Journal of Theoretical Politics 8(3): 383–414

TOCQUEVILLE'S ANALYSIS OF BELIEF IN A TRANSCENDENT ORDER, ENLIGHTENED INTEREST AND DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Popular and scholarly appraisals of recently 'emerging' democracies often equate privatization and a market economy with self-government. Yet an analysis made 150 years ago by Alexis de Tocqueville of another 'new world' – the American democratic experiment – suggests a much deeper foundation of mores, institutions and consciousness must inform self-governing societies. His analysis shows that the individualism and materialism of the current democratic scene may even undermine the foundations of self-government. In contrast to our contemporary understanding of interest calculations as the basis for democracy, Tocqueville finds that religion is chief among American political institutions that maintain liberal democracy. He examines the foundations on which democratic theory and practice depend by studying the 'simple ideas' taken from America's religious traditions and their role in public life. He examines the relationship between the teachings of revealed religion – the first law of Torah to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself, and the Christian belief in an immortal soul – and the consciousness and institutional framework required to avoid 'democratic despotism'. This illuminates the ideas that could serve as an ontology for self-governing societies.

KEY WORDS • Tocqueville • covenant • federalism • religion • self-government

At the close of the 20th century, the 'free world' heralds the emergence of 'new democracies' in the formerly Soviet-dominated countries of Eastern Europe.[1] Proclaiming these events not only as a triumph of capitalist reality

1. After visiting Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia, July and August 1990, assessing the legal-constitutional issues, economic environment, and education and training issues influencing journalism in these countries, Dennis et al. (1990) find 'The greatest needs for Western aid involve the market economy and privatization, as well as management training and experience.' The political, cultural and social functions of 'free media' are inextricably linked to advertising and the market-place. See also recent articles in *Harvard Business Review*, such as Fordham University Business Professor Vladimir Kvint's 'Don't Give up on Russia' (1994), which state that recent elections were not a vote against capitalism, but a reaction against 'shock therapy'. Westerners should maintain their involvement in Russia's transition – as investors: 'Russia is on sale now, and those who arrive late will have to pay more.' Lester Thurow (1992) explains the meaning of the changes seen in the last decade of the 20th century: 'The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 marked the end of the old contest between capitalism and communism; the integration of the European Common Market on 1 January 1993 will mark the beginning of a new economic contest.... Democracy and capital-

over Marxist theory, Western commentators have accorded the Cold War 'victory' to the forces of privatization and market economies. Although Cold War economics were unsustainable in the Soviet bloc, the passage from economic upheaval to nascent democratic political institutions has yet to be negotiated. Such commentaries mistakenly assume that self-government, liberty and a democratic redistribution of political power are the inevitable denouement of economic disarray. If anything, history suggests that human freedom and self-government rarely result from economic crisis.

By naively equating capitalism and democracy, and simplistically conceiving the 'emerging' new world order as merely a global market-place, we confuse the actual requirements for self government – limited, distributed and shared constitutional authority, an enterprising consciousness of self-organization and a concern for humanity's significance that surpasses material claims – with banking, the information 'super highway', and the apportioning of benefits to coordinated interests. Simplistic Western responses not only misrepresent self-governing institutions, but also inaccurately portray the new world citizen as a one-dimensional rational calculator – a depiction too narrow for either democratic theory or practice.

Contemporary models of democracy confound the self-consciousness of self-governing citizens with the self-interest of consumers in nascent and mature democracies alike. By thus removing the study of ontology from the study of the polity, contemporary social science hinders our ability to analyze or realize 'democracy' – a self-governing community, transcending coordinated interest groups. To address the practical and theoretical need for more complete models of self-government, it is instructive to consider the science of existence instructing the early American experience of democracy. Such an inquiry, while taking into account America's peculiarities, could enable us to generalize from this practical application of theory in a setting once itself considered 'a world quite new' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 26). More than a century and a half ago, Alexis de Tocqueville observed the American experience in self-government and provided a theoretical account of such scope.

> In that land the great experiment of the attempt to construct society upon a new basis was to be made by civilized man; and it was there, for the first time, that theories hitherto unknown, or deemed impracticable, were to exhibit a spectacle for which the world had not been prepared by the history of the past. (Tocqueville, 145, 1: 26).

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ism faced off against dictatorship and communism. Suddenly, the threat disappeared. The Berlin Wall came down; East Germany and West Germany were united; democracy and capitalism arrived in the formerly communist countries of middle Europe and then in Eastern Europe. Democracy and capitalism had won.' In contrast to commentaries that indicate economic aid as the primary need for emerging democracy, see Antoni Z. Kaminski (1992, 1994), who argues that a consciousness of self-government as well as economic change must occur for a successful transition to liberal democratic policies.

By understanding America as an experiment, Tocqueville extracted a theoretical framework – 'a new science of politics, for a new world' – that continues to speak to contemporary democratic theorists (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 12).

In the new world that Tocqueville encountered, the Federalists' multi-tiered framework, a form of limited, distributed constitutional authority, had remedied one obstacle to a practical experiment in democracy – the 'republican disease' – majority tyranny. Yet, institutional design alone could not prevent all manifestations of human dominance. In the American case, strategies of domination had been transformed, but, as Tocqueville found, these new mutations remained obstacles to self-government. Individualism and materialism, two corrupting factors of democracy, ushered in 'a new physiognomy of servitude' – 'democratic despotism'. Staples of today's new world order, individualism and materialism, are currently misapprehended as ciphers of democracy. In contrast, Tocqueville argues that these habits of the heart nurture despotism, not democracy, heralding not self-rule but self-ruin.

For Tocqueville, materialism and individualism signify a profound spiritual anxiety attending de-ontological liberalism's notion of freedom. Tocqueville's theory traces the source of a 'free' people's malaise to lib-eral theory's conception of the individual – a being without natural ties to others, who forms community on the basis of ephemeral or expedient interests, and who attaches no ontologically based obligations or inherent significance to this or any action. This interpretation of the human being and social order accords significance to nothing beyond human invention, denying the existence of transcendent meaning.

Observing the new world of the mid-19th century, Tocqueville assessed this new skepticism, moored in the heart of Enlightenment thought. Transcendent belief succumbed to reason, science and rational calculus. 'Enlightenment', no longer pertaining to an enlightened self, was reduced to an adjective modifying our interests. Finding the seeds of democratic despotism in the core of liberal views of the individual, Tocqueville reconsiders the role of transcendent belief and moral order in self-governing communities. Without a belief in purpose beyond mere existence, Tocqueville thought democratic people would not long maintain their grasp on the institutions of self-government. Religion, he contends, must play a role in the new science that instructs self-governing citizens. It is within this context and against this tide and type of 'Enlightenment' that Tocqueville writes.

> [B]y a strange coincidence of events, religion has been for a time entangled with those institutions which democracy destroys; and it is not infrequently brought to reject the equality which it loves, and to curse as a foe that cause of liberty whose efforts it might hallow by its alliance.... The religionists are the enemies of liberty, and the friends of

> liberty attack religion; the high-minded and the noble advocate bondage, and the meanest and most servile preach independence; honest and enlightened citizens are opposed to all progress, while men without patriotism and without principle put themselves forward as the apostles of civilization and intelligence.... [Has] man always inhabited a world like the present,... where virtue is without genius, and genius without honor; where the love of order is confused with a taste for oppression, and the holy cult of freedom with a contempt of law; where the light thrown by conscience on human action is dim, and where nothing seems to be any longer forbidden or allowed, honorable or shameful, false or true? (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 12–14)

Tocqueville's analysis challenges us to consider the moral foundations required for democracy, and to examine the institutional framework that prevents the entanglement of religion and politics, leading religion to be foe, not friend, of liberty. This essay will explore the ontology of Tocqueville's new science, and will examine particularly his conclusion 'that liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 12). This conclusion raises three important practical and theoretical questions for the study of politics. First, does liberalism's particular recasting of self-interest – 'self-interest rightly understood' – sufficiently develop and sustain concern for one's fellow citizens, and go beyond the production of common goods to create a self-governing *community*? Second, does our contemporary model of citizens as rational actors adequately represent the democratic characteristics needed to sustain self-government? Third, if transcendent belief does inform self-governing consciousness, how do citizens maintain inviolate beliefs while simultaneously assenting to values of tolerance and freedom?

Tocqueville observed that 'nothing in history [is] more worthy of sorrow and pity' than a new world experiencing a democratic revolution 'without that concomitant change in the laws, ideas, customs, and morals which [is] necessary to render such a revolution beneficial' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 8–14). Yet no simple formula reunites human action with transcendent principles to produce a new, self-governing world. As Tocqueville describes our need for fixed, foundational principles in a world of cosmic uncertainty, 'the difficulty appears to be without parallel' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 22). Tocqueville cannot provide certain knowledge of God, but his inquiry tells us much about our skeptical world and the enduring issues raised by deontological liberalism.

Philosophical Method in the Liberal Context: Skepticism and the New Science of Politics

Twentieth century philosophical and theoretical models of democracy are constructed on the legacy of the shift from revelation to reason, a legacy Tocqueville believed failed to insure freedom, leading more readily to

democratic despotism. Because Tocqueville identifies skepticism, concomitant with Enlightenment-based liberal theory, as the fundamental problem facing the age of democracy, he approaches 'solutions' to the dilemmas raised by cosmic uncertainty within this same context. By exploring Tocqueville's new science of politics for this new age of skepticism, we can understand more precisely the dilemmas caused by unbelief, the manner in which religion addresses these dilemmas, the problems raised by religion in the context of democracy and the multi-tiered institutional framework that might mitigate the problem of religious intolerance.

In America, Tocqueville observed the results of de-ontological liberalism's deliverance from doctrine and tradition as a condition for political freedom: a new belief, 'the philosophical method of the Americans'.

> Almost all the inhabitants of the United States use their minds in the same manner, and direct them according to the same rules; that is to say, without ever having taken the trouble to define the rules, they have a philosophical method common to the whole people.
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> To evade the bondage of system and habit, of family maxims, class opinions, and, in some degree, of national prejudices; to accept tradition only as a means of information, and existing facts only as a lesson to be used in doing otherwise and doing better; to seek the reason of things for oneself, and in oneself alone; to tend to results without being bound to means, and to strike through the form to the substance – such are the principal characteristics of what I shall call the philosophical method of the Americans. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 3).

Tocqueville marveled at the Americans' philosophy of self-styled freedom in which they declared the uncertainty of the moral order, while simultaneously proclaiming certainty in their ability to control the material world.

> The practice of Americans leads their minds to other habits, to fixing the standard of their judgment in themselves alone. As they perceived that they succeed in resolving without assistance all the little difficulties which their practical life presents, they readily conclude that everything in the world may be explained, and that nothing in it transcends the limits of understanding. Thus they fall to denying what they cannot comprehend; which leaves them but little faith for whatever is extraordinary and an almost insurmountable distaste for whatever is supernatural. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 4).

The liberal skeptic, while admitting cosmic uncertainty, embraces, illogically, a myth of human omniscience. Daily experience would seem to contradict the belief that destiny can be controlled by human will, but astonishingly, this individual not only denies human limitations, but embraces this illogical philosophy and the dissonance between it and experience. Abandoning hope and choice, the liberal skeptic renounces personal responsibility to fate. By thus rejecting free will tethered in a moral universe, these Americans, Tocqueville observes, abdicated choice to chance.[2]

2. Free will, as a Christian concept, affirms choice over predestination, but such choice is not assumed to be without cost.

> I am aware that many of my contemporaries maintain that nations are never their own masters here below, and that they necessarily obey some insurmountable and unintelligent power, arising from anterior events, from their race, or from the soil and climate of their country. Such principles are false and cowardly.... Providence has not created mankind entirely independent or entirely free. It is true that around every man a fatal circle is traced beyond which he cannot pass; but within the wide verge of that circle he is powerful and free; as it is with man, so with communities. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 352)

Disbelief, Tocqueville concluded, promotes arrogance and despair, laying the foundation for immense individual anxiety, constant agitation and collective paralysis. Consequently, citizens fail to preserve their democratic institutions and forfeit the means of self-government.

> In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest circumstances that the world affords; it seemed to me as if a cloud habitually hung upon their brow, and I thought them serious and almost sad, even in their pleasures.... It is strange to see with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue their own welfare, and to watch the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 144)

This improbable mix of arrogance and despair, agitation and paralysis, ambiguity and omniscience results in three significant political concerns: (1) individualism replaces a relational conception of the self, resulting in isolation and alienation, reducing the bonds of intersecting interests; (2) materialism quells cosmic anxiety, at the price of diminishing further our concern for others beyond their instrumental use; (3) majority opinion supplants religion as transcendent belief, providing new grounds for the majority's political dominance. Each of these symptoms of skepticism lays a stone in the path to democratic despotism. Tocqueville provides a detailed analysis of this probable denouement of democracy's providential advance (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 6).

Radical equality - for Tocqueville, democracy's chief characteristic – initiates this predictable course. The equality that foreshadows democratic despotism concerns not only America's social condition and political rights, but also the presumed equal merit of all beliefs and ideas. Of greater significance than the issues raised by democratic individuals' equal social state are the challenges posed by liberalism's de-ontological philosophy. The American's belief in nothing beyond mere existence, coupled with social and political equality's apparently boundless field of opportunity, produces a 'restlessness of spirit amidst prosperity' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 144), promoting attitudes and actions of democratic despotism. By drawing our attention to this facet of equality, Tocqueville extends our concern to the consequences of liberal skepticism, as well as radical individualism. The subject of political inquiry must include not only the coordination problems posed by conditions of equality, but also the more significant challenges caused by the lack of a science of existence, denoted by the equal merits of

all beliefs. This lack of moral authority renders each person sovereign but insignificant, independent but weak, reducing ideas to a sort of 'intellectual dust' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 7).

Unbelief, Equality, and Political Freedom: Individualism, Materialism and Majority Dominance

Liberal theory teaches that political freedom requires an admission of human fallibility and consequent limits on all human authority. Yet liberal citizens often deny the relationship between humanity's limitations and the obstacles to their mastery of fate. Perhaps the deepest irony that Tocqueville observes in the American practice of liberalism is that cosmic uncertainty requires the admission of human fallibility, but Americans, instead, either replace God with human omniscience or assign ultimate causation to fate. The resulting desire for a tutelary power negates the polity's quest for limits on fallible human authority. Although political philosophy had presented ideas for designing limits to political authority, Tocqueville argues, history had not prepared humanity to know the practice of such theories. Tocqueville finds the key to self-government neither simply in theory nor in the record of the past, but in a new consciousness that makes these theories knowable and practicable. Understanding how the Anglo–American founders could do what history did not predict provides the 'germ of all that is to follow and the key to almost the whole [of Tocqueville's] work' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 29).

Tocqueville recognizes many characteristics of the founders' origins, but none so important as the self-organizing religious orientation that led them to believe they were engaged in an experiment of human self-rule with transcendent meaning. More than metaphor, the Puritan 'errand for God in the wilderness' was an experiment with parameters that relied on interpretations of cause bounded by a clear ontology. To be able to understand the mercurial political world as an experiment, the Puritans required the ordered, absolute parameters of a stable moral world. Tocqueville describes the Puritan approach to their experiment in the wilderness.

> Under their hand, political principles, laws, and human institutions seem malleable, capable of being shaped and combined at will. As they go forward, the barriers which imprisoned society and behind which they were born are lowered; old opinions, which for centuries had been controlling the world, vanish; a course almost without limits, a field without horizon, is revealed; the human spirit rushes forward and traverses them in every direction. But having reached the limits of the political world, the human spirit stops of itself; in fear it relinquishes the need of exploration; it even abstains from lifting the veil of the sanctuary; it bows with respect before truths which it accepts without discussion. (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 45)

Human uncertainty demands political experimentation, but such experimentation depends on a particular logic. If humans are fallible, so are their institutions; institutional design, although it may reduce temporal ignorance, cannot eliminate transcendent uncertainty. Experimentation never leads to perfection and depends on clearly specified parameters to be interpretable. In the America case these parameters were a Christian moral order. Without a moral firmament, anxiety and paralysis undermine the qualities required for self-government. That moral firmament is itself jeopardized by the liberal interpretation of the human being, deepening the trough of human uncertainty to cosmic proportions.

Conceiving the human being as a disconnected individual, without cosmic significance, natural relationships, obligations or interdependencies, liberal theory provides the foundation for 'individualism', not the basis for self-government.

> *Individualism* is a novel expression, to which a novel idea has given birth. Our fathers were only acquainted with *égoisme* (selfishness). Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self, which leads a man to connect everything with himself and to prefer himself to everything in the world. Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. Selfishness originates in blind instinct; individualism proceeds from erroneous judgment more than from depraved feelings; it originates as much in deficiencies of mind as in perversity of heart. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 104)

This picture of the individual governs the citizen's philosophical orientation as well as their actions.

> [N]ot only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 106)

The consequence for the citizen's philosophical orientation is most readily seen in the growth of the majority's moral authority, while individualism's influence on citizen action is most easily observed in the prominence of materialism.

Individualism and Majority Dominance

In the age of skepticism, the moral authority of the majority is derived from two principles of individualism that are harmful to a philosophy of self-government: first, the intelligence of many is greater than the intelligence of one; and, second, the interests of the many are preferable to the interests of the few. These principles tend in themselves to strengthen the majority against the individual to create a power of opinion so great that 'no ob-

stacles exist which can impede or even retard its progress, so as to make it heed the complaints of those whom it crushes upon its path' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 266).

Tocqueville derives the first principle by observing the self-defining individual's sense of isolation and insignificance.

> At periods of equality men have no faith in one another, by reason of their common resemblance; but this very resemblance gives them almost unbounded confidence in the judgment of the public; for it would seem probable that, as they are all endowed with equal means of judging, the greater truth should go with the greater number. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 11)

This 'truth' is difficult to assail since its content reinforces the individual's sense of insignificance.

> When the inhabitant of a democratic country compares himself individually with all those about him, he feels with pride that he is the equal of any one of them; but when he comes to survey the totality of his fellows and to place himself in contrast with so huge a body, he is instantly overwhelmed by the sense of his own insignificance and weakness.... The public, therefore, among a democratic people, has a singular power, which aristocratic nations cannot conceive; for it does not persuade others to its beliefs, but it imposes them and makes them permeate the thinking of everyone by a sort of enormous pressure of the mind of all upon the individual intelligence. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 11)

In this environment of individual isolation and impotence, the power of majority opinion flourishes. Finding no obstacle, majority opinion can reintroduce the seeds of majority tyranny and dominance through law (Allen, 1991). Majority dominance, no longer advanced by unconstrained political equality, returns through the equality of all opinions. If majority opinion is elevated to transcendent significance and legal limits to the majority's political power are reduced, then institutional arrangements that limit majority dominance will fail.

> In the principle of equality I very clearly discern two tendencies; one leading the mind of every man to untried thoughts, the other prohibiting him from thinking at all. And I perceive how, under the dominion of certain laws, democracy would extinguish that liberty of mind to which a democratic social condition is favorable; so that, after having broken all the bondage once imposed on it by ranks or by men, the human mind would be closely fettered to the general will of the greatest number.
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> If the absolute power of a majority were to be substituted by democratic nations for all the different powers that checked or retarded overmuch the energy of individual minds, the evil would only have changed character. Men would not have found the means of independent life; they would simply have discovered... a new physiognomy of servitude. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 12–13)

In a setting of skepticism, religion itself comes to be understood as nothing more than opinion.[3]

3. Interpretations of Tocqueville's writing about religion in America can be divided into two

> Everybody [in America] adopts great numbers of theories, on philosophy, morals, and politics, without inquiry, upon public trust; and if we examine it very closely, it will be perceived that religion itself holds sway there much less than as a commonly received opinion. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 12)

As such, religion can become part of the cycle of tyranny and part of what is disposed of in political upheaval. Religion as popular opinion also provides only a fragile bond for the community, easily manipulated in the cause of related problems of materialism and individualism. The new science cannot utilize religion as only a salutary myth.[4] The problem is without parallel. Most importantly, skepticism, like the materialism and individualism that it causes, is sown in the philosophical orientation of liberal theory.

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schools of thought. One view asserts that Tocqueville offers salutary myth as an extra-legal means of social control, a palliative of majority opinion to redirect the actions of self-interested individuals toward public spirited behavior (Zetterbaum, 1967). A second account maintains that Tocqueville finds a natural inclination for human beings to seek first cause or ultimate significance beyond human endeavor (Zuckert, 1981; Hereth, 1986). This latter view also falls into two categories, those emphasizing the civil religion that Tocqueville discusses and Cynthia Hinckley who claims that Tocqueville focused on revealed religion, more specifically Protestantism (Hinckley, 1990). I begin this paper accepting the view that Tocqueville believes we have a natural desire to understand the ultimate meaning of life. He argues that this urge toward transcendent beliefs can be satisfied by religion, and that this desire and its resolution can protect liberty in democracy. In taking this position as my starting point, I am not arguing, as have some, that Tocqueville either wished to inculcate myths for a mass public or that he intended to restore aristocratic institutions as a bulwark against the democratic tide. Rather than exploring how Tocqueville resolves that to preserve liberty, democratic political communities must, at a minimum, believe human life is sacred, I wish to examine the implications of his conclusion.

4. Tocqueville is often credited with a cynical view of religion in this context (Zetterbaum, 1967). Sanford Kessler (1977) details Tocqueville's specific recommendations for how Christian religions may fit themselves to democratic times. Unlike Zetterbaum's assertion that Tocqueville would accept any religion for its utility in providing fundamental beliefs for democracy, Kessler argues that Tocqueville distinguishes between the primary features of a religion, which were indispensable to its identity, and its secondary characteristics, which could be molded to fit a particular community. Kessel's view is similar to the present analysis in that he credits Tocqueville with a complex argument that shows the reader what is fundamental and, therefore, not malleable, about both religion and a democratic philosophy of liberty and equality. Kessler's conclusion that Tocqueville errs in his analysis of religion's civil counterpart, self-interest rightly understood, and fails to see how a philosophy of enlightened self-interest ushers in an era of materialism and selfishness differs from my conclusion, however. If Tocqueville's discussion of the role of enlightened self-interest and the democratic form of actual religion is understood in the larger context of the *many* institutional arrangements designed to influence the *moeurs* of democratic peoples toward liberty and away from despotism (see also James Ceaser, 1985), one may conclude that the egoism that Tocqueville did fear is not a result of misguided dependence on a right understanding of self-interest, but is indicative of the breakdown of institutional safeguards against democratic despotism – a process of design failure predicted and analyzed in detail by Tocqueville. Kessler concludes that the end of an indirect role for religion in politics may be one cause of America's 'deepening political crisis' (Kessler, 1977: 119, 145–6). He explains that greater direct government

Materialism

The Americans' fear of uncertainty and consequent attempt to bring everything under human control intensifies when they experience the tangible prospects of self-control – when they alone are responsible for the design and use of instruments of self-government.

> When the religion of a people is destroyed, doubt gets hold of the higher powers of the intellect and half paralyzes all the others. Every man accustoms himself to having only confused and changing notions on the subjects of most interest to his fellow creatures and himself. His opinions are ill-defined and easily abandoned; and, in despair of ever solving by himself the hard problems respecting the destiny of man, he ignobly submits to think no more about them. Such a condition cannot but enervate the soul, relax the springs of the will, and prepare a people for servitude. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 22–3)

Instead of expanding the possibilities and unfettering the intellect, unbelief results in circumscribing what humanity imagines. The focus becomes daily survival in material existence.

> [I]n proportion as the light of faith grows dim, the range of man's sight is circumscribed, as if the end and aim of human actions appeared every day to be more within his reach. When men have once allowed themselves to think no more of what is to befall them after life, they readily lapse into that complete and brutal indifference to futurity which is but too comfortable to some propensities of mankind. ... In skeptical ages it is always to be feared, therefore, that men may perpetually give way to their daily casual desires, and that, wholly renouncing whatever cannot be acquired without protracted effort, they may establish nothing great, permanent, and calm. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 158–9)

In this situation of apparently boundless opportunity, anxiety and despair are more likely than hope and freedom. The balm for this affliction, materialism, itself becomes a source of anxiety.

> Their taste for physical gratifications must be regarded as the original sources of that secret disquietude which the actions of the Americans betray and of that inconstancy of which they daily afford fresh examples. He who has set his heart exclusively upon the pursuit of worldly welfare is always in a hurry, for he has but a limited time at his disposal to reach, to grasp, and to enjoy it. The recollection of the shortness of life is a constant spur to him. Besides the good things that he possesses, he every instant fancies a thousand others that death will prevent him from trying if he does not try them soon. This thought fills him with anxiety, fear, and regret and keeps his mind in ceaseless trepidation, which leads him perpetually to change his plans and his abode. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 145)

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support for religion in the form of public financial aid to religious institutions and religious teachings in public education once were part of the political institutions that Tocqueville observed. Today we may need again to encourage public support for common religious values, Kessler argues (1977: 146). Kessler suggests that such changes require political wisdom and Tocqueville advises caution in drawing policy implications, especially a direct link between government and religion, from this analysis of their indirect relationship. Tocqueville's reader must discern the complex function of a right understanding of self-interest, in its interaction with religion and in the role that secular beliefs and religious creeds play in the institutional system that influences the *moeurs* that could inhibit democratic despotism's advance.

This orientation intensifies acquisitiveness to levels approaching panic and despair.

> If in addition to the taste for physical well-being a social condition be added in which neither laws nor customs retain any person in his place, there is a great additional stimulant to this restlessness of temper. Men will then be seen continually to change their track for fear of missing the shortest cut to happiness. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 145)

Focusing primarily on filling the spiritual void with commodities, individuals become more separated in the political sphere. '[Equality] tends to isolate them from one another, to concentrate every man's attention upon himself; and it lays open the soul to an inordinate love of material gratification' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 23).

As a result, citizens have less concern for the community and little motivation for political participation, except to request exceptional treatment to limit their own risks. Two tendencies of liberalism, its equality of social condition and the equal merit given to any and all beliefs, assist each other in reducing the care taken of the community. Tocqueville argues that 'democratic nations that have introduced freedom into their political constitutions at the very time when they were augmenting the despotism of their administration' have created a number of 'strange paradoxes' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 339). Tocqueville observed a number of dangerous incongruities, including a love of order combined with fickle majority rule, an unstable legal environment that produces unmalleable expedients to treat different situations with uniform remedies, and the homogeneity of beliefs and tastes mixed with a disdain for anything commonplace. Yet the greatest paradox Tocqueville observes is the free person – the political and social equal of everyone, able to cast off all limiting beliefs and control destiny at will – who renounces freedom and embrace a new form of despotism.

Democratic Despotism

From materialism as a manifestation of individualism, democratic people derive a 'love of public tranquillity' as an 'indiscriminate passion', leading each citizen 'to conceive a most inordinate devotion to order' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 318). This consciousness, coupled with the dominance of majority opinion, allows citizens to abandon their self-governing capacity and establish the only form of government capable of extending uniformity and order over the whole nation, a central power. In this way, skepticism and individualism, which promote the equal value of all beliefs, encourage materialism and the triumph of majority opinion over individual thought. Together these patterns of de-ontological liberalism can assist the new science of despotism that democracy must fear. Experienced first internally, this psychological malaise may be codified in laws that actually do remove control from the individual, making the powerlessness that the

unbounded soul feels a political reality.

> As in periods of equality no man is compelled to lend his assistance to his fellow men, and none has any right to expect much support from them, everyone is at once independent and powerless. These two conditions, which must never be either separately considered or confounded together, inspire the citizen of a democratic country with very contrary propensities. His independence fills him with self-reliance and pride among his equals, his debility makes him feel from time to time the want of some outward assistance, which he cannot expect from any of them, because they are all impotent and unsympathizing. In his predicament he naturally turns his eyes to that imposing power which alone rises above the level of universal depression. Of that power his wants and especially his desires continually remind him, until he ultimately views it as the sole and necessary support of his own weakness. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 311)

Actually shackled by doubt, the supposedly unfettered intellect appreciates little of the necessary thoughtfulness, deliberation and experimentation of democratic processes. Since differences among people and situations are too difficult to discern, they obtain little of the disconnected citizen's attention. Instead the citizen's focus is evermore inward, evermore concerned with private interests, narrowly defined as material well-being.

> The first thing that strikes the [observer about democratic despotism] is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to produce the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is a stranger to the fate of all the rest; his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, he is close to them, but he does not see them; he touches them, but he does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 336)

So long as citizens seek uniformity and regulation as an easy route to assure immediate gratification of simple pleasures, the community is easily governed, and the skills of self-government as easily forfeited.

> Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratification and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular and mild.... For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and only arbiter of that happiness, it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities.... What remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and the trouble of living?... Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 336–7).

Rather than fostering democracy, then, Tocqueville finds that individualism and materialism rapidly extinguish the institutions of self-government. Losing their moral compass, individuals develop an excessive concern with material well-being. Adrift in the spiritual world, these citizens single-mindedly seek control in politics, particularly desiring deliverance from risk in the new salvation of materialism and commercial ventures. Only through

centralized authority can such demands be met. This aversion to risk in commerce betrays, in politics, a general preference for control and order over experimentation and innovation, resulting in policies that promote equality and diminish liberty. Although any particular individual might desire the liberty to experiment and innovate, each wishes success assured. Each demands certainty and uniformity, increasing the tutelary power that reigns supreme, assuring the equal subjection of all to routine and control.

> [T]he increasing love of well-being and the fluctuating character of property cause democratic nations to dread all violent disturbances. The love of public tranquility is frequently the only passion which these nations retain.... Every central government worships uniformity; uniformity relieves it from inquiring into an infinity of details, which must be attended to if rules have to be adapted to different men, instead of indiscriminately subjecting all men to the same rule.... [T]he principle of equality suggests... the notion of a sole, uniform, and strong government.... [I]ndividual independence and local liberties will ever be the products of art;... centralization will be the natural [consequence of democratic] government. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 310–13)

The individual's material desires, aversion to risk and consequent love of uniformity combine with the central power's inclination to expand its dominion. These two paths converge, compelling the growth of centralized government. This avenue to despotism, with roots that thrive at depths beyond individual political and social equality, is initiated by the rootless soul of the liberal individual. Because de-ontological liberalism places equal value on all beliefs, it offers no authority for belief other than majority opinion. This deficiency promotes materialism and individualism, sacrificing the means of self-government, while homogenizing meaning, manners and material status through majority dominance and government centralization.

> [T]he very men who are so impatient of superiors patiently submit to a master, exhibiting at once their pride and their servility.
>
> This never dying, ever kindling hatred which sets a democratic people against the smallest privileges is peculiarly favorable to the gradual concentration of all political rights in the hands of the representative of the state alone. The sovereign, being necessarily and incontestably above all the citizens, does not excite their envy, and each of them thinks that he strips his equals of the prerogative that he concedes to the crown. The man of a democratic age is extremely reluctant to obey his neighbor, who is his equal; he refuses to acknowledge superior ability in such a person; he mistrusts his justice and is jealous of his power; he fears and he despises him; and he loves continually to remind him of the common dependence in which both of them stand to the same master.
>
> Every central power, which follows its natural tendencies, courts and encourages the principle of equality; for equality singularly facilitates, extends, and secures the influence of a central power. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 312–13)

Operating now for consumers, not self-governing citizens, uniform laws

and, in general, policies focused on removing all chance from the political world appear to serve government best. It is in this way that loss of bearing in that spiritual world leads to greater constraint in the political realm. Tocqueville concludes that self-government is an improbable result of a process so paradoxically opposed to the experimentation and innovation required where human uncertainty and fallibility prevail. Before a self-governing people can address the challenges posed by social and political equality, they must consider the means for dealing with the more fundamental problem that occur when skepticism reduces ideas to intellectual dust.

> When there is no longer any principle of authority in religion any more than in politics, men are speedily frightened at the aspect of this unbounded independence. The constant agitation of all surrounding things alarms and exhausts them. As everything is at sea in the sphere of the mind, they determine at least that the mechanisms of society shall be firm and fixed; and as they cannot resume their ancient belief, they assume a master.... I doubt whether man can ever support at the same time complete religious independence and entire political freedom. And I am inclined to think that if faith be wanting in him, he must be subject; and if he be free, he must believe. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 23)

Religion as the Moral Foundation of American Democracy

Only if Americans have a different response to the fundamental human dilemmas arising from uncertain knowledge of God can they devise adequate barriers to democratic despotism. Religion, Tocqueville argues, acts as an extra-legal institution indirectly shaping these required mores of democracy. Ironically, Tocqueville shows that skeptical societies fail to escape dogma, although they may invest themselves in the false belief that only they can do so. Finding it simply impossible to negotiate a single day without using ideas and opinions accepted on faith (no single human has the time or talent to prove all the ideas that are useful for a daily life), even the skeptic accepts on faith many untried opinions. Protesting that they avoid dogma, liberal skeptics less consciously do as all humans must do – locate the authority for belief outside their individual abilities.

Because individuals must form a social body to enjoy some benefits, they find the social body requires common beliefs, including the common signifiers of language (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 9). Common belief in the liberal analysis, at best, amounts to little more than common assent to those ideas that allow us to negotiate our individual good by discovering the intersection of our interests with those of others. At worst, common belief in democratic times may result from unarticulated, majority opinion – potentially tyrannical dogma, in Tocqueville's view. By submitting less to doctrine, the Americans that Tocqueville observes are in no way automatically led to more thoughtful reflection or wise deliberation. In fact, the Americans'

philosophical disdain of tradition and doctrine more readily leads individuals to be oblivious to ideas and concerns beyond their limited experience. Condemning dogmas while participating in its actual propagation, each individual adopts what the crowd approves, elevating majority opinion to transcendent significance. In such conditions, interests may not long remain enlightened and selves may never become so.

Enlightened self-interest has come to be interpreted as solely concerned with material gain. For Tocqueville, however, the polity's indispensable 'common belief' is not simply commonly held opinion derived from common interests. Far from offering such a narrow role to moral sentiments, Tocqueville extracts a more subtle interpretation of enlightened interest from Federalist and earlier Puritan founding traditions. A common intellectual tradition, common language and common transcendental belief are all part of the 'favorable circumstances' that enabled America's founding citizens to recognize and pursue their interests, facilitated by law.

The use of instruments that constitute a multi-tiered federal community requires both knowledge and wisdom from those who will govern themselves. Citizens must have information about the mechanics of government and considerable ability to make discerning judgments (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 172). The Federalists' compound republic depends on citizens' understanding of their role as the foundational participants in limiting tyrannical relationships through a system of limited, distributed authority. Requiring an understanding of rules as more than tools, the Federalists' framework demands actual consent and belief in its institutions as well as concern for fellow citizens. For the Federalists' framework to be effective, the actual use of the tools of self-government must be informed by this self-conscious understanding of self-governing relationships.[5]

Tocqueville observes, 'The government of the Union depends almost entirely on legal fictions; the union is an ideal nation which exists, so to speak, only in the mind' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 172). The whole form of American government is artificial or conventional, he maintains, and would be 'ill adapted to a people which has not been long accustomed to conducting its own affairs, or to one in which the science of politics has not descended to the humblest classes of society' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 172).

5. Although figures such as Madison, Hamilton and Jefferson disagreed in important ways about the relationship of religion and politics, they generally sought the separation of church and state but acknowledged a vital indirect role for religious teachings as a basis for the informing consciousness of self-government. While *Federalist* No. 10 (Hamilton et al., 1788) is instructive about the issues raised for political communities by intolerant religious views, other writings of Madison suggest not only the necessary separation of church and state, but also an important role for the teachings of revealed religion in public life (Madison, 1910, 1985). Jefferson (1943a, 1943b) offers a valuable alternative view of the relationship of religion and politics, stressing the mean-spirited hypocrisy of self-interest masquerading as religious feeling.

Tocqueville perceives a self-governing consciousness that entails an awareness of self and society greater than relationships demonstrated in a marketplace. Tocqueville finds that a self-governing consciousness is derived from a covenant that goes beyond what laws teach and what interests demand, to an intellectual foundation, vital to the proper functioning of law. Citizens must understand not only rules that direct conduct, but the relationships and roles presumed by such rules. For Tocqueville, such relationships are prior to rules and are deeper than the coincidence and coordination of interests.

> [M]en have sentiments and principles as well as material interests. A certain uniformity of civilization is not less necessary to the durability of a confederation than a uniformity of interests in the states that compose it.... The circumstance which makes it easy to maintain a Federal government in America is not only that the states have similar interests, a common origin, and a common language, but have also arrived at the same stage of civilization, which almost always renders a union feasible. (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 175–6)

This indispensable sophistication in the use of a self-governing framework not only draws upon more than common interests, but also surpasses differences in the original founders' language and origins. Tocqueville suggests this prerequisite common belief is derived from Puritan, America's conjunction of religious and political institutions. Although contemporary scholarship suggests that Calvinist, as well as Puritan, institutions inform our shared heritage, this research supports Tocqueville's principal conclusion. American constitutionalism, as well as American federalism, are founded on a covenanting and compacting tradition in which religious institutions inform the way of life embodied in these political documents.[6] The actual workings of the political institutions based on these documents are, thus, inseparable from the religious principles of the covenanting traditions.

The fortuitous covenantal roots of America's founding embodied two related steps: first, contracting among citizens to create a political body and second, as one body, compacting with God. The contract of society is made firm by the *political right* of those who, with one another, swear allegiance to it, and by the *transcendental authority* invoked when they do so in the sight of God.

From this example of America's republican and religious founding, Tocqueville expands our usual thinking of the social contract to include covenant and compact, showing that neither common material interests nor the design of laws alone constitutes a workable democracy (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 32–46). Even if social science focuses primarily on problems as-

6. Contemporary scholarship underscores the importance of the Calvinist and Puritan covenants and compacts that undergird the constitutional founding of the Federalists. See Donald S. Lutz (1988: 25) concerning the transfiguration of covenant to compacts to constitutions.

sociated with the coordination of interests, material motivations are insufficient to establish, explain or maintain a community. Materialism may, in fact, impede the practice of self-government. In the Puritan covenantal tradition, materialism was tempered by religion.

> [The character of Anglo-American civilization] is the result of two distinct elements... the *spirit of religion* and *the spirit of liberty*.... The settlers of New England were at the same time ardent sectarians and daring innovators. Narrow as the limits of some of their religious opinions were, they were free from all political prejudices.
>
> Hence arose two tendencies, distinct but not opposite, which are everywhere discernable in the manners as well as the laws of the country.
>
> Men sacrifice for a religious opinion their friends, their family, and their country; one can consider them devoted to the pursuit of intellectual goals which they came to purchase at so high a price. One sees them, however, seeking with almost equal eagerness material wealth and moral satisfaction; heaven in the world beyond, and well-being and liberty in this one. (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 145)

Just as we cannot understand the institutional foundation of America's democratic experience from the standpoint of coordinating material interests, we cannot understand the role of religion in America's ontological foundation without considering the institutional framework that facilitates religion's role in liberal democracy. The institutional roots that support American democracy are twofold, embracing religious and federal frameworks. It is not the Puritan heritage alone, but also the indigenous institution of the township, that comprises the foundation of America's multitiered framework.

Indigenous Local Liberty and Religion in Democracy

In America, Tocqueville observed, the township arises as a natural association from the Puritan founder's experience in self-government (see also Lutz, 1988).

> It is not without intention that I begin this subject with the township. The village or township is the only association which is so perfectly natural that wherever a number of men is collected, it seems to constitute itself.... It is men who make monarchies and establish republics, but the township seems to come directly from the hand of God. (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 62)

Drawing on these original covenantal relationships and experiences, the Federalists designed a compound republic that maintained these indigenous institutions by permitting local government to flourish. Together, the natural association of the township and the specific content of Puritan Christianity provide the moral foundation of federalism. Federalism maintains these institutions, so that the covenantal basis of *foedus* – as an amalgam of religion and republicanism – and the institutional arrangement of *federalism* can create the framework that moderates individualism, materi-

alism and majority dominance.

Tocqueville shows us a complex picture of self-organization based on shared moral sentiments in a context of limited, distributed constitutional order. Too fragile to survive without care and artisanship, these self-organizing practices, so natural to the township, demand the aid of a multi-tiered framework. Without the art and science of association, local rule may simply mean local tyranny, including religious intolerance. Not simplistically enamored of either religion or local government as merely salutary founding myths, Tocqueville would doubtless be skeptical about attempts to reintroduce Puritanism in the absence of a vibrant multi-tiered system.

Religion's Complex Role in Modern Democracy

When Tocqueville concludes that religion is 'the first of [America's] political institutions' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 316), he indicates not only that religion in this new world is inseparable from the Puritan's indigenous institutions of participation and self-government, but also the importance of these ontological origins for contemporary democratic practice. Religion is neither a socially useful myth nor simply received dogma in the Puritan experience. The lessons of this experience suggest that it is imprudent today to manipulate religion in the service of politics. Tocqueville interprets the Puritan experience as one in which religion facilitated self-government and self-government tempered zealotry (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 40–1).

Yet, religious institutions, to the extent that they are humanly influenced and 'political', navigate a difficult course in modern democracy. Two hundred years after the Puritan founding, Tocqueville contrasts religion's indirect effect on politics with the consequences of fusing Church and state. While the institutions of faith and those of government may have a symbiotic relationship, their interests, he maintains, remain distinct.[7] If religion leaves the individual free to change temporal circumstances in the political world, it can be a source of foundational ideas of self-control, self-organization and self-government. If, in contrast, a state church replaces an individual's choice of religious affiliation, faith, and the independent moral judgment it fosters, would be threatened. Once linked to a particular political system, religious authority comes to be seen as human-made and, therefore, conditional. Corruption of civil government extends to the state church, and rejection of the former requires rejection of the latter, or at least a considerable lessening of its moral imperative.

As with any institution having the authority to enforce law and sanctions,

7. Primarily, Tocqueville presents these views in his critique of the cooptation of faith by state interests in 18th-century France (1945, 1: 321; 1955, 155–7). In contrast, religion containing the seeds of political critique, yet, in his description, free from association with government, is a primary aid to minority Catholics in Ireland (1958; 57, 180–2).

human authority in religious practice can become tyrannical. Yet, without universal, concurrent revelation as a source of common knowledge, some coercion to belief seems inevitable. Coercion implies authoritative rule, yet human fallibility necessitates that any authority be limited and induced to correct its errors. The transit from God's perfection to institutions of human imperfection is not simply made, producing a profoundly troubling tension between necessary authority and potential tyranny. Given the polity's need to set the principles of some judgments beyond the concerns of everyday life, in order to maintain openness and experimentation in politics, the dilemma, in Tocqueville's words, is unparalleled.

> Fixed ideas about God and human nature are indispensable to the daily practice of men's lives; but the practice of their lives prevents them from acquiring such ideas.
>
> The difficulty appears to be without a parallel. Among the sciences there are some that are useful to the mass of mankind and are within its reach; others can be approached only by the few and are not cultivated by the many, who require nothing beyond their more remote applications; but the daily practice of the science I speak of is indispensable to all, although the study of it is inaccessible to the greater number.
>
> General ideas respecting God and human nature are therefore the ideas above all others which it is most suitable to withdraw from the habitual action of private judgment and in which there is most to gain and least to lose by recognizing a principle of authority. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 22)

Vexing as it may be to remove religious principles from daily inquiry, Tocqueville argues that we have the most to gain and the least to lose by doing so. Removed from debate are only what Tocqueville calls 'a few simple ideas' drawn from Jewish and Christian traditions: the idea of the immortality of the soul that motivates us, and more importantly, the love of God and neighbor that draws us to more than an instrumental understanding of others. Nothing is incorporated into religious dogma that gives specific corrections to the neighbor that we love; that content is left to politics, an arena from which religion is to remain clear.

As a 'political institution' religion inspires moral sentiments that indirectly influence political activity. The effects of such sentiments are as indispensable as they are profound. Considered only in terms of its practical contributions, religion's principal advantage is to 'furnish a clear, precise, intelligible and lasting answer' to the fundamental questions for most of humanity (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 22). Religion's profound contribution to self-government is to secure the individual's mind and soul morally, while leaving political opinions open to deliberation and experimentation. The actuality of belief and the absence of a state religion make possible habits of self-restraint on which self-governing societies depend (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 310–18). By operating within a multi-tiered institutional framework, this amalgam of revealed religion's teachings and self-interest, rightly understood, provides the theory and practice that are foundational to self-government.

Vitiating Materialism, Individualism and Majority Dominance: Revealed Religion and Self-interest Rightly Understood

Societies characterized by skepticism require a means of drawing individuals out of self-absorption, materialism, factionalism and majority dominance. Such methods must offer the stability of fundamental ideas, but, to fit the requirements of liberty, must also alleviate tyranny resulting from the imposition of dogma on non-believers. Religion addresses these complex demands only by providing common beliefs that are beyond individual challenge and government manipulation, but nevertheless remain connected to the practical experience of daily life. Religion, while remaining free from government control, significantly influences politics, most importantly by instilling mores to advance a right understanding of self-interest and encouraging negotiation even when there seems to be no common ground. It is religion that can motivate a view of others as ends rather than means when no material motivation compels common action.

Self-interest rightly understood, in turn, can moderate conflicts among parties with fundamental differences, even different religious beliefs. In a multi-tiered institutional framework that allows only an indirect role for religion in politics, a right understanding of self-interest can show individuals the benefit of cooperation in voluntary associations, notwithstanding their differences in doctrine. By applying a right understanding of self-interest to acts of political participation, individuals learn habits of tolerance and forbearance that temper self-righteousness, promoting religious freedom, not religious faction. A right understanding of self-interest can temper religious difference only if the religious principles to which all must assent remain the minimal 'simple ideas' that Tocqueville enumerates. By maintaining this deep consensus, while avoiding a direct link between religion and government and contests between religious doctrines, the conjunction of self-interest, rightly understood, and religion can create the mores and customs basic to self-government.[8] In this complex amalgam of self-interest rightly understood and the teachings of revealed religion, Tocqueville offers an ontological foundation for liberal communities.[9]

8. Suzanne Jacobitti (1991) argues that Tocqueville's reliance on revealed religion and the mores it teaches will be ineffective in contemporary American society. Stimulation of strong religious and communitarian values, she suggests, in a society with diversity can create unresolvable social conflict. Thus if religion is necessary, but cannot play the role required, she concludes the prospects for the moral basis of democracy are grim. It is just this problem which Tocqueville hopes the simple foundation of a convenantal method of concern for one's neighbor will ameliorate, however.

9. Vincent Ostrom (1991) also considers precepts of Jewish and Christian law (the commandment to love God, one's neighbor as oneself, and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us) as essential foundation for self-governing communities. Exploring the complementarity of these teachings of revealed religion and the Hobbesean concept of right

In the modern world this nexus of religion and self-interest rightly understood combines disinterested concern for others with the desire to coordinate interests for shared material well-being. Religious enlightenment, Tocqueville believes, provides disinterested concern, the basis for community when common interests are not easily recognized. A right understanding of interest provides means to reach practical consensus when religious differences would otherwise be unnegotiable. Together, Christianity's 'simple ideas' and interest-based cooperation produce the sympathetic understanding among political equals that permits political experimentation and conflict negotiation.

The federal framework, Tocqueville concludes, must allow for an indirect role for religion, while limiting any direct role that ecclesiastic powers might play in government. Multi-tiered arrangements must facilitate citizens coming together to pursue individually enjoyed benefits collectively, while mores learned from religion must garner their attention when the benefits are not immediately apparent. This nexus of religion and a right understanding of self-interest in a multi-tiered institutional arrangement motivates mutual concern for others and vitiates individualism, materialism and majority dominance. With this ontology, 'democracy' can mean self-government, not the new form of servitude, democratic despotism.

Materialism

This ontology addresses the problem of excessive materialism by using natural human desires for well-being to promote an interest in others and concern for the transcendent. The transcendent nature of revealed religion combats the excessive concern for temporal existence. Tocqueville writes with irony of the mutual manipulation of materialism and the transcendental that he observed in America. By exploring this part of Tocqueville's analysis we learn more of the amalgam of religion and enlightened interest.

Material well-being may motivate a host of important interactions in democracy and may even temper religious zealotry. By engaging in an activity undertaken for base motives – contracting to improve one's material state – Tocqueville suggests individuals may learn more about others with whom they associate. If people learn more about those that they may actually hope to assist, they are less likely to be tyrants through sheer ignorance.

reason, Ostrom suggests that the Golden Rule, for example, can be understood as 'a method of normative inquiry that enables human beings to come to a commonly shared understanding about the meaning of value terms used as norms or criteria of choice' (see especially Chapter 3, page 63, and also Chapters 2 and 8). These foundations that Tocqueville calls 'simple ideas', are the required ontology for people who wish to undertake a problem-solving mode of self-government, as contrasted with strategies of sovereignty that rely on command, control and obedience and self-government conceived as adversarial contests of radical individualism.

That the cause of reducing oppressive, paternalistic intervention in the lives of others might be self-serving, and thus less virtuous than pure altruism, matters less in this practical application of interest than do the effects of such a practice.

Organized religious institutions should not attempt to end the desire for material goods with explicit prohibitions, Tocqueville concludes, but, using the general teachings of religious beliefs, could help regulate and restrain an excessive taste for well-being. Tocqueville explains that individuals cannot be cured of their love for riches, but they can be guided to enrich themselves by only honest means (Tocqueville, 145, 2: 27). To deny ambitions aimed at material fulfillment, or negate the self totally, would eliminate a primary junction at which individuals unite to act collectively.

From this perspective Tocqueville can argue that self-interest rightly understood is not the motive of religious people, but it can be the mode by which religion governs a people (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 134). According to Tocqueville, the 'simple ideas' that could play this vital role include a general teaching of the immortality of the soul (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 154). Although it seems clear that Tocqueville means for such a teaching to lead the individual to forego selfishness in the present life in hopes of attaining eternal life, his analysis involves more than this expression of long-range self-interest.

Self-interest may be the initial motivation to accept religion, but the teachings of religion actually require something more of the individual. If a right understanding of self-interest directs individuals to adopt a religion in order to attain eternal life, Tocqueville points out that it

> also teaches that men should benefit their fellow creatures for the love of God! A sublime expression! Man searches by his intellect into the divine conception and sees that order is the purpose of God; he freely gives his own efforts to aid in prosecuting this great design, and, while he sacrifices his personal interests to this consummate order of all created things, expects no other recompense than the pleasure of contemplating it. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 154)

Although a doctrine of the immortality of the soul may work similarly to enlightened self-interest in drawing democratic citizens away from excessive individualism, it is neither clear that this motivation is sufficient to produce interactions that resolve the contests of democratic peoples, nor that this is all Tocqueville meant for religion to do. Tocqueville considers the first commandment, to love God, oneself, and others for the sake of God, to be the Christian and Jewish religious teaching that makes the most consequential contribution to democracy. By connecting revealed religion and a right understanding of self-interest to create common belief required of democracy, Tocqueville amalgamates liberal and preliberal thought. This ontology addresses democracy's predicament, navigating a course be-

tween religious intolerance and religious indifference, particularly as they are encountered in individualism and majority dominance.

Individualism and Majority Dominance

In the first volume of *Democracy*, Tocqueville discusses in general terms the effects of the idea of religious equality – the equality of every person in the eyes of God – on democratic mores. His analysis of this concept deepens in the second volume, in which he focuses on the effects of Christianity's 'simple ideas' on the hearts of the people in democratic society.[10] Tocqueville shows how religion might indirectly influence such problems as individualism by contrasting the effects on mores of Christian equality with the results of democratic equality, including the social state of individual equality and a philosophical orientation that accords equal value to all beliefs. Just as the individual's conception of relationships precedes the use of rules that govern their associations, so are the problems caused by the equality of ideas and beliefs deeper than the actualization of equality in equal social roles. Tocqueville argues that Christian belief in the equality of all before God replaces liberalism's de-ontological stance. Religious equality, rather than the equality of all beliefs, reduces the problems raised by the social state of equality, including its tendency toward radical individualism.

The admonition in the Jewish and Christian traditions, to love God above all else, to love God with one's whole self and to love one's neighbor as oneself, requires the individual to acknowledge the ultimate connection between all persons and all actions. These ideas, along with the belief in the equality of all souls, teach mores that counteract the individualism and majority dominance that precipitate democratic despotism.

Equality, in political and religious contexts, inspires different attitudes and actions. In political life, Tocqueville argues, social equality leads to a general feeling of individual weakness before the crowd, and a propensity to trust the capabilities of no one who is an equal. This social equality, while leading to an illusion of independence, leaves the individual, in truth, isolated and insignificant. In a spiritual context, the equality of all ideas and beliefs brings on a more fundamental malaise, deepening the anxiety and universal depression of the isolated individual. The march to democratic despotism, initiated by such feelings of uncertainty and worthlessness, is the subject of Tocqueville's second volume.

10. Catherine Zuckert (1992) argues that Tocqueville changed from the belief expressed in Volume 1 that a separation of church and state could preserve religion in democracy to a view that religion must adapt to democratic times. Here I am suggesting an alternative interpretation that he focuses in the second volume on the minimum ideas that religion must impart to democratic people.

Religious equality, in contrast, depicts each soul as equal before God, leading to beliefs about the worth of every individual, regardless of the opinions of the multitude. In the context of fixed belief and transcendent principles, the individual experiences the significance of existence, vitiating the alienating effects of social equality. Tocqueville uses the Catholic faith as it is experienced in the American context of social equality to exemplify these claims.

> On doctrinal points the Catholic faith places all human capacities upon the same level; it subjects the wise and the ignorant, the man of genius and the vulgar crowd, to the details of the same creed... it listens to no compromise with mortal man, but reducing all the human race to the same standard, it confounds all the distinctions of society at the foot of the same altar.... (Tocqueville, 1945, 7: 311)

A religion so focused on the equal worth of the individual may require obedience to these tenets, but, by doing so, inspires the independent judgment that an isolated individualism extinguishes. For political equality to lead to independent judgment, but not to isolation and individualism, institutions must be designed to bring people out of their small orbit of individual concern. Even in the voluntary associations that foster the self-help of self-government, independent political judgment may be fettered by majority opinion. The 'simple ideas' that Tocqueville admires in Christian traditions may be necessary not only to motivate individuals to respect the community, but also to help citizens develop mature, independent thinking.

Tocqueville surmises that most actions in the political realm emanate from the individual's ideas about the nature of God, the Deity's relationship to humanity and the relationship of each individual to every other person (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 21). Religion in America helps citizens develop the belief in the unconditional value of every individual on which a theory of constitutional choice must be based.[11] While the actual ability to constitute such relationships comes primarily through political participation, especially in voluntary associations, an ontology of moral belief informs both the process and content of participation.

Institutional designs fostering such associations based on a right understanding of self-interest provide a practical approach to diminishing tyranny among human beings with coincident interests.[12] If such institutions

11. Such a theory, as described by Vincent Ostrom (1991), enables citizens to link the probable consequences for different roles in a specific authority structure to the design of authority. A person might then have a theoretical basis for preferring one design of authority to another and would then constitute her relationships accordingly. For another exploration of Tocqueville's constitutional analysis see Robert P. Kraynak (1987).

12. Tocqueville discussed in detail the methods by which material interests could be used to motivate a 'proper understanding of self-interest'. Commercial associations could be easily organized and the necessity of contracting for material gain might be immediately perceived by individuals who had only the most basic understanding of enlightened self-interest. However,

that evoke participation on the basis of shared interests are imperiled – if it is no longer the case that working with one's fellows is the road to helping oneself – it is increasingly important for the individual to be committed to others for reasons beyond their instrumental use.[13] By addressing this possibility, Tocqueville's conception of the sympathetic understanding found in the nexus of a proper understanding of self-interest and religion also clarifies the connection between revealed religion, common belief and majority dominance.[14]

Although religion shapes the conception of what is possible in the sphere of politics, political opinions also shape how religious tenets are understood. Tocqueville suggests that people will naturally try to accommodate religion and political philosophy in human institutions.

> By the side of every religion is to be found a political opinion, which is connected with it by affinity. If the human mind be left to follow its own bent, it will regulate the temporal and spiritual institutions of society in a uniform manner, and man will endeavor, if I may so speak, to *harmonize* earth with heaven. (Tocqueville, 1945, 1: 310)[15]

Religion diminishes the threat of majority tyranny and maintains self-government by influencing the mores or habits of the heart and mind, 'the whole moral and intellectual condition of a people' (Tocqueville, 1945, 1:

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the requirement of risking financial resources often foreclosed this opportunity to participate in joint ventures that could supply additional types of information about one's associates. Tocqueville reasoned that associations in which individuals volunteered to advance a political or social cause might be more easily accessible and even more instructive in the virtue of considering others' interests as well as one's own (1945, 2: 123–8). The larger role of enlightened self-interest is to create a habit of considering the consequences for others of one's own actions. Perceiving that each citizen had an interest in maintaining the peace of the polity, none would wish to antagonize another purposely. Rather, a plurality of opinions and needs must be balanced through institutions that fostered productive resolutions to conflict. A right understanding of self-interest plays a particularly vital role in pluralist democracies

13. The principles that mitigate majority tyranny only work because there are no permanent factions that make it impossible to negotiate different interests. Everyone is willing to recognize the power of the majority because each can imagine gaining that power (1945, 1: 266). This insight of Tocqueville's suggests that if differences were ever extreme or if a majority coalition could dominate political life, a right understanding of self-interest would be insufficient to bring a diverse community together. When one or a few groups can dominate, there is no reason to compromise further. None of the motivation to work with others to procure one's interest exists. Therefore, some motivation beyond the utility of others to oneself is required to cause people to undertake the projects which enable them to learn about others and their civic responsibilities. Religion can cause us to think about others, whether or not we need them or can use them.

14. Cynthia Hinckley (1990) writes persuasively that Tocqueville's foremost concern is not civil, but revealed religion. Tocqueville focuses less on Christian doctrine, however, than the mores learned from a few fundamental tenets common to a number of religions.

15. Although some scholars argue that Tocqueville formulates the relationship between religion and political society in Augustinian terms (see Hereth, 1986: 58), Tocqueville's ideas might also be contrasted with the Augustinian view of religion and political authority. When

310). Religion can act as a standard against which more ephemeral popular ideas can be measured by supplying an antidote to the zeal of majority opinion. To avoid becoming a source of majority tyranny itself, however, religion must abstain from a direct influence in politics and should partake of 'simple ideas', the precepts which Tocqueville finds common to most religious thought.

Tocqueville writes about the harmony that might come between the City of God and the earthly kingdom, he introduces the concept of political opinion and human belief, and considers religion as a political institution. Tocqueville and Augustine both speak of harmonizing earth with heaven, but religion in democracy will be shaped by human understanding, harmonizing heaven in terms of earth, in a process that differs significantly from that contemplated by Augustine. The political opinions that will shape religion will, moreover, be derived from the philosophical method of Americans, their desire for ideas to relate directly to practical use in daily life. Such a method suggests why religion in America might take on a political penumbra and why it should refrain from doing so. The Christian preliberal tradition of both Augustine and Aquinas might be contrasted with Tocqueville's analysis of religion and politics. St Thomas Aquinas (1948: 429, 434–7, 471–3) integrates the secular and the sacred, as well as the public and the private. Human beings have a purpose beyond mere existence. That end is the happiness derived from knowledge of the First Cause, God. Furthermore, Aquinas (1938: 96–7) argues that as the human being is created to pursue some good beyond the self, so, too, is society ordered with a purpose beyond its mere maintenance. The purpose of the individual and the purpose of society are inseparable. Society is the necessary context in which the individual lives the life of virtue that might, after life, attain the enjoyment of God. In this context Aquinas maintains that the commandment to love one's neighbor requires one to intervene to correct the moral behavior of one's peers, whether or not those behaviors are lawful. The two cities, earthly and heavenly, that Augustine wishes to harmonize are discussed in detail in both *The City of God* (1952) and *On Christian Doctrine* (1988). Augustine discusses two methods of harmonizing earth and heaven as part of humanity's fundamental drive to know God. Humanity can either shape God according to their own likeness or they can understand God as immutable wisdom itself (1988: 11–12). In the Augustinian system human will and wisdom are not only imperfect, they are a snare that may prevent understanding (1988: 62). The person depends on God's grace for right action and understanding. The process laid out by Augustine for right human action and the hope in God's grace involve seven steps that require an attitude of piety that resists despairing over human uncertainty and hungers to become instruments of God's justice (1988; 38–9). Human standards and human action are not made perfect by human will, but by God's grace. Implicit in this view is a basis for human judgment and action to intervene and correct the failures of others. Although a just ruler judges and enforces law not from love of power, but from a sense of duty owed others, such rule is without limitation. Equitable rule is the equally loving oversight a ruler might offer subjects (1952: 520). There should be no variance of justice if the rule of loving God, our neighbor and ourselves is followed (1988: 92). It is by humans adhering to this rule that God is allowed to work justice in human life and that earth and heaven are harmonized. Tocqueville is similar to Augustine in utilizing this first tenet of Christianity and Judaism as the covenantal method of democracy. Tocqueville's *democratic* use of this teaching differs from Augustine's understanding of civil power as sovereignty limited only by God, however. Although Tocqueville also speaks of a higher law of justice, there is little to support the direct intervention of people in the private concerns of their peers, the unlimited authority of a civil sovereign and the emphasis on grace and God's justice found in both Aquinas and Augustine.

Liberal Theory and Conceptions of the Sacred

Modern liberal theory would seem to separate individuals and the political communities they form from any ontological foundation or purpose beyond mere existence. Understanding the choices relevant to political inquiry as, instead, based only on calculations of interest, contemporary social science neglects the role of an enlightened self in self-government. In contrast, Tocqueville concludes that if democratic peoples wish to avoid despotic rule, self-organization, including commercial and voluntary associations, must draw on mores inspired by a belief in humanity's transcendent meaning. Without such a consciousness, Tocqueville argues that the untethered soul will fall prey to individualism and excessive concern with material gain, two causes of majority dominance and democratic despotism.

Tocqueville concludes that self-government depends on two imperatives, the need for common belief to unify the community and the need for individual liberty. Contemporary discussions of dogma and self-determination present these precepts antagonistically, as the individual quest for identity meets the stifling weight of community standards. Tocqueville would appear to increase this tension by perceiving common belief to entail more than shared conventions. Yet, a closer appraisal of his analysis shows that tyrannical public opinion is, ironically, a likely result of de-ontological liberalism's dependence on shared conventions. To avoid this elevation of opinion to transcendent significance, and the democratic despotism it inspires, Tocqueville offers democracy an ontological foundation. By examining America's complex amalgam of religion and republicanism, Tocqueville discovers a moral and institutional foundation that enables citizens to undertake the risks of self-government.

The 'simple ideas' of Christianity provide the foundational values that permit the individual to withstand the agitation of experiment and uncertainty in political life. Free will, Tocqueville argues, must be exercised in the assent to belief, but speculation about the existence of transcendent meaning must be bounded, so that political liberty is not extinguished. Political liberty is not bounded by political authority alone. The enlightened choice on which self-government depends requires an ontology that surpasses public articulation and coordination of private interests as the basis for constituting political authority. While interest alone cannot provide the foundations on which freedom in community depends, neither can religion play a direct role in politics, if liberty is to be maintained. Tocqueville presents us with a complex harmonization of political opinions and religious belief, utilizing liberal theory's right understanding of self-interest and the multi-tiered institutional framework expressed in *The Federalist*. The ontology that he derives from America's covenantal and conventional roots promotes a vital, yet indirect, role for the teachings of

revealed religion, preserving belief and the indigenous institutions of self-organization.

Tocqueville's interpretation of the American democratic experiment is as significant for the questions it raises as the specific ontology it explores. Tocqueville addressed his work to readers that he believed faced a junction between an old world of aristocracy and a new world of democracy. 'The political world is metamorphosed,' he explained, 'new remedies must henceforth be sought for new disorders' (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 347). Not only did increasing equality of conditions pose new challenges of coordination and cooperation, but liberal skepticism posed an even more significant threat to an emerging new world.

Contemporary discussions of emerging democracies in Eastern Europe focus on the obvious problems of economic transition. Yet as Tocqueville's work suggests, material prosperity is complexly related to the quest for self-government. In language reminiscent of Tocqueville's analysis, Polish sociologist Antoni Kaminski argues that a self-governing consciousness is the most significant requirement for the transition to democracy within the former Soviet Union. Because Kaminski's views represent a significant advance over the common misperception that markets mean self-management, his ideas are worth quoting at length.

> Let us consider, first, the prospects for a course of events that is less probable and demands a lot more political wisdom and moderation than do the pessimistic scenarios of a return to yet another despotism – a liberal, democratic transition of the USSR, and its impact upon the European order. By a successful transition in the USSR, I mean the emergence of solid institutional grounds for the development of competitive markets, the rule of law, representative government, and of truly federal structures.... The success of a liberal, democratic transition will depend on a number of factors. Among the obvious ones the imperative of improving the economic situation has already been mentioned. A requirement of no lesser importance is the need for a fundamental change in Russian political consciousness.... A successful liberal, democratic transition, besides further stimulating changes in the national consciousness, would have to affect social perceptions in every area of life, strategic and military, economic and political. It would have to affect the whole social structure of Soviet society, including interethnic and religious relations. Moreover, the social consciousness must recognize that the state cannot solve all problems. People have to acquire self-confidence, learn to trust lateral mechanisms of coordination, and rely on their own initiative and talents instead of relying on the state hierarchy to solve their problems.... The most detrimental effect of the more than seventy years of Communist rule in the USSR has been destruction of elements of the tradition of the civil society that started to emerge in Russia in the late nineteenth century. The civil society is a combination of a universalistic moral basis for community relationships with a technologically competent understanding of the democratic process. The two cannot be separated. The moral community determines the attitude of people toward one another and toward the norms of behavior accepted by a group. The technological competence relates to the ability of individuals and groups to constitute and operate institutions and to function effectively within those institutions..... The destruction of civil society is among the most serious impediments to the progress of change in the Soviet Union. (Kaminski, 1992, 340–1)

Tocqueville's work indeed suggests a more pessimistic denouement for the close of the 20th century, if material drives are facilitated at the expense of developing a community's moral foundations and self-governing consciousness. Self-government requires wisdom and experience as a basis for all interactions, political and economic. Yet, in conceiving a new science of politics for his new age, Tocqueville cautioned against either using the American experience as a simple blueprint or abandoning the hope of self-government by returning to formerly held principles of authority.

> No man on the earth can as yet affirm, absolutely and generally, that the new state of the world is better than its former one.... [Aristocracy and democracy] are like two distinct orders of human beings, each of which has its own merits and defects, its own advantages and its own evils. Care must therefore be taken not to judge the state of society that is now coming into existence by notions derived from a state of society that no longer exists.... But as yet these things are imperfectly understood. I find that a great number of my contemporaries undertake to make a selection from among the institutions, the opinions, and the ideas that originated in the aristocratic constitution of society as it was; a portion of these elements they would willingly relinquish, but they would keep the remainder and transplant them into their new world.... The object is, not to retain the peculiar advantages which the inequality of conditions bestows upon mankind, but to secure the new benefits which equality may supply. We have not to seek to make ourselves like our progenitors but to strive to work out that species of greatness and happiness which is our own. (Tocqueville, 1945, 2: 351–2)

Tocqueville raises questions about democracy's ontology that surpass the contrast of aristocratic and democratic institutions of interest to his contemporaries. We must discern from his examination of the American example a method for analyzing how emerging and seasoned democracies alike address the challenge of self-government. Such an inquiry includes exploring the 'simple ideas' that could serve as the foundation of self-governing societies.

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Paper submitted 1 October 1993; accepted for publication 1 August 1994.