

neither genius nor philosophy comes in consistent form
we have mostly read treatises; but there are other forms of political philosophy
DeTocqueville is different; it is mostly a work of sociology

Two major considerations to be taken into account:

why did DeTocqueville, a Frenchman, write democracy in America?

why DeTocqueville find it necessary to come to terms with democracy in the US or elsewhere?

(obviously he wanted to teach the French, but thats the start, not the end)

these two points are related: he is interested in analyzing American democracy so the French can learn those lessons necessary to accommodate the massive and overwhelming fact of history; the march of democracy/egalitarianism (interchangeable)

so while his first concern is the French

lessons had a major importance for the entire western world

states this imperative forcefully: "To instruct democracy...society in our day" (7)

(this is one of the reasons he begins his argument by noting the single aspect of the US that made the biggest impression on him is the radical equality of conditions)

DeTocqueville found this equality of conditions to have comprehensive/important ramifications throughout American government, society, and life; subject is woven throughout the book

problems to be solved:

what does equality/democracy actually mean?

relationship/tension between equality of condition and equality of opportunity

also equality of opportunity and equality of results

tension between spirit of religion and spirit of freedom

these are complimentary intellectual attitudes in America (fortunate, but not necessary)

in Europe, the two were in tension or directly at loggerhead with one another

their complementariness in the US can only be explained by specifically American conditions

why is the fortunate combination of these aspects accidentally complimentary?

France at the time was an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country

church was tied to traditional powers; self-interest of church was guaranteed in this way

political leaders let the church control moral matters so they might rule more effectively

thus as long as the church had the last word on moral matters--marriage, abortion, etc.--it was

willing to give the political power a free hand

this was not only true in Catholic France, but also Anglican England and Lutheran Germany

tradition and religion spawned and alliance to suppress the spirit of freedom (not true in the US)

With DeTocqueville, nothing is all good or all bad

freedom is close to being unmitigated good, but it still has problematic aspects
total freedom leads to anarchy, which is very much like the state of nature
can also lead to: selfishness, lack of public spiritedness, lack of duty/obligation to anyone else
suppression of liberty through political means opens the door to abuses even worse
thus religion becomes extremely important

the only salutary way that liberty can be moderated is through morality
morality is contingent on religion (there is no basis for morality without religion)
however, morality is only compelling if religion is believed
real faith is necessary (real denominations), not what is convenient

liberty needs religion, despite European history showing nothing complementary about them
this is different in America: the puritans came to the new world primarily for religious freedom
religious persecution in England was largely unofficial; passive discrimination, taxed more
the puritans were educated, rich, only mildly persecuted; "left a social position they might regret"
they were refugees who were downwardly mobile; voluntary migration, not driven from England
voluntary migrations in the interest of an ideal rather than self-preservation or prosperity
came solely for the interest of an intellectual idea, no other reason for coming

the founding of the US took place on a very exclusive basis
spirit of liberty and religion were from the beginning part of a symbiotic relationship in the US
acted as overlapping concepts in the American founding, and afforded each other reciprocal
influences that are essential for the creation of good modern politics

Problems:
spirit of freedom/religion
problematic nature of equality
freedom

American Revolution speaks to many of these
has been overrated both as to its principles and its valor
basis of American regime was not that different from basis of British
the Declaration of Independence is essentially a Lockean call to arms

nor was the American Revolution really a revolution
basis of society should be changed, whole way of life disappear; not the case
american society had been in formation for 150 years before the revolution
it was ratified by the revolution

military aspects? owe victory more to geography than military prowess and patriotism
if England had not been separated by an ocean, America would not have won
armies were valorous, patriotic, but that is not why they won

what they did after the revolution was noteworthy; not during the revolution

one should also note that during this two years of time, federalist papers were written
federalist papers are really the fundamental beginning of American political philosophy
what was the product of these two years of reflection?
the Constitution; baseline of liberal democracy in the world
(civil war modified the Constitution)

founding fathers already knew what revisions were going to have to be made
of the revisions they projected, 98% overlapped with revisions that came after the Civil War
they had to compromise on certain things to get the Constitution at all
knew where it was effective, knew where it was not going to work
did not know it would be resolved by a civil war

major reason of superiority of Constitution was legislators who wrote it
this combination of men was right place at right time
raw materials of intelligence/honor was there in humans

main danger threatening government was total domination by democracy itself
knew the problem that needed to be solved

the first way the American was a superior constitution was it contained "a great discovery in
modern political science" -- not only did federal government have right to make laws, but also
carry it out; thus the federal government ruled over citizens, not states
what was formed was not a federal government but "an incomplete national government"
American states could make the most of this new device

deals with other aspects of American federal government
community feeling inherent in it; rare for such a large nation
in a number of ways, the US is an exceptional country
its government works because of American society

what characterizes government, how is it different?
mechanical, checks and balances, parallel powers, etc; mechanical and perfect
adapted to a free and independent people: a notion of democratic egalitarian politics permeates
even lower classes of society

in Europe, lower classes understood they were lower, and were supposed to be lower
in the US, while people might be lower for specific reasons, nobody felt they were supposed to
be in the bottom tier, felt there was a way to become upwardly mobile

the mexicans copied the US constitution basically in total
p155-156: our constitution was made for a specific society/type of people

won't work in any other society
so a federal government like the US is not appropriate to all countries
can be considered a defect, not universally applicable
second defect: weakness for both war powers and police powers

harks back to notion from classical political thought: aristotle
federal government must have virtue and equipment
federal system can't succeed without favorable circumstances and good laws

also need homogeneity in civilization
France has different provinces, with different languages, customs, classes, etc.

war: federal governments are not good at them
this is not as important as it might be, since US is unlikely to have them
(hadn't taken tech into account)

Look at the table of contents; development of book

1. origins of country
2. the people
3. their condition
4. their government
5. transition: people as they stand in relation to government

discusses american society in detail from this point on
appropriate development takes this form considering political parties
(one essential aspect of American political system that is not mentioned in constitution)
no political guidelines for political parties, must apply it to political parties

table of contents continued . . .

6. individualism, selfishness
7. man isolated unto himself in society
8. (later) democratic envy

these are all products of democracy and liberty
have the potential to destroy liberty

individualism/selfishness/isolation are products, caused by liberty and equality
results of liberty and equality have the potential to destroy liberty, not equality
diagnosis leads to antidote to disease

then DeTocqueville begins his discussion of public associations

they are part of the antidote, generate feelings of "self-interest rightly understood" - perhaps most important contribution to democratic political thought
rest of chapter deals with impact of these things

dichotomy between equality and freedom; parallel between theoretical and practical
equality and liberty are related phenomena but they are not the same thing (intersecting circles)
they are related and sometimes the same; different but there's a place where they overlap

how are they related?

they overlap when everyone is the same

speaks of "equal rights" but also of no one being "different"

most radical form of equality is sameness

however, this is impossible in the real world

thus only on the theoretical level can equality and liberty be used simply interchangeably

meaningful evaluation of democracy forces us to consider the difference between them or those situations that DeTocqueville describes as "incomplete equality"

e.g. everyone except one person is equal

that one person would be a tyrant, almost complete equality

however, notice there is no freedom

almost complete equality implies virtual absence of freedom

why is that important? DeTocqueville is interested in protecting freedom

democracy is here to stay, and we must come to terms with it

there is no question that democracy will prevail, but he's not sure about freedom

that being the case, the question becomes "what kind of democracy?"

DeTocqueville's central concern is with freedom, his interest is in liberal democracy

freedom is primary concern, assures liberal democracy is the form he must be interested in

what are the prospects for liberal democracy in the world?

the prospects for liberal democracy are not bad, but they are not guaranteed

problems can and probably will ensue

practically speaking, main thing is to protect liberty

promote liberal democracy

that in and of itself is tough enough

equality by virtue of permeating the laws, social conditions, manners, opinions, etc. can only be eliminated with the greatest effort; people are wholly egalitarian at heart

liberty can be lost easily, and the fact that equality can sometimes be mistaken doesn't help

the evils of liberty are easily seen/observed

can be seen immediately; stuff people see in the local news

evils of equality
tyranny of the majority, envy, selfishness, materialism
are seen only at intervals or over time
they are not really felt by the people

the advantages of liberty
production of excellence, art, culture
seen only after time has elapsed

advantages of equality
I'm as good as anybody else, etc.
part of our everyday lives

democratic nations love equality
they are not indifferent to freedom, but they don't love it

thus all political regimes must give democracy its due in the modern world
rule is impossible if this is not done
this is why fascism explained itself as the purest form of democracy
they couldn't say they were undemocratic, inegalitarian

goes on to consider phenomena derivatives of equality (protection of liberty in mind)
individualism - democratic phenomenon related to selfishness
selfishness is egotistical exaggerated love of self, immature unthinking feeling
we can call selfishness self interest wrongly understood

individualism is more complicated
not necessarily immature or unthinking
but it can be very dangerous
especially for the person whose first interest is maintenance of liberty
creates human beings on their own, isolated
divide and conquer, a despot and gilded subject individual
this individualism is noteworthy after a democratic revolution
Americans were fortunate in not having such a revolution
switch from british to american constitution was a change in government, not a revolution
american way of life has been an establishment

p488 - "one is occupied by general interest at first by necessity, and then by choice. what was calculation...observing it."

public associations are a logical extension of this notion of development

they seem to combat the isolation and anomie - alienated individual self?

491 - "sentiments and ideas renew themselves....this is what associations alone can do."

among the laws (492) - "among the laws that rule human societies...in the same ratio as the equality of conditions increases"

it is rare for DeTocqueville to call something a "law"

so take this quote to heart

another kind of association is a newspaper

this gets into the issue of has tech transcended the situation

"newspapers help to give a group an identity."

492 - "when men are no longer bound...without disturbing your particular affairs"

not convinced that watching msnbc does the same thing

48:00 - newspaper is a kind of association

aid and help freedom, substitute of most salutary aspect of aristocracy

there were good things about aristocracy, and we've lost them

associations help

one specific aspect of aristocracy--firm and lasting ties among humans--is something that needs to be substituted for to avoid democratic tyranny

since lasting ties are necessary, turns attention to general associations

press is a type of association, civil associations proliferate in the US

PTO's are rare in other liberal democracy, as are large number of associations

there is a common interest

americans act in concert to secure goals

492 - second to last paragraph

"in democratic countries, the...progress of that one"

first important thing to remember about DeTocqueville remarks about associations

ability to form such groups is a manifestation of liberty/freedom

it is an important manifestation, not a privilege taken advantage of from time to time

requires volition, must want to do it

in this sense, it is active liberty

associations are the vehicles through which self interest rightly understood is pursued

finally the habit of associating leads to political associations

absolutely crucial obstacles to the development of tyranny

they are liberty in use and at work

self-interest rightly understood

begins discussion by pointing out how it combats individualism

finds it necessary to discuss the idea of virtue in aristocracy before he makes his case in regard to self-interest rightly understood; why?

aristocracy has a long history, most familiar with decadent aristocracy (most recent) way back, it had certain virtues, they weren't bastardized

aristocracy does not reflect single driving motive of self-interest
decadent aristocracies do that; but old ones didn't have self-interest as its driving motive
did not see themselves as self-interested people

the single driving motive of self-interest was not there
maybe men were not more virtuous than they were today
but what is undeniable is they were more concerned with virtue than men are today
art, beauty, poetry, etc. was lauded for their own sake by the aristocracy
utilitarian motives were hardly mentioned; not so in democracy
virtue is contingent on utility in democracy

self interest was not a motivation of the aristocrat
it was the only motivation of the democracy

heroes will be rare, art stilted, philosophy mundane
but while enlightened self-interest will not produce a might civilization
it can produce a mighty regime
once characterized by decency and stability

p502 enlightened self interest rightly understood
"I shall not fear to say...adopt it as necessary."
enlightened self interest is the democratic cure for the democratic disease of selfishness

involves short run sacrifice for long run gain
but there are lots of people who won't involve themselves in long run gain
those people rarely succeed in the world, even economically
so lets write that off; democracy is not dependent on those people

sacrifices are not to be expected unless there is an overarching reason
at this point, religion, especially american christianity, becomes relative
it gives human beings a sense of their mortality
religions of salvation operate in thoughts very much the way self interest rightly understood does
it is little wonder that DeTocqueville relies on the theoretical and most profound religious
thinker, pascal, to explain the elements of choice

p505 - "If he has conceived doubts...there is nothign great to lose, but what unhappiness in being wrong about believing it false"

quoted pascal about salvation/religious notices as well that american protestantism was much of this world in contrast to the catholicism of middle ages, which deal almost exclusively with future state, had the effect of denigrating this world american preachers were opposite; deeply enmeshed in this world 505 bottom: "to touch their listeners better...or well being in this one"

religion in the US supports and buttresses the notion of self-interest rightly understood in american form, protestantism forces men to think beyond themselves and also undermines any guilt they might feel for action in this world that would increase their fortunes in other words, god validates getting rich

DT has pointed to democratic products such as selfishness and individualism and shown how they are qualified and mitigated based on doctrine of self interest rightly understood and institutions necessary to promote that ethic

these institutions are at their core related to freedom and liberty having completed his discussion of how religion buttresses this condition, he reverts to his original methods: other democratic problems, including the dread of losing those possessions one has obtained with so much toil, including a heavy emphasis on materialism

these preoccupation with things does not corrupt the soul, but enervates the soul the evil consequence of materialism has no dishonesty or immorality attached to it but the passion with which human beings go after its material possessions--this almost religiously observant dedication to shopping--forces humans to lose sight of any higher goals thus, alienation in the form of fanaticism and restlessness amidst prosperity can be produced

it enervates the soul, makes us lesser beings this emphasis on materialism leads to an emphasis on the means of the body all of those trinkets, gadgets, etc. that are an extension of needs of the body

having described these problems almost poetically, points out specific political dangers inherent it is the american love of freedom that produces these perils the almost fanatical attachment of americans to their freedoms is a good thing

what are the specific dangers that can be expected from the love of physical gratification/ materialism that is typical of the democratic state? freedom and liberty is first and foremost understood to be freedom to accumulate property freedom and religion in the US combine to form a productive attitude and synthesize to "bless" the accumulation of wealth this is the problem, because it is possible to give oneself over to these physical gratifications "cannot keep their hand out of the cookie jar"

it is possible to give oneself over to these physical gratifications, which engenders complete privacy and selfishness, which produces a vulnerability to tyranny
that vulnerability to tyranny is the consequences
515 (2/3): preoccupied with the sole care of making a fortune...to the prosperity of all
the notion of self-interest rightly understood can be eroded/undermined

the american attitude toward freedom--think it is the surest safeguard of their welfare--517:
attached to one by the other--has saved them from the perils of materialism
as a democratic nation, america is in a fortunate position

two things:
US at this time is a lesson to europe
but it can also be a lesson to us

the content of America's fortune/position cannot be attributed to freedom alone
religion becomes important in this context
we come to chapter 15 in this regard - 517 (whole chapter)
begins with a general panegyric to religion
(panegyric - a formal eulogistic composition intended as a public compliment
then get a description of the legislator, which varies from regime to regime
education and freedom leads to atheism, or at least agnosticism whose practical application is
atheism; such atheistic doctrines are especially dangerous to democracy

for DT, even the most salutary phenomenon, nothing is in higher esteem than freedom
nothing after that is put in higher esteem than education after that
but even these two contain the potential for some evil; nothing in DT is 100% good or bad

concludes with this problematic passage
"my answer will do me harm...in the lesser concerns of life"
(not to believe, but to act as if)

but DT has not yet finished "perfecting the soul" (521)
there is a short chapter where he points out the same attitude that includes the soul makes the
human being more capable of succeeding economically
this is because humans, in contrast to animals, have the capacity to see beyond material objects
and consequently have the capacity to keep the needs of the body in perspective
animals only have the needs of the body, nothing else
human beings can see beyond the self and thus humans have the capacity to put the self in clearer
perspective (education is inherent integral part of the process)

religion is the vehicle which allows us to act in the world with the future in mind
the salvation of religion trains the soul to repress immediate gratification in favor of the future
(talking about religion as an instrument)

when faith declines, our natural sloth and laziness give way to immediate desires
and they give way to the competition and faddishness of democracies
this can cause us to lose sight of ourselves

to keep this notion of ourselves, DT claims (523) "in these countries...eyes of men"
philosophers or those in power must constantly remind us of that which religion is no longer
capable; namely that only by resisting a thousand petty selfish passions an hour can the general
and unquenchable passion for happiness be satisfied
part of this teaching includes not allowing the advancement of individuals unless it is on the
basis of self-evident excellence; less envy lead the people to search for arbitrary and corrupt
means to achieve material goals
the future orientation that the lack of religion makes endless must be substituted for with a
secular ethic that teaches that wealth, fame, power are the rewards of only one thing: labor (or
self-evident excellence, but that is rare)

when religion is not there anymore--when faith declines--in secular times
freedom and education produce atheism
when this happens, it is crucially important that the people understand that one succeeds in the
world only through labor; for people to get ahead by other means is dangerous

what is the reason for others getting ahead besides labor?
nepotism, characteristics: gender race etc.

this is the greatest danger of democracy:
people seeing others get ahead by something other than work
so dangerous because you cannot avoid the danger
it will come about as a result of precisely those things that we want: freedom/education
freedom/education will erode faith
if there is no faith to validate things, then people will accept nothing except advancement on the
basis of labor; that will do in community, creates a dog eat dog world
must act as if labor is what gets people ahead

lead to discussion of aristocratic and democratic attitudes toward work and labor
point out: when money is the standard, egalitarianism is promoted
one of the most potent reason aristocracy will never be resurrected

the phenomena of money, along with the physical/material gratifications that are a result, will
strongly influence humans to choose "industrial callings" as opposed to farming/politics/
medicine/etc.

for DT, the ambition for material possessions dictates that farming ultimately will revert to the
domain of the very rich/very poor

the acquisition of land is capitalistically desired, but agriculture will only account for a few people; wealth in america must consider industry and manufacturing

refers to a "aristocracy of manufacturers" and this suggests some salutary aspect in light of the connections he makes earlier between aristocracy and freedom

not the case: very down on the new aristocracy that is developing

DT's first point is to mention the impact of the division of labor on society

takes into account the theory freedom to acquire and keep property combined with the division of labor is the most effective way for wealth to be developing in a nation (

however, he also points out kind of people who will be developed as a result to this process

worker becomes an extension of this job; basic reason for existence is dependent on something that has nothing to do with him as a human being (sound like marx?)

this is the definition that marx gave to alienation

DT says on 531 - "the arts makes progress, the artisan retrogresses"

while the worker becomes more dehumanized, the bosses get to be of higher caliber

an aristocracy of sorts is formed; boss and worker are dependent on each other

however, not like the past, because rich has no feeling beyond hedonistic gratification

no tradition or hopes in common, they are a bunch of individuals, not a class

no relationship to the poor whatsoever, nobles had a relationship with the serfs

532 - object is not to govern population, but to use it

concludes this way: this aristocracy is harsh, but in the end, harmless

it is too much of a democracy itself

it is however an aristocracy or oligarchy, and if inequality of tradition is to make any headway in the US it will be thought this vehicle - aristocracy of manufacturers

ends

final message: the future of the US is not in the hands of the aristocracy

that can be gleamed most explicitly in final conclusion on last page

"the fact of the matter is the world will be controlled and determined by democracy. the most important aspect of the democracy that will control/interpret the world is equality of condition.

the issue is not whether or not we will have democracy, as i said the issue is *how* we will have it.

democracy with liberty or democracy without it. but either way, democracy we will have. the

choice is ours; but how our is defined makes all the difference in the world."

two question to leave us with

how does his notion of history fit in the context of hegel, marx, nietzsche?

talks of progress, but if you speak of progress, you are presuming an endpoint; you are moving toward something; the deviations from that endpoint would be defined as retrogressive or

regressive; question: what is the endpoint of progress that DT purports?