man's primary source of leisure will not be intellectually degenerating 'reality-TV', a rather depressing tribute to the blissful ignorance of sensationalism. The rights of man offer no assurance for its proper use, and a democratically elected legislative is not by its own force a guarantee against unjust laws. Religion can be misused to promote fundamentalism and hostility, freedom of the press does not necessarily generate a public arena of thoughtful communication instead of mindless, ready-made digested information. The motivations of the citizenry to participate in the public sphere is not always based on a sense of civic duty or intellectual curiosity, and 'deliberation' in the public debate is no warrant for reason and common sense; interests and passions *are* inherently human traits and they influence the outcome of political debate. (Hereth 1986:169)

Nevertheless, these limitations do not invalidate the principles of liberalism; rather they signify that liberalism and its principles and goals, "like those of any structure of political doctrines", do not guarantee that its outcome is sensible politics. (ibid.) Modern liberalism has

become detached from its philosophical and cultural heritage, by turning to the state as an instrument in the imposition of justice and equality.

In an attempt to restrict the scope of the market, liberals have therefore turned to the state. But the remedy often proves to be worse than the disease. The replacement of informal types of association by formal systems of socialization and control weakens social trust, undermines the willingness both to assume responsibility for oneself and to hold others accountable for their actions, destroys respect for authority, and thus turns to be self-defeating. (Lasch 1996:98)

Material well-being is an important feature in the overall well-being of people's lives. Material well-being is not solely restricted to material comfort, but to education, infrastructure, technological innovation and health-care. In the achievement of these ends, capitalism effectively serves as the mode of production that provides the 'best' way to accomplish material ends and prosperity. It is rather naive and utopian to propose that people should devote their lives to a *vita contemplativa*, intellectually detached from the 'conventional' necessities of material life; what needs to be addressed is not the material standard of living in the West, but materialism as a dominant way of thinking; a mindset. Tocqueville's heritage is that we must look for democracy's strengths to remedy democracy's weaknesses; the principle of equality *is* just, but we must have clear notions of what democracy aims at achieving politically. A Tocquevillian perspective on democracy apprehends that its problems originate not from deficiency of proficient arrangements, but from the diversity of inability of ends. For democracy to function as a political regime, it must have clearly defined limits.

The Necessity of Freedom and Virtue

Whenever I encountered in our forefathers any of those manly virtues which are most necessary in our time have almost disappeared, I have highlighted them: true independence of mind, high ambition, faith in ourselves and in a cause. (*The Old Regime and the Revolution*: 1998:87)

Ideally, in order for a political regime to function optimally, there should be a high correlation between the normative values it postulates and the normative values of the culture of which it is embedded in. Certainly, there is a high degree of support in the West concerning the central principles that democracy encompasses; equal political rights, respect for fundamental human rights, tolerance and pluralism are maxims that remain incontestable values. However, I think that there is a growing disparity between the practical realities of Western democracy internally

and how it aspires to present itself externally as a universal political regime based on justice. First, I believe that there is an inconsistency between the abstract and universal principles democracy wishes to symbolize and how the political regime is actually perceived among its citizenry in the West. Given the current system of financial entitlements, what matters for democratic man is not so much estimation as a human being with indissoluble political rights, and the freedom to accomplish one's potentialities as a political being, but respect and rights as members of a particular minority. I believe that there is a worrying political tendency within the West; this concerns democratic man's relationship to the political within the *politeia*. The identity of democratic man as a political being is gradually evaporating, and the relationship *with* the political is increasingly becoming a relationship *to* the political. By this, I mean that democratic man's identity is steadily drained of the political and it becomes something *outside* him, something that he relates *to*, an externality where the political and economic spheres have amalgamated. It is becoming a relationship based on reason and interests, not values and identification. Thus, the political has become means to an end, and not an end in itself.

Tocqueville supports the idea that men are politically equal by nature, and that political equality is a necessary basis of justice. Therefore, Tocqueville, somewhat reluctantly, acknowledges that the just commonwealth is undeniably democratic;

It is natural to believe that what most satisfies the regard of this creator and preserver of men is not the singular prosperity of some, but the greatest well-being of all: what seems to me decadence is therefore progress in his eyes; what wounds me is agreeable to him. Equality is perhaps less elevated; but is more just, and its justice makes for its greatness and its beauty. (DA II, 4.8 p. 674)

However, in order for democratic man to realize his potential, the justice of equality is not satisfactory by its own force; he must actively exercise his opportunities for freedom. The freedom that Tocqueville emphasises in particular is freedom of the mind, which necessitates not only absence of bureaucratically minute restrictions, but also the existence of alternative and atypical thinking. Jack Lively elaborates that

The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities that makes it seem inconceivable that other ways are viable, that removes the sense that there is an outside. It is not feelings or commitments that will render the a man free, but thoughts, reasoned thoughts. Feelings are largely formed and informed by convention. Real differences come from difference in thought and fundamental principle. Much in democracy conduces to the assault in awareness in difference. (Lively 1962:249)

It is expedient to blame politicians for their insufficiencies and failings to satisfy the expectations of the citizenry. However, the politicians in Western democracies are overall a representative reflection of the public will, and the opinions and convictions that reign in politics are in general those of the electorate. As a result, I believe that what calls for greater attention in the debate on democracy are the underlying thoughts and ideas that support the current political system, and an attentiveness of the historical and cultural heritage of the West. The philosophical traditions that views man either as an innately selfish individual or as a purely emotional being has in this regard contributed to a detachment from and disenchantment about our past.

After having believed ourselves capable of transforming ourselves, we believe ourselves incapable of reforming ourselves; after having had an excessive pride, we have fallen into a humility that is no less excessive; we believed ourselves capable of everything, today we believe ourselves capable of nothing, and we like to believe that from now on struggle and effort will be useless and that our blood, our muscles, and our nerves will always be stronger than our will and virtue. This is simply the great malady of the time, a malady completely opposed to that of our fathers. (Letter to Arthur de Gobineau, December 20, 1853 Boesche 1985:303)

Democratic man has increasingly become a political nomad in the *politeia* that he dwells in, benefiting from its profits, lawfully obliging its rules and regulations, faithfully abiding to its opinions, but faithless in democracy's normative dimension or simply indifferent about influencing the conditions that these seemingly autonomous and self-directed forces wield on his existence as a political being. He has been brought up to believe that he is the result of social forces outside and beyond him, and that his identity is to be located in externalities and that his individuality is the sum of these objects.

While Tocqueville cautioned against this modern idea of individualism as well as the philosophically interrelated idea of the conform masses, he also rejected the idea of the naturally noble man and the obstruction of his nobleness by corrupted society; the democratic institutions requires active attention from its citizenry, and this attention must be rooted in social mores and a sense of obligation. Democratic man cannot look to society to change himself, but must look within himself in order to change society. Most importantly, in a Tocquevillian perspective, true diversity is not quantitatively measured by defined 'life-styles' or minorities; what is of the essence to a vibrant democracy is intellectual freedom, diversity and audacity.

Freedom of the mind requires not only, or even especially, the absence of legal constraints but the presence of alternative thoughts. The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities, that makes it seem inconceivable that other ways are viable, that removes the sense that there is an outside. It is not feelings or commitments that will render a man free, but thoughts, reasoned thoughts. Feelings are largely formed and informed by convention. Real differences comes form difference in thought and fundamental principle. (Bloom 1988:249)

However, the prospects are regrettably ominous; liberalism began with worries about mixing ultimate moral questions with politics, and a desire to limit government and make it responsible to the people. If we are to take Tocqueville's worries seriously, we could say that it is about to end in a system that cares less about such things.

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