

Civilization Without the Discontents:
Tocqueville on Democracy as the Social State of Nature
Steven Bilakovics

*After having lent liberty a thousand imaginary qualities, people no longer
saw its real charms*

- Tocqueville

Part I: Freedom, Equality, and Power

Freedom's Meaning: Mastery and Escape

In America today, freedom has taken on two polar opposite meanings. This is the conclusion put forward in 2005 by moral psychologist C. Fred Alford, based upon a series of interviews he conducted with primarily young Americans.¹ On one hand, Alford writes, most of the people he spoke with associate freedom with “the possession of money and power, or they devalue freedom compared to money and power.” The “formal freedoms ... enshrined in the Bill of Rights for example,” are largely dismissed as “effete rights” and “mere symbols.” Being allowed to say what one wants means little relative to the power to do what one wants. “Money and power are real;” real freedom requires “total control.”² Alford suggests that the “view of freedom that comes closest to that of young people is the ancient Greek view of freedom as *autokratôr* The difference is that for the ancient Greeks the term *autokratôr* generally (but not always) referred to the freedom of the polis, a city state with sufficient power to govern itself. ... For most people I spoke with, each individual is or would be his or her own city state. ‘Freedom is being the CEO of my own life,’” as one of Alford’s respondents put it.³

This notion of what Alford calls “freedom as mastery” takes shape not out of any will-to-power or self-affirmative aspiration to extend one’s dominion, though, but out of a fear of being dominated or victimized and a perceived need to defend oneself amid ceaseless competition. The drive to power is born of felt weakness; one must be predatory lest one is preyed upon. Seeing “civilized society in the terms, if not the extremes, of Hobbes’s state of nature,” Alford writes, what is “desired above all else is the power to protect oneself against the incursions of others. Insulation becomes freedom.”⁴ In a world where I am vulnerable and everyone else is aggressive, I must preemptively “amass enough power over others” so as “not to be subject to another’s will.”⁵

In turn, feeling always under siege and trapped in a sort of arms race, “the mastery that most young people seek is not idealized as much as it is *regretted*, as though there were no other choice. ... They wish they did not have to trade freedom for power, but dare not refuse, lest they end up with neither.”⁶ In their pursuit of power they “claim not virtue, but only necessity.”⁷

Out of this very same logic follows a second dimension of freedom, what we might call freedom as escape. Freedom here is not about the exertion of power over others, but about the retreat into a power-free space away from others. The alternative to autocracy is isolation. Alford describes this second dimension as “the freedom of passivity and submission,” of “losing control of oneself, or at least letting go of one’s need to control the world.” It is experienced “often in darkness” - in “sleep, hot baths, relaxation” - when “the cares of the world, all the constraints and demands of the day,

slip away, and one is free to just be, subject to a part of oneself kept under lock and key during the day.” This is the part of the self that is unleashed - set free to roam and stretch out and play and dream - either when one is asleep, or “when everyone else is asleep.”⁸

An alternative experience of freedom as escape follows from “relaxing with friends,” when one is with others but without the need to “monitor” oneself.⁹ We might think of this as the experience of being at home with others. To return to the previous chapter’s metaphor, if freedom as power over others is what we might call the “sex-object” formulation of freedom, freedom as power-free relaxation with friends is the “soul-mate” formulation. Only from the relational positions of being on top or being alone do I feel free. The social alternative to these two positions lies in the experience of *being by myself with others*. The line between “I” and “we” is blurred here, whether in the frictionless communion of lovers or friends, in the authentic community of one’s culture, or in facile communication across humanity. In what follows, I suggest that these become the dominant norms of social relations in democracy precisely because they convey this soul-mate sense of being by oneself with others.

The Tocquevillean framework developed in the previous chapter helps us interpret the apparent coalescing of freedom’s meaning around the poles of mastery and escape in three further respects.

First, the experiences people associate with freedom have just as much to do with equality. Freedom takes shape as mastery and escape within the normative context of equality. Alford writes that it was apparent how “power to get what one wants becomes the only standard” and the “universal medium of moral exchange in a world in which all values are equal.”¹⁰ Freedom is devalued relative to power in a world without recognized authority. When competition between equals replaces hierarchical command as the immanent ordering principle of social relations, success becomes more significant than freedom. By the same token, freedom as total independence - as escape from power into even “emotional autarky” - is embraced in a world where dependence of every sort is experienced as degrading.¹¹ “Not having to ask permission turned out to be a leading example of freedom,” Alford writes, because “having to ask permission reveals the power differential between the parties, and it is the knowledge of that differential that is humiliating.”¹² Further, the passion for equality seems in a sense turned inward when freedom is experienced as the loss of control and “letting go” even of oneself - freedom as the collapse of even internal hierarchy.

Second, as we saw with the notions of degradation and elevation, freedom-in-equality tends toward exclusive extremes. Alford calls this freedom’s “borderline quality.” The people he spoke with seemed to suggest that there was no intermediate point in between “the extremes of all and nothing at all;” “if they can’t be completely free, then they want none of it.”¹³ Most people expect their freedom to be “real, ... complete and total;” they “assume that they should be able to do what they want.”¹⁴ Here again we encounter the idea of a sort of commonplace rising above the level of humanity. The ordinary people of democracy simply assume a measure of mastery to which no king in history had aspired. When this proves impossible, the experience is of being wholly unfree, degraded below the level of humanity. Every limitation of freedom, every compromise or need to ask permission, seems an outright negation of freedom. Along

these lines, Alford identifies the same dialectic of “idealization and devaluation” that was at the center of the previous chapter.¹⁵

Alford attributes this borderline quality of freedom to the fact that his respondents “have grown up in a consumer society in which the commercial media panders to narcissistic fantasies of total control,” wherein one lives “in a world without boundaries or limits, free of all entanglements and obligations, able to do anything one wants.”¹⁶ I suggested previously that we must look to the larger whole of life after the democratic revolution - of which “consumer society” is but a derivative part - to understand our passion for the idea of a world without limits. The commercial media panders to the narcissistic sex-object and soul-mate fantasies that take shape within a society principled upon democratic openness.

And third, Alford makes clear that even as people imagine absolute freedom, they don’t believe their ideas have any impact upon the workaday world. The “economic world they live in ... is harsh, competitive, and relatively unforgiving, like Hobbes’s state of nature.”¹⁷ They “do not expect their imaginations to have any influence on the world, or the world on their imaginations. Rather, imagination and material reality belong to separate categories of existence that never meet.”¹⁸ The same divergence of *powerless* thought and *meaningless* action we touched upon last chapter recurs here as freedom’s dualism. In principle we are entirely free, but to approach this freedom we must retreat from the world into utter privacy or utter intimacy - into a “literary” world of our own making. In practice freedom is immaterial and we are entirely subject to necessity. Alford picks up a hint of this, reporting that when just *talking* about experiences of freedom, people spoke in terms of respite and relaxation; when asked to *define* freedom, people spoke of mastery, money, and power.¹⁹

We should distinguish between two distinct lines of logic in this relationship between freedom’s dimensions. On one hand, we might collapse into the peace of respite and relaxation because we are fatigued by the *reality* of the war of all against all. At the same time we might devalue freedom in the regrettable *necessity* of seeking self-defensive control over our environment. In either case freedom is subverted by external circumstances. On the other hand, *imagining* an ideal of absolute freedom, we might abandon the idea and practice of freedom because we are disappointed with and even indignant over our inevitably limited share. In this case freedom is self-subverting, undermined by its own expansiveness. Freedom *in* society and the world is cynically devalued in relation to the idealization of freedom *from* others and the world. From this angle, we might say that freedom as escape is the freedom of transcendence. Analogous to the revolutionary contempt of existing facts discussed in the previous chapter, a contempt of existing freedom follows from this logic.

Freedom-in-Equality: Competition and Intimacy

In this chapter I continue to explore and extend Tocqueville’s envisioning of our democratic way of life in an attempt to interpret these dimensions of modern freedom. Tocqueville is perhaps best known for his argument that modern democratic peoples might sacrifice freedom to their overriding passion for equality. “They want equality in liberty, and if they cannot have it, they want it in slavery. They will suffer poverty, servitude, and barbarity, but they will not suffer aristocracy.”²⁰ For all of Tocqueville’s celebrated powers of prediction, it seems like this most famous prognosis might well be

the furthest from the mark. Far from being our “principal passion,” as he puts it, one wonders if anyone even cares about equality anymore. We certainly don’t hear much about it in these times of great and growing inequalities. If anything is held to be self-evident today, it would seem to be that “the rich get richer, the poor poorer.” By contrast, freedom is constantly invoked as, in Alford’s words, “an all purpose word for everything that is good about our way of life.”²¹

I think we can account for this situation from within Tocqueville’s theory of democracy, though. What is affirmed as everything that is good about our way of life is freedom of a particular sort, freedom-in-equality, in the absence of hierarchical absolutes. This is the freedom of what I have been calling “democratic openness.” Equality of authority is the unseen background picture we accept silently, as neither advocates nor adversaries, like the course of the sun and the succession of the seasons. And it is against this background picture that freedom comes into relief as everything that is good - and true, as we shall see - about our democratic way of life. Democratic freedom is to the principle of equality what aristocratic command is to the principle of hierarchy. We might say that we are *oriented* by the principle of equality and *animated* by the spirit of freedom.

As Hobbes makes so clear, the equality of authority does not preclude and in many ways exacerbates the struggle for power. The condition of equality turns easily into one of competition, and so of winners and losers. Inequality thus persists in democracy but hierarchy does not.²² The inequalities produced by open competition supplant the inequalities that justify command. Tocqueville himself draws on such a distinction in the above passage when he distinguishes between servitude and aristocracy.²³

Along these lines, I suggest that Tocqueville accurately interprets our social state as premised upon the equality of authority, but to an extent misses the inextricable link between democratic equality and democratic freedom. I argued in the previous chapter that Tocqueville’s own work can be read to show how equality does not subvert the *passion* for revolution (even if it does make great political revolutions rare). Along exactly the same lines, I argue in this chapter that equality does not subvert the passion for freedom (even if it does make its political expression seem impossible). I argued that the democratic social state, defined by the presence of equality/absence of hierarchy, harbors a permanent tension between extreme notions of human degradation and grandeur - between the fear of collapsing into domestication and the revolutionary aspiration of rising above or delving below superficial and fettering materiality to make the idea of openness triumph in the world. I extend this analysis here, arguing that freedom-in-equality takes on its “borderline” meanings over against the fear of domestication. We respond to the prospect of domestication by striving for mastery and/or escape - fight or flight.

Alford describes how many of the people he interviewed saw society as a less extreme version of Hobbes’s state of nature. The reasoning, it would seem, is that the social compact at best renders the natural war of all against all a sort of cold war. This should not surprise us. The social state of equality cannot but mirror many of the features of the natural state of equality. Hobbes’s state of nature is characterized by the absence of authority and the irreducible potential for force in all interactions - there is no basis for

command and a constant struggle for control. This condition of insecurity may be attenuated in society, but never be eliminated. The notion persists that - when we get past all the talk and down to the truth of the matter - human relations are at bottom power relations. And so while a man may no longer fear for his life in society, he remains vulnerable to being over-powered by others - economically, intellectually, emotionally, and so forth. Insofar as I perceive myself as weak, such domination might extend to domestication.²⁴

What's more, as Locke recognizes, the construction of new social, political, and economic power centers and systems actually introduces a whole new level of threat - the wolf is replaced by the lion. Now I am potentially subject to far vaster and in a sense unseen concentrations of power than were present in the state of nature. And insofar as I perceive these impersonal powers as conventional, as the product of human intentions, I encounter them as the power of another's will over me. In this sense, the potential for both controlling and being controlled is greatly expanded in the socialized state of nature. In the zoo that is society, the threat of death is supplanted by the specter of domestication. And in the zero-sum game struggle to be the so-called "alpha-male," every influence of one over another may seem to portend domestication.²⁵

As we have seen, though, the struggle for mastery that follows from this logic is often experienced as a regrettable necessity. To extend Alford's representation, if his respondents feel trapped in Hobbes's state of nature, they imagine escaping into Rousseau's state of nature. Circumstances force conflict and the striving for power over others, but what people really want is a different sort of freedom, a different sort of wildness - the pastoral freedom of privacy or utter intimacy. This is a power-free condition outside the economic necessities of material reality. Here I need fear neither death nor domestication. I am free to let down my guard and relax into inaction, to just stretch out and dream.

In what follows, I argue that these two notions of wildness stand as central norms of human relations within the democratic social state. We take a watered-down version of Hobbes's state of nature as the truth we simply cannot deny in our open society. At the same time, we affirm socialized aspects of Rousseau's state of nature as all that is potentially good and beautiful about our open society. In a sense, we might say that democratic society rejects the terms of the liberal contract under which liberty is traded for security, holding that even in society insecurity is inevitable and liberty is properly unlimited. In turn, democratic society tends to be represented as a market (a social construct, of course, but one which is taken to be natural, a mirror of the Hobbesian - or Darwinian - way the real world works), or in the terms of "culture" (another social construct, but which mirrors the deep, authentic blood-bond of family resemblance). What captures the imagination in democracy are those relationships wherein we feel together-as-one or in total combat, wherein we see others as our community or our competitors.²⁶ I go on to argue that democratic politics comes to seem alien to democratic society, which is taken as either a pre-conventional world before politics or a post-conventional world beyond politics. Political argument is represented accordingly, not as the debate between citizens but as a "war" between "cultures."

I argue that Tocqueville's most prescient concerns are thus most precisely formulated not as the threat to freedom in equality, but as the threat to democratic politics in democratic freedom. We should be less concerned with despotism born of equality than with de-politicization born of democratic openness. By "de-politicization" I mean

the widespread acceptance of the view that democratic politics - arguing and acting in association with equal others toward the collective use of power - is basically an incoherent idea. As Tocqueville explains, this loss is significant beyond the political sphere. De-politicization threatens the overall health of society because the political practice of democracy is perhaps the sole remedy to the pathologies of freedom-as-openness.

Part II: The Freedom of Openness

The Savage and the Slave

I believe we can read Tocqueville's story of the slave and the savage as an account of modern freedom's dimensions of mastery and escape. Tocqueville writes toward the end of *Democracy I* of how once, "while traveling through the forests," he encountered an "Indian woman" who was "holding the hand of a little girl of five or six, of the white race A Negro woman followed along behind." In appearance and demeanor the savage and the slave were mirror opposites. The "savage women," who "was not married," "looked free, proud, and almost fierce." The "Negress wore European clothing that was almost in tatters," and exhibit "a servile fear" in her relationship to the child. For her part, the child "displayed a sense of superiority that contrasted oddly with her weakness and her age." Yet, alone together in the wilderness, the group seemed like a little family, the two women showing an "almost maternal attachment" to the little girl. There was "something particularly touching" in this scene of "nature . . . striving to bring them together" in a "bond of affection," despite the "vast distance that prejudices and laws had placed between them . . ." Tocqueville ruined it all, though. Upon noticing his presence, the Indian "abruptly stood, rather roughly pushed the child away, and with an irritated glance in (Tocqueville's) direction set off into the forest."²⁷

Can we take these two types - the savage and the slave - as theoretical markers of how we think about freedom and its loss in democratic times? Can we say that the slave represents the possibility of utter domestication, and that the savage reaction to the presence of power and its domesticating potential represents the alternatives of mastery and escape?

Tocqueville writes elsewhere that while violence has deprived the slave "of nearly all the privileges of humanity," "habituation to servitude has given him the thoughts and ambitions" of a slave. He "enjoys all the privileges of his baseness in tranquility."²⁸ How far is Tocqueville's description of the slave from today's near-ubiquitous notion that we have become the tame creatures of commercial society, stripped of our individual identities and our human capacities, equating the privileges of our base servitude to the market - consumer choice and purchasing power - with freedom? Habituated to the thoughts and ambitions of consumers, we are contentedly domesticated.

Where the "Negro exists at the ultimate extreme of servitude, the Indian (exists) at the outer limits of freedom." The slave "is ashamed of himself. In every one of his features he sees a trace of slavery, and if he could repudiate himself altogether, he would gladly consent to do so." He "has learned only how to submit (to) and obey . . . his needs." Conversely, the "Indian's imagination is filled with the supposed nobility of his origins. He lives and dies amid dreams inspired by his pride" - not unlike the French

“men of ’89.” The slave “finds his joy and pride in servile imitation of his oppressors” and “aspires, by imitating them, to become indistinguishable from them.” The savage “is afraid of resembling the Europeans” and “clings to his opinions and to the least modicum of his habits with a lack of flexibility unparalleled in history.” The “Negro (is) the proprietor of nothing, not even his own person.” The “savage is his own *master* from the moment he can act. . . . He has never bowed to the will of another man. No one has taught him to distinguish between voluntary obedience and shameful subjection, and he knows nothing of law, not even the name. For him, to be free is to *escape* from nearly every social bond.” He “revels in his barbarous independence” and is unwilling to “sacrifice any part of it. Civilization has little purchase on such a man.”²⁹ To what extent does Tocqueville’s description of the savage’s prideful pursuit of all-or-nothing independence into isolation capture the borderline norms of freedom given by Alford’s respondents?

On Tocqueville’s account, I argue, democratic society’s characteristic individualism and materialism both take shape around these poles of domestication and savage independence.³⁰

Democratic Individualism: Sovereignty and Insignificance

Tocqueville’s metaphor for the organization of aristocratic society is that of a chain. “Aristocracy linked all citizens together in a long chain from peasant to king.” Born into their station within immutable and hierarchical networks of *influence* and *service*, each member of society is bound to his place, and also to those members in the places above and below him. Association is obligatory. In this sense, aristocratic society is the public society *par excellence*: “men who live in aristocratic centuries are almost always closely tied to something outside themselves and are often disposed to forget about themselves.”³¹

Democratic society is organized not as a chain but via revolutionary rupture. “Democracy breaks the chain and severs the links.”³² This is in part a consequence of the way democratic equality was born into the old world via revolution. Revolution, to paraphrase Thucydides, is a violent teacher, and the hatred it generates drives people apart. Moreover, post-revolutionary society is populated “by men who, having achieved independence only yesterday, are drunk with newfound power,” and “have a presumptuous confidence in their own strength.”³³ But the breaking of the social chain is also a consequence of equality itself. In equality, each man “seeks to be *self-sufficient* and prides himself on subscribing to his own peculiar beliefs about all things.”³⁴ While hatred fades as the equalization of conditions gives way to settled equality, the stance of self-sufficiency persists. While “democratic revolutions encourage (people) to shun one another,” then, democratic equality “tends to make men unwilling to approach their fellows.”³⁵ Even in revolution-free America, democratic man follows the maxim: “In everything that regards himself alone, he remains master.”³⁶

This maxim takes root at the level of the republican political unit, but is adopted by each individual within democratic society. In the relationship between family members, citizens, and Protestants, what Tocqueville terms the “dogma of popular sovereignty” becomes the “law of laws.”³⁷ The “generative principle of the republic is the same principle that governs most human actions. Hence the republic penetrates, if I may put it that way, into the ideas, opinions, and general habits of the Americans”³⁸

For perhaps the first time in human history the utterly audacious idea of being one's own exclusive authority presents itself to each member of society - every man a king. "Equality fosters in each individual the desire to judge everything for himself," henceforth "each man seeks his beliefs" and his "rules of judgment solely from within."³⁹ Ultimately, people are even "pleased to think that their fate lies entirely in their own hands"⁴⁰ These norms of self-sufficiency and personal sovereignty are one aspect of democratic individualism.

We might say that the outer-directed members of aristocratic society are supplanted by the inner-directed individuals of democracy. In aristocratic times, "all men are connected with and dependent on one another. All are linked by a hierarchical bond, which helps to keep each individual in his place and enforce obedience in the body as a whole." In democratic society, a wild and disobedient streak persists: "Accustomed to subjecting his movements to no rule other than his personal impulses," the democratic individual "finds it difficult to bend to rules imposed from outside." And this inflexibility, which takes root with the republican political principle of self-government, rebounds to make collective action more difficult. Even if the democratic individual "consents to join with others in pursuit of a common goal, he wants at least to remain his own master, cooperating in the common success as he sees fit."⁴¹ Democratic society, in turn, becomes the private and personal society *par excellence*; democratic man is never disposed to forget about himself.

This proud and powerful stance of independence is only one aspect of democratic individualism, though. The flip side of the self-made man is the feeling of being just one small self alone among innumerable others. Democratic individuals believe that they "owe nothing to anyone," but also that they can "expect nothing from anyone."⁴² As much as the individual imagines himself standing self-sufficient and sovereign, he feels himself helpless and compelled to retreat before society and the world. "Each person ... *retreats* within the limits of the self and from that vantage *ventures* to judge the world."⁴³ Democratic individuals "have neither superiors nor inferiors nor habitual and necessary associates," and so their "natural inclination" is "to *fall back* on themselves and consider themselves in isolation."⁴⁴ Democratic man ends up the CEO of a company of one.

Not unlike Hobbes's state of nature, then, the experience of individualism in the social state of equality is one of being "free but vulnerable." "Equality of conditions makes men aware of their independence but at the same time points up their weakness."⁴⁵ And their weakness seems to them as limitless as their independence. Inflexible pride inverts to soft neediness as each person realizes he is not up to the impossible task of self-sufficiency. The sovereignty of the savage inverts to the slave's "servile imitation" of others-en-mass, and even to a sort of self-repudiation. Wildness inverts to domestication. Tocqueville's argument on this front is well known: desperate for intellectual, spiritual, and emotional guidance and support but too proud to admit to any sort of dependence on one's equals, the *overt influence* characteristic of aristocratic society gives way to the *covert conformity* of democratic society. "In democratic countries it is common for large numbers of citizens to make for the same point," Tocqueville writes, even as "each one ... flatters himself that he does so ... wholly of his own accord."⁴⁶ Even as he "feels with pride that he is equal" to the particular people around him, the democratic individual is "immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and weakness" in relation to the innumerable similar individuals that surround him.⁴⁷ Engulfed in a vast sea of numbers,

he is carried along by the majority current. He never forgets himself, but he does end up in a sense losing himself - "lost in the crowd and easily swallowed up in the common obscurity."⁴⁸ This is the other aspect of democratic individualism. "In the most civilized nations of the globe it is common for an unfortunate individual to find himself as lonely amid the crowd as the savage in his woods."⁴⁹

In their individualism, Tocqueville concludes, democratic peoples "are constantly wracked by two warring passions: they feel the need to be led and the desire to remain free."⁵⁰ As we shall see, Tocqueville argues that to combat the former democratic individuals must combat the latter, at least insofar as the exclusivity of the desire to remain free subverts itself, inverting to powerlessness - to feelings of isolation and insignificance. To remain free, citizens of democracy must be "*forced* to know and accommodate one another."⁵¹ The democratic individual must be made to wake up from the dreams inspired by his pride and see "that he is not as independent of his fellow men as he initially imagined," and that it is at times "in his own interest to forget himself."⁵² To remain free he must resist his natural, savage, revolutionary inclination to escape from nearly every social bond and instead "learn the art of joining with his fellow men."⁵³

The Heroic Materialism of Democratic Times

We see a similar dualism in Tocqueville's description of the materialism of democratic society, at least in America. In the previous chapter, we looked at Tocqueville's analysis of the pacifying impetus of democratic man's need for "material well-being." There is, for instance, "nothing more opposed to revolutionary mores than commercial mores." Commercial peoples oppose "revolutionary instincts" with "conservative interests," "impetuousness" with "inertia," and "adventurous passions" with "homely tastes."⁵⁴ But this is only half the picture of democracy's commercial society. Even as commercial mores might sap their vigor and spiritedness, potentially rendering them "a flock of timid and industrious animals," democrats in America display a certain wildness in their materialism - a "commercial recklessness," an "audacity" and "boldness in industry."⁵⁵ Far from only opposing revolutionary mores, their passion for gaining and love of chance and risk simulates a sort of passion for revolution within their commercial mores.

Whatever homely tastes and conservative interests a life of commerce inculcates are accompanied by an adventurous spirit of "intense competition (and) endless experimentation."⁵⁶ Indeed, Tocqueville identifies a sort of predatory passion in American materialism that the exactly opposes the soft and stultifying need for bodily pleasure, comfort, and security. Hardly resembling the timid sheep that might lie in democracy's future, Tocqueville writes that it "would be difficult to describe the avidity with which the American hurls himself upon the immense prey that fortune offers him. ... A passion stronger than the love of life constantly spurs him on." The "desire for well-being has become an anxious, burning passion that grows even as it is satisfied;" it drives the American to, for instance, "fearlessly brave the Indian's arrows and the maladies of the wilderness."⁵⁷ The American, in other words, sacrifices his material well-being for the sake of a passion that manifests itself in the striving for material well-being.

"Those who live amid democratic instability," Tocqueville explains, generalizing beyond the case of America, "have the image of chance constantly before their eyes, and

eventually they come to love all undertakings in which chance plays a role. Hence they are all propelled toward commerce, not only for the promise of gain it affords but also for the *love of the emotions* it occasions.”⁵⁸ Democratic peoples love the gamble as much as the gain. They love the drama of the economic game - the chance of rising and even the risk of falling - that reflects the open-ended uncertainty of the democratic way of life. In this sense, commercial society takes shape and is affirmed as an aspect of the democratic mode of being; materialism is as much an opportunity for adventure, mobility, and innovation as it is a doctrine of timidity, submission, and neediness.

Tocqueville himself goes so far as to say that there is “a kind of heroism” in the entrepreneurial American’s “avidity for profit;” there is “something heroic about the way Americans do business, ... not just responding to a calculation but obeying the dictates of his nature.”⁵⁹ There is even something of the Napoleonic spirit of the French in American businessmen: “What the French did for victory, they do to cut costs.”⁶⁰ Tocqueville writes: “The American navigator sets sail from Boston to buy tea in China. ... During a crossing of eight to ten months, he has drunk brackish water and lived on salted meat. He has battled constantly with the sea, with disease, and with boredom. But upon his return, he can sell his tea for a penny a pound less than the English merchant: his goal has been achieved.”⁶¹ It is this sort of warrior materialism, as it were, this bourgeois heroism, that “fires the imagination of the crowd” in democratic times.⁶²

For Tocqueville, then, there is a dualism to both democratic materialism and democratic individualism. Whether lost in the crowd or lost in the herd, whether in isolation and insignificance or in the need for material well-being, democratic man may suffer a boundless loss of freedom. The opposite path of materialism and individualism leads toward an equally unbounded freedom - whether of the untouched and self-sufficient individual or of the bold soul who risks all in uncharted and unpredictable waters. This freedom - the freedom of being untamed in the wild, so to speak - takes shape as restlessness within the social state of what I have been calling “democratic openness.” While less obvious, this path has its own dangers.

Democracy’s Compulsive Restlessness

Tocqueville argues that France’s revolutionary sequels, in particular the revolution of 1848, were self-conscious imitations of the original rupture of 1789 (rather sentimental sequels at that). Analogously, I want to suggest that what Tocqueville describes as the characteristic “restlessness” or “restiveness” of American democracy can in part be understood as an ongoing re-enactment of America’s founding rupture of pilgrimage to the freedom of the New World. Restlessness and freedom are intertwined in America’s migratory epic. The pursuit of the original and the new, the notion of never being bound to place, the passion for openings and openness: these become the animating spirit of the lives of Americans, of their economics, their religion, and their politics. Tocqueville, as we shall see, develops this picture in what is perhaps his master trope of the different freedoms of aristocratic hierarchy and democratic equality: in aristocracy, freedom means having a place to stand; in democracy, freedom means having space to move.

For Tocqueville, the democratic revolution seems the precondition for imagining change in the world.⁶³ It is almost as if the very concepts of the new and the possible come into the world with democracy. In centuries of hierarchy, “conditions seemed fixed

forever, and the whole society seemed so static that no one imagined that anything could ever stir within it. In centuries of equality the human mind takes on a different cast. It is easy to imagine that nothing stays put. The mind is possessed by the idea of instability.”⁶⁴ Democracy, we might say, is the milieu of open-mindedness. And this shift in the mode of thought leads to a shift in the mode of action. “Aristocracy seeks to maintain things as they are rather than to improve them.” In democracy, the “improving spirit” rules. There “exists an urge to do something even when the goal is not precise, a sort of permanent fever that turns to innovation of every kind.”⁶⁵ This fever manifests itself even in democratic expression. “In aristocracies, language inevitably partakes of the general ambience of repose. Few new words are created, because few new things come to pass. . . . By contrast, the perpetual fluidity that is so prominent a feature of democracy is forever reshaping the face of language” Democratic peoples “sometimes feel a desire to change words even when there is no need.”⁶⁶

This same basic contrast runs throughout Tocqueville’s writings. Aristocratic society is dominated by a stillness that would seem like death in democratic times. Democratic society is dominated by a flux that would seem like Pandemonium in aristocratic times.⁶⁷ There is one constant we should not overlook, though. In democracy, as in aristocracy, the order of society and the order of the world reflect one another. Norm and nature, ought and is, take the same shape. Before the revolution, Nature and society paralleled each other in their hierarchical solidity, which was considered at once given and good. Every change seemed to signify corruption, and the idea of the old was coupled with that of the proper. In America, by contrast, where “everything seems to be in constant flux,” “every change seems to mark an advance. Hence the idea of the new is coupled . . . with the idea of the better.”⁶⁸ On Tocqueville’s account, the order of the democratic social state seems hardly less natural to its inhabitants than the aristocratic social order did to its inhabitants. The principle of openness seems inscribed in the truth of the world after the revolution, just as the principle of hierarchy once seemed inscribed in the Truth of the world. Now, reality is full of dynamic change and newness, society is full of dynamic change and newness, and perhaps providentially this means not decay and corruption but vitality, innovation, evolution, even progress. “In the midst of the universal movement that surrounds him,” the American considers “change . . . the natural state of man,” and comes to “love change for its own sake.”⁶⁹ Consequently, all come to “consider society a body in progress and mankind a changing tableau in which nothing is or should be fixed forever.”⁷⁰

For example, Tocqueville writes that in the conflict over the Second Bank of the United States the people did not necessarily understand the complex issues at stake, but opposed the institution on the grounds of its independence and its permanence. “In a society where everything is in flux, this immovable object is offensive to their eyes, and they want to see if they can oblige it to change along with everything else.”⁷¹ Impermanence becomes as much a matter of value as of fact; that which is static seems an unnatural aberration.

As much as the material bounty of the New World shaped this view of society and the world, it doesn’t appear to be limited to America. At the time of the Revolution, the French too had a “taste for instability and risk.” The difference lies in Tocqueville’s assessment of this “love of change for itself.” As we shall see, the consequences in the American context are mixed. In France, this outlook is a symptom of what Tocqueville

wholly condemns as “the revolutionary disease” - the “disgust at and horror for rules and authority, even for rules one has made and authority one has established.”⁷² The love of change in the French context turned to a lust for violence, and the taste for instability to reflexive insubordination. Tocqueville makes clear that while the symptoms of this disease will never be as acute as at the moment of revolution, they will henceforth be chronic. This is because “the accidental illness finds itself with living roots in the permanent social state, the habits, ideas, and lasting mores that the revolution has founded.” Its “particular character comes in part from the fundamental characteristics of the society created by the Revolution. Therefore some of it will necessarily remain, even after the revolutionary period is completely over. This something will be a certain disquiet and chronic instability, and a permanent disposition to relapse easily into the revolutionary disease.”⁷³ A residual passion for revolution persists as habitual rebelliousness. In France, as in America, the founding event resonates; neither people should ever be expected to fully settle down.

This new sense of possibility and mobility - of being able to take to an open road, as it were - gives rise to what Tocqueville describes as the *compulsive* restlessness of democratic society. In the “universal tumult” of democratic times, “men never stand still. ... (They) are constantly on the move, and there is always something unexpected and in a sense improvised about their lives.”⁷⁴ And this restlessness seems as inescapable in democracy as tradition seemed in aristocracy. If aristocratic man can never move, democratic man feels like he can never stop. “Equality,” Tocqueville writes, “allows anyone to go anywhere.”⁷⁵ But this sense of openness inverts to a sort of imperative; able to move, the democratic individual feels enjoined to move. To stand still when all is in motion, to stay at home when one can go anywhere, is to seem unfree, somehow constrained - even in a way not “fully alive.”

Democratic society thus settles into its determinate form as amorphous - constituted as a “state of constant agitation” wherein “everything is in flux” and “in a *permanent state of transformation*.”⁷⁶ Uniform and routine, restlessness is the new rule. “Democratic centuries,” Tocqueville concludes, “are times of trial, innovation, and adventure,” but they are not times of chaos.⁷⁷ All is in motion, but all motion is animated by the same spirit. The experience of life in the fluidity of democracy is not so much of being uprooted and left adrift as of being “daily swept along and buffeted about by the impetuous current that carries all things before it.”⁷⁸

This compulsive restlessness drives the material life of Americans. The American brings a “fervent ardor ... to the pursuit of well-being.” He “grasps at everything but embraces nothing and soon lets things slip from his grasp so that he may go chasing after new pleasures. ... He settles in one place only to leave it a short while later to pursue his changing desires elsewhere.”⁷⁹ It is as if his well-being lies in the pursuit of well-being more so than in the state of well-being - his pleasure lies in the chase, what he really desires is change itself. “No one can work harder at being happy than Americans do.”⁸⁰ Interestingly, Tocqueville argues that the “vast competitive arena” that arises when “everyone is constantly seeking to change places” actually constrains the restless movement of democracy’s economic sphere.⁸¹ Democracy comes to almost resemble aristocracy: “Having destroyed the obstructing privileges enjoyed by some of their fellow

men,” democratic peoples “run up against universal competition. The form of the obstacle has changed, but the obstacle remains.”⁸²

The spiritual life of Americans is at times similarly restless and agitated. As we have seen, Americans demonstrates a sort of disregard for bodily needs in their quest for material well-being. They abandon what they have today in pursuit of what they will abandon tomorrow. An analogous recklessness manifests itself when Americans turn away from the here and now and toward matters of the soul. Tocqueville writes that this manifests itself in eruptive moments “when their souls seem suddenly to cast off all material bonds and fly impetuously toward heaven.” In this flight, Americans neglect “even their most pressing bodily needs.”⁸³

Tocqueville explicitly presents this spiritual restlessness as a “powerful reaction” to democratic society’s deadening preoccupation with material well-being. “The soul has needs that must be satisfied, and no matter what pains one takes to distract it from itself, it soon grows bored, anxious, and agitated among the pleasures of the senses.” The “American spirit,” narrowly confined to the search for well-being, “feels imprisoned within limits that apparently it cannot transgress.”⁸⁴ But perhaps the feeling of being imprisoned within limits and the urge to transgression are rooted deeper in democratic society than the search for well-being, and indeed determines what democratic man thinks of as his well-being, whether material or spiritual. Here, democratic man isn’t spiritually restless because of the material well-being he pursues, but rather pursues material and spiritual well-being the way he does because he is restless. His “fervent ardor” in pursuit of material well-being is of a kind with his “impassioned, almost wild spiritualism.”⁸⁵ Not boredom with the pleasures of the senses but the passion for freedom-in-equality gives rise to restlessness.⁸⁶ As with France’s revolutionary rupture, democratic man’s occasional flight from “the fetters of the body” is a manifestation of how he imagines freedom in the social state of openness.

Pilgrimage Into the Wild

In the previous chapter, we saw how Tocqueville interpreted the founding pilgrimage to the New World as motivated not by any material need, but rather to ensure the victory of an idea. He describes America’s ongoing westward migration in analogous terms. Americans “daily depart the place of their birth to create vast estates for themselves in far-off places.” “Millions of men march together toward the same point on the horizon” in a “migratory flow (that) is never-ending.”⁸⁷ “These people left their original homeland in search of the good life. They left their second homeland in search of a still better one. . . . They long ago broke the bonds that attached them to their native soil and have formed no bonds since.” And while this emigration “began as a need; today it has become a game of chance, which they love as much for the emotions it stirs as for the profit it brings.”⁸⁸ While the French take up a sort of perpetual rebelliousness, the American vocation is perpetual restlessness; these are the adaptations of the same passion for revolutionary openness to different social, historical, and physical environments.

Along these lines, Tocqueville argues, the shift from aristocracy to democracy is largely constituted by the shift from *landedness* to *openness* as the ordering, animating virtue of society - from territoriality to “breaking the bonds” of territory. It is in this sense that he writes of the American West as “democracy pushed to its ultimate limit” - a

sort of instantiated ideal type of democracy in its permanent state of transformation.⁸⁹ It is primarily in the West that one encounters the “wild spiritualism” and “bizarre sects” of American religion.⁹⁰ And it is in the West - where society was “organized only yesterday (and) is still but a swarm of adventurers and speculators” - that one encounters the full extent of American’s wild materialism.⁹¹ In these lands upon which people don’t so much settle as pass over, freedom-in-equality is pushed to its ultimate limit. “The Americans who flee the Atlantic coast and rush headlong westward are adventurers impatient of discipline of any kind They arrive in the wilderness as strangers to one another and find there nothing to restrain them - not traditions or family spirit or examples. The law has little power over them, and mores even less.”⁹² These adventurers stand as the ideal of democratic individualism in action - sovereign, self-sufficient, isolated, insignificant. They live the socialized savage life. “Many of the Americans who live in the West were born in the woods, and in them the civilization of their fathers is conjoined with ideas and customs drawn from the savage life. . . . Men exert less control over one another, because they barely know their neighbors. (They) therefore exhibit the inexperience and unbridled ways of nascent peoples.”⁹³ In these new societies that “sprang up in the wilderness overnight,” people “*escaped the influence* not only of great names and great wealth but also of that natural aristocracy which derives from enlightenment and virtue.”⁹⁴

In the always new world of the frontier, then, with its absolute equality and unbridled independence, democratic openness comes close to being realized in the world. And it is this freedom of the frontier that continues to take hold of the American imagination: freedom as the insecure condition of the “wild west” in which we “really” live when the comforting illusions of liberal civilization and polite society are stripped away; freedom as the escape from power and external influence into the untouched wild. This is the freedom of the state of nature - of life in the irreducible turmoil of Hobbes’s state of nature; of life on one’s own in Rousseau’s state of nature.⁹⁵

Freedom’s Meaning: From Place to Space

Thus far I have argued that for Tocqueville the restless style of American individualism and materialism, along with the habitual rebelliousness of the French, follow in part from the idea of freedom inscribed in democratic equality. This is the freedom experienced when conditions are in flux and one can move about unconstrained, unobstructed, uninhibited. Tocqueville seems of two minds about this notion of freedom. In a description that would seem to align freedom with democracy and the lack of freedom with aristocracy, Tocqueville writes that in a free country “bustle and activity are everywhere,” in an unfree country “everything seems calm and still.”⁹⁶ Tocqueville goes on to exalt the “universal movement that dominates everything else in the United State, the frequent reversals of fortune, the unforeseen shifts in public and private wealth - all of these things combine to keep the soul in a sort of febrile agitation, which admirably disposes it to effort of all kinds and keeps it above the common run of humankind.”⁹⁷ This elevating agitation is not confined to the “private industry” of Americans, shaping even their “religious doctrines.”⁹⁸ And democratic government introduces this “ceaseless agitation” into politics, which then transforms “civil society.” The practice of democratic government “spreads throughout society a restless activity, a superabundant strength, an energy that never exists without it, and which, if

circumstances are even slightly favorable, can accomplish miracles.”⁹⁹ Animated by this restless sort of freedom, what one finds in America “is an image of strength, a little untamed, to be sure, but full of vigor; and of life, not without mishaps, to be sure, but also dynamic and energetic.”¹⁰⁰ With its messy but vitalizing freedom, the democratic way of life in America seems almost synonymous with being fully alive.

By the time of volume II of *Democracy*, however, Tocqueville comes to believe that this agitation and restlessness might actually end up sapping the energy and halting the activity of democratic peoples. We have seen how democratic restlessness is a sort of moderated form of the democratic passion for revolution. But this very moderation, this lack of revolutionary audacity, troubles Tocqueville. A “perpetual motion is ubiquitous in (democratic) societies and rest is unknown, but that agitation is confined within certain limits that are seldom exceeded. Men in democracies change, alter, and replace things of secondary importance every day but are extremely careful not to tamper with things of primary importance.”¹⁰¹ Democratic man, Tocqueville fears, will “exhaust his energies in petty, solitary, and sterile changes,” and “humanity, though constantly on the move, will cease to advance.”¹⁰² In exact opposition to the sentiment expressed in the above passage, Tocqueville writes that what is “common in democratic nations ... is a somewhat troubling restlessness, a constant turnover of people, which disturbs and distracts the mind without stimulating or elevating it.”¹⁰³

Perhaps in his ambivalence Tocqueville leads us to a sort of paradox of the democratic condition of freedom and restlessness, which is characterized by the opening of the imagination and the elevating sense that anything is possible, but also by a doubt and uncertainty - an inability to focus amid the constant flux - that disturbs and distracts the mind. In this sense, perhaps democratic freedom is a necessary but not sufficient condition of a vitality of thought and action.

At other times, Tocqueville identifies and embraces what he describes as the freedom specific to aristocratic times. While democratic freedom is about having space to move, aristocratic freedom is about having one’s own place to stand in public. The latter freedom takes shape not so much as acting and speaking without constraint, but as being seen and heard.

In times of democratic equality, Tocqueville explains, “all are insignificant and none stands out from crowd.”¹⁰⁴ Democracy, in turn, offers the freedom of anonymity, of being nobody in particular, invisible in the audience rather than up on stage. This is the freedom of the frontier, as Tocqueville describes it, where everyone is a stranger and one barely knows one’s neighbors. Mobile, the traveler escapes power and evades surveillance (thus the compulsive restlessness of his freedom). Tocqueville describes this in one of his finest passages: “Men living in the democratic centuries upon which we are now embarking have a natural taste for independence. They are naturally impatient of rules; the permanence of the very state they prefer tires them. They like power, but they are inclined to scorn and hate the man who exercises it; and their very minuteness and mobility makes it easy for them to evade his grasp. These instincts will always be found because they stem from the depths of the social state, which will not change. For some time to come they will prevent the establishment of any form of despotism”¹⁰⁵ Here is Tocqueville’s picture of democratic freedom, which we have been tracing throughout this chapter, painted more or less in its entirety.

By contrast, aristocratic peoples prevent the establishment of despotism not through their mobility but through their visibility. “Among aristocratic peoples,” Tocqueville explains, “all ranks are different, but all are also fixed. Each individual occupies ... a place that he cannot quite, and he lives among other men similarly moored all around him. In such nations, no one can either hope or fear that he will not be seen. No man is placed so low as to be deprived of a theater and likely to escape blame or praise by dint of obscurity.”¹⁰⁶ In the first place, one draws strength from the permanent group in which one is stuck. There is a sort of automatic sense fellowship and mutual obligation (rather than otherness) in aristocracy, and one simply cannot slip into the insignificance of isolation. And in the second place, one is influenced - almost forced - to be free as a matter of what in democratic times would be called “keeping up appearances.” Always on stage in front of others, one is going to be judged and so one seeks to be judged well by putting on a noble show of freedom. Aristocratic man is an actor in every sense of the word.

Conversely, in times of democratic equality, freedom is precisely about being uninfluenced by the judgments of others - or at least about putting on a show of being inflexible before or untouched by the power of others. We might say that aristocratic freedom attaches to being seen as *noble*, while democratic freedom attaches to being seen as *authentic*, or to being unseen. In the former, freedom is driven by the pride of being *honored*, in the latter by the pride of being *undomesticated*.

In aristocracy, then, freedom takes shape as a matter of having a place upon which to stand up to power, rather than as being able to evade power. In this sense, aristocratic freedom follows from what I have referred to as that social state’s generative fact/principle of “landedness.” Owning actual property is one aspect of aristocratic standing. For instance (and in perfect contrast to the pride and independence of the savage hunter), Tocqueville writes of the French peasant of late feudalism that the “little piece of dirt that belongs to him in this vast universe fills him with pride and independence.”¹⁰⁷ But Tocqueville also offers a more figurative sense of having a place to stand. The bourgeoisie of the old regime, for example, had a sense of standing and an “independent mind” because the “old construction of society had made each profession ... a little stage.” There “was no one, whatever his rank, who did not believe that he had a certain part to fill, a certain place to occupy, and spectators to judge his attitudes and his acts.”¹⁰⁸ Further, the legal rights and privileges the bourgeoisie enjoyed “made of them a pseudo-aristocracy which often showed the pride and spirit of resistance of real aristocracy.” The standing conveyed by legal rights ensured that their holder could not “lose himself in the crowd and hide his cowardly subservience. Every individual found himself on stage, in a very small theater ... and there had a permanent audience that was always ready to hiss or applaud.” The rights of certain classes were less a form of private insulation than a sort of public platform. Finally (and more democratically), the organization of the judicial system, with its public hearings and formal procedures, “assured the oppressed a way to make themselves heard ... ”¹⁰⁹

Of course, aristocratic freedom is not without its downside on Tocqueville’s account. In democracy, the individual tends to get lost in the very space that constitutes his freedom. In aristocracy, one is locked into the place that belongs to him, and to which he belongs. The aristocratic actor is bound to a public place and a public role that he cannot quite, and bound to others by a chain of mutual obligations. As we have seen, this

social arrangement can come to seem very much devoid of the vitality of freedom - ossified, still, and stagnant, as with the slave-holding American South. Moreover, Tocqueville writes that the freedom-in-hierarchy of the old regime was “reduced and deformed.” “There was much more freedom then than in our day: but it was a kind of freedom that was irregular and intermittent, always contracted within the limits of a class, always linked to the idea of exception and privilege, and almost never went so far as to furnish the most natural and necessary guarantees for all citizens.”¹¹⁰ Aristocratic freedom took on the features of nobility but was unjust; it was politically beneficial but in a sense unnatural. And it was linked to class privileges and divisions, which paved the way for the collapse of the aristocratic society old regime, for revolution, and for the rise of democratic society. No less than democracy, aristocracy contains its own internal flaws and self-subverting elements.

As is usually the case, Tocqueville takes up the cause not of returning to the conditions of aristocracy, but of incorporating select features of aristocracy into the democratic social state. Democracy is made better than itself, as it were, when alloyed with the elements of aristocracy that can be synthesized by democratic means: democratic associations replicate the power and standing of the aristocratic actor, lawyers introduce into democracy some of the aristocratic taste for continuity, and so forth. For instance, Americans do well to reproduce the sense of public place and standing through the use of newspapers. These “give visibility” to otherwise anonymous people and unnoticed ideas and feelings.¹¹¹

In the conclusion to this work I suggest analogously that, far from undermining the political practice of democracy, the American Constitution can potentially serve as a sort of public stage upon which citizens may stand and be seen and heard. The extent to which we should consider the American Constitution either democratic or undemocratic hinges in part upon the extent to which it creates a “constitutional theater,” as it were - a venue for quasi-aristocratic political freedom. The Constitution is defensible on democratic grounds to the extent that it harbors a sort of freedom that does not reduce to either mastery or escape.

Part III: Norms of Association in Democracy

Political Bonds and Natural Bonds

Thus far I have argued that freedom in times of democratic openness manifests as a sort of compulsive *restlessness*. In what follows, I argue that association in times of democratic openness take shape around the norms of *intimacy* and *informality*. The key, as Tocqueville explains, is that democracy weakens the political bonds of society even as it strengthens those bonds that seem natural.

We would be mistaken to conclude that democratic freedom leads exclusively to disassociation - to the “atomization” or “fragmentation” of society. Individualism captures only half the picture of human relations in the democratic social state. In the whole picture we see that the individual disengages from others in his pursuit of a sort of savage liberty, but also engages others in certain ways that seem in accord with such liberty. The individual feels free when by himself, but also when he feels by himself with others. This is what I have been calling the “soul-mate” norm of human relations - the norm of being together-as-one, effortlessly and without compromise, in a way that seems

spontaneous, authentic, and natural. In such a relationship, one enjoys the liberty of the savage without suffering his isolation, loneliness, and insecurity.

I shall argue that in general two types of association convey this experience of being alone with others: the very tight ties of family (or of the extended family of one's "culture" or "community"), and the very loose ties that unites all humanity. Along with the independent individual, the blood-bond of family and the blood-bond of species constitute the central norms of human relations in the democratic social state. Such are the ways of being free in society, of being in society without civilization's discontents. Principled upon openness, democracy captures the imagination as a sort of social state of nature. Democratic freedom thus leads not so much to disassociation and the dissolution of society (as if such a thing were possible), but rather to the depoliticization of association.

To unpack this a bit, we might say that association in democratic society takes shape around two intertwined paradoxes. First, the inhabitants of democracy are as fixated upon resemblance and unity as upon individuality and uniqueness. Whether in terms of our biology or our morality, our hopes or our fears, that we are all basically the same will be as celebrated as that we are all different and diverse. And second, seizing upon relations that seem natural - that seem power-free - as a way of experiencing freedom and belonging at the same time, the principle of inheritance again takes center stage, trumping the principle of democratic choice. Locke above all sets forth the modern, liberal project of banishing the norm of filial inheritance from social and political thought, replacing paternalism with consent as authority's source. But relations based upon choice are problematic in democratic society because intention implies the exercise of power (whether legitimate or otherwise). To live under social arrangements that are the product of choice (even when one is for a brief moment in time one amongst the many choosers), is to live under the sway of others. Conversely, to live under social arrangements that are inherited as the product of nature (or of traditions so distant and transcendent as to seem second nature) is to live freely, at least in relation to others. The norm, to return to my old metaphor, is of a marriage that is neither arranged nor freely contracted into, but of a union that is "born into" or simply somehow "meant to be." There is the individual, the community, and nothing in between. One feels at home with others - and so free to be oneself - only in the so-called "tribal" relations of family, friendship-as-extended-family, race, gender, the "global village" of humanity, and so forth. These relationships transcend or delve beneath the need for mediating words; unspoken, they are experienced as properly unintended, spontaneous, and authentic.

In this context, we should reconsider the argument of Tocqueville's with which we began, that democratic people will accept servitude before inequality. Perhaps to be free in relation to others, to be free of every inequality of power, we are prone to abdicate democratic power and think of ourselves as subject to impersonal, abstract, superhuman forces - not of the all-too-human, personifiable state or bureaucracy, but of the market, evolution, God, chance, fate, and so on. We can never be equally powerful, so we settle for being equally powerless. Only when determined by the common master of nature or Nature can we be free with others.

Democratic Associations: The Family and Humanity

Tocqueville makes clear that, along with the idea of the independent individual, the idea of humanity occurs naturally to the democratic imagination. In aristocratic times, “the general notion of ‘one’s fellow man’ is obscure, and little thought is given to devoting oneself to one’s fellow man for the sake of humanity By contrast, in democratic centuries, . . . the duties of each individual toward the species are far more clear.”¹¹² This dual movement toward individualism and humanitarianism - toward the desire for independence from each other, and toward the idea of being bound to every other - is born of democratic equality and the recognition of one’s similarity to others that follows. This recognition of resemblance, of being surrounded by those like oneself, neither superior nor inferior, facilitates conformity, compassion, and communication within and across democratic societies - the elements of what we would call “globalization.” It also facilitates the inversion of these phenomena: the ostentatious display of uniqueness, competitiveness, and the feeling of being strangers to one another.

We have already touched upon the conformity, and the reaction against conformity, produced by freedom-in-equality. In times of equality, one takes pride in not depending upon one’s neighbors. At the same time, independence is a difficult test and one is prone to cheat off of one’s neighbors, secretly going with the flow of what seems to be the prevailing opinion. Isolated, the individual has the desire but not the ability to maintain his individuality. Consequently, insofar as one can make it out, the authority of humanity will be overwhelmingly weighty. On the other hand, as with the story of the savage and the slave, the more one’s resemblance to one’s neighbors is recognized, the more widespread, vehement, and even rebellious will be the reaction against resemblance. Feeling lost in the human crowd, the individual will feel compelled to express his own personality and make a conspicuous show of his freedom. Like the savage, “pride will always impel individuals to escape the common level”¹¹³ Conformity and a contrary uniqueness thus advance together. With democracy, Tocqueville writes, for “the first time in history, the features of the human race become clearly visible.”¹¹⁴ At the same time, to avoid being “confounded in a common mass, a host of artificial and arbitrary classifications arise, and individuals use these to set themselves apart lest they be dragged against their will into the crowd.”¹¹⁵ This is what Freud would later term the “narcissism of small differences.”

Moreover, Tocqueville argues that diversity can only be shallow in times of equality and mobility. With the collapse of the principle of hierarchical difference, and with the dissolution of the principle of landedness and the separation between distinct places, diversity cannot but diminish to idiosyncrasy. In a passage that must seem bizarre to modern sensibilities, Tocqueville writes that the era between the Roman empire and the empire of democracy was a sort of golden age of diversity and individuality. The advent of equality, by contrast, gave rise to the “tendency toward assimilation” “The Middle Ages were times of fragmentation. Each people, each province, each city, each family had a strong tendency to assert its individuality. Today, an opposite tendency is apparent: peoples seem to be moving toward unity. Intellectual bonds join the most remote parts of the earth, and people cannot remain strangers to one another for a single day or ignorant of what is taking place in any corner of the globe.”¹¹⁶ “Uniformity reigns” in democracy, and “diversity, like liberty, is vanishing day by day.”¹¹⁷

The recognition of human similarity facilitates more than conformity and the reaction against conformity, though. Democratic men, Tocqueville argues, will also be compassionate - as compassionate in their humanitarianism as they are competitive in their individualism. And again, resemblance is the source of both sides of the apparent opposition. When all are equal and similar, Tocqueville explains, the possibility of climbing up (and falling down) the social and economic ladder is "open to all." "The immediate result of this is that all citizens are secretly at war with one another."¹¹⁸ But even as the democratic individual has one foot in this socialized version of Hobbes's state of nature, his other foot is planted firmly in Rousseau's. When all are equal and "everyone thinks and feels in almost the same way, then each person can judge everyone else's sensations in an instant: all he has to do is cast a quick glance at himself. ... No matter if strangers or enemies are involved: his imagination instantly puts him in their place. ... In democratic centuries, men rarely sacrifice themselves for one another, but they do exhibit a general compassion for all members of the human species."¹¹⁹ More a matter of sympathy born of sameness than of the harmony of differences, men are bound across all divides by a "natural pity."¹²⁰

Finally, the recognition of similarity facilitates unfettered communication within and across peoples, but also a sense of distance between people. Tocqueville suggests that in democratic times the members of the human association cannot remain strangers - thought circulates freely as everyone is "in constant communication with one another."¹²¹ Mobile, people "are constantly changing places, and inhabitants of different countries mingle with, see, listen to, and borrow from one another."¹²² But on Tocqueville's account, this mingling represents less achieved unity than given uniformity. People and nations associate less as distinct and differentiated parts of a whole than as additions to a general mass. And as we have seen in the American West, constant mobility in a sense breaks the communicative bond. For instance, Tocqueville writes that as aristocracy gives way to democracy "each profession is open to all comers, and large numbers of practitioners are constantly entering and leaving, so that they become strangers to one another, each indifferent and almost invisible to all the rest" - the "social bond is destroyed."¹²³ Similarly, as "each class draws closer ... , its members become indifferent to one another and treat one another as strangers."¹²⁴ Like tenants in an apartment - right next-door but transient - the inhabitants of democracy are increasingly able and increasingly disinclined to converse with disparate others. Everyone speaks the same language, as it were, but no one talks.

These, then, are the bonds that unite individuals in human association. They are ties that divide as much as they bind, whether in reaction against homogenization, in competition, or in the feeling of being among strangers. Given and universal, these ties seem natural, as real and spontaneous as caring about oneself. They bind everyone equally and are worn lightly, without effort or compromise, never constraining or obstructing the freedom of the individual. And they are a product of the abstract resemblance of individuals. "In democratic societies," Tocqueville writes, "where all men are insignificant and very much alike, each person looks at himself and instantly sees everyone else."¹²⁵ In this sense, the human association is a sort of association of one, beyond the need for mediating words. Talking with other members is at once as shallow and as intimate as talking to oneself.

The idea of association via the internet is exemplary of this bond of shallow intimacy - of a bond one clicks out of as easily as it is taken on, wherein emotions are exchanged largely through pictures and symbols ("emoticons," for example) with like-minded individuals around the world (one's "friends"), in a manner that conveys the sense of being by oneself with others. In this sense, the internet is constituted as the social state of nature *par excellence*, the perfect marriage of privacy and recognition, freedom and belonging. It is the perfectly open society one creates above the world one actually inhabits.

Tocqueville writes that, with the spread of democracy, all "bonds of race, class, and country are becoming looser; the great bond of humanity is growing tighter."¹²⁶ In America, and it would seem in the world, there will come a day when there is but one people, "all equal to one another, all members of the same family."¹²⁷ But universal humanity is not the only mode of association Tocqueville describes as inscribed in democracy. The familial association is just as central as the human association. Or better, a single norm of association - association based upon innate resemblance - dominates democratic society in its opposite extremes. While human beings will see each other as "members of the same family," Tocqueville sees a future when each individual, "withdrawn into himself, is virtually a stranger to the fate of all the others. For him, his children and personal friends comprise the entire human race. As for the remainder of his fellow citizens, he lives alongside them but does not see them. ... He exists only in himself and for himself, and if he still has a family, he no longer has a country."¹²⁸ There is the exclusive family and all-inclusive humanity, and nothing in between.

The equality of conditions thus both expands and contracts the orbit of social relations - one is connected to everybody in the world and disconnected from one's next-door neighbor. But as we see, even in this disconnection the individual does not retreat into total isolation; so-called "atomization" is never a viable possibility. Instead, individualism "disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men and withdraw into the circle of family and friends, so that having *created a little society for his own use*, he gladly leaves the larger society to take care of itself."¹²⁹ We saw how the French attempted through revolution to create an imaginary society above the one they inhabited - an effort at mastery and escape in a single stroke. Here, the American exemplar of democracy creates a little society outside of the one he inhabits where he feels, quite literally, at home - by himself with others. The French envisioned politics as a vehicle for their literary ideals of pristine democracy, of an expansively open society that transcended the fetters of hierarchy and landedness. The Americans envision private family life as a venue for their literary ideals of perfectly open society - of a "small republic," as it were - that transcends the fetters of political life. Bound by nature, the democratic family is a little society that can do without politics.

Tocqueville addresses the influence of democracy on the family in single chapter, which can be read almost as a microcosm of the entirety of *Democracy II*. For Tocqueville (and as we shall see in the next chapter, for Claude Lefort as well), democratic society takes shape around the disappearance of the figure of the father - the figure who speaks on behalf of authority, whether of God, the sovereign, or tradition. In aristocracy, the father is the present embodiment of the distant ruler (who himself is the

present embodiment of a distant God). As the “natural and necessary bond between the past and the present ... he is the organ of tradition, the interpreter of custom, the arbiter of mores.”¹³⁰ With a bit of an Oedipal resonance, we might say that democracy is born into the world with the beheading of the father-figure.

This, of course, transforms the family as much as society. “In the aristocratic family, as in aristocratic society generally, every place is marked” according to distinctions of rank. “Democracy overturns or lowers most of these barriers.”¹³¹ Consequently, Tocqueville writes, “the distance that once separated a father from his son has decreased and ... paternal authority has been if not destroyed then at least impaired.” This tendency is taken to its extreme in America, where “the family - taking the word in its Roman and aristocratic sense - does not exist.” The father “enjoys the unchallenged domestic dictatorship that the weakness of his sons requires” for the first few years following birth, but as the “young American approaches manhood ... the bonds of filial obedience grow looser He first becomes master of his thoughts and soon thereafter of his conduct.”¹³² The order of the democratic family thus perfectly mirrors that of democratic society in general: with the dissolution of the right of command the distance between people decreases and the bonds that hold them together soften.

On Tocqueville’s account, the democratic family adheres largely around the intimacy this new closeness brings. As “mores and laws become more democratic, relations between father and sons become more intimate and tender. Rule and authority are less frequently encountered. ... The master and magistrate have vanished; the father remains.” Fraternity supplants paternity even in the relation between father and son. “Confidence and affection are often greater,” and while the father’s “order may be ignored,” his “advice is usually powerful.”¹³³ There is such an ease and sweetness to this new bond of affection that the democratization of the family becomes irresistible. Democratic family mores, Tocqueville famously concludes, “are so mild that even partisans of aristocracy find them attractive, and after savoring them for a time they are not tempted to revert to the chilly and respectful formalities of the aristocratic family.”¹³⁴

With this newfound intimacy, all that is formal in the relationship dissolves, leaving only a warm and familiar informality. As “power slips away from the aristocracy, we see *all that was austere, conventional, and legal vanishing* from paternal power as well, and a kind of equality establishing itself around the domestic hearth.” There remain few “external signs of respect” around the father, and no “recognized formula for addressing him.” “I have seen,” Tocqueville writes, even “fiery enemies of democracies allow their children to address them in the most familiar of terms.”¹³⁵ To see this difference, one need only compare the domestic correspondence of democratic times to those of the aristocratic past. In aristocracy, the “style is always correct, formal, rigid, and so cold that the heart’s natural warmth can barely be felt through the words. Among democratic peoples, by contrast, every word that a son addresses to his father bears the stamp of something that is at once free, familiar, and tender”¹³⁶ We might say that aristocratic language is like the formal and often uncomfortable suit one is expected to put on in public, while democratic language is what one relaxes in around the house. Democratic communication is direct and “from the heart,” liberated from the repressive confines of mediating social rules, forms, and conventions. Aristocratic communication, conversely, appears more concerned with propriety of style than authenticity of expression. Words are a façade whereby one presents oneself to public

court rather than a means of opening up to others. The son of aristocracy is recognized through in a sense forgetting himself, what in democratic times would be considered “repressing,” “concealing,” or “masking” himself. The son of democracy is recognized through revealing himself, what in aristocratic times would be considered degrading himself.

Beyond the family, Tocqueville concludes that while democratic informality and intimacy seduces even stalwart aristocrats in the heartfelt emotion it allows to come through, the “manners of the aristocracy draped human nature in beautiful illusions, and though the portrait was often deceptive, there was a noble pleasure in looking at it.”¹³⁷ One wonders whether Tocqueville reflects his democratic milieu here, assuming that manners are drapery - that the inner, private, deep self is “the real me,” as it were, while the features one chooses or feels obliged to present in public are illusion. One wonders whether in aristocratic times the noble character one portrayed in accordance with public norms would have been considered more telling of the “real.” In times of hierarchy, manners would be considered natural. To be sure, the persona of noble actor is determined and in a sense enforced from without, by a public code of social expectations and immutable traditions. But is the inner self of democracy any less determined and enforced from without, by a natural code of genetic facts and immutable family upbringing? Are the mysterious contours of the subconscious self any less inherited than were the rules of etiquette and honor that shaped the aristocratic actor?

Regardless, as Tocqueville writes, the experience of the democratic mode of association is that “the natural bond seems to grow tighter as the social bond relaxes.”¹³⁸ Democracy, Tocqueville continues, “brings kin closer together while at the same time driving citizens further apart.”¹³⁹ To generalize, we might say that democracy tightens kin-type relations - associations that seems to follow from the blood-bond of family resemblance - while weakening any relationship that seems held together merely by social conventions. For Tocqueville, as we have seen, the former relationship manifests itself in the associations of global humanity and the intimate family. The latter mode of association is everything in between - relations based on citizenship, class, race, religion, all those voluntary associations of civil and political society, and so forth.

Here Tocqueville would seem on weak footing. Clearly enough, the bonds of race and religion, among others, continue to hold tight. I would maintain that we can explain this state of affairs by following Tocqueville’s reasoning, if not necessarily his writings. Such bonds persist in democratic society insofar as they convey the experience of being members of the same family or “tribe.” This, I think, is analogous to the phenomenon Tocqueville called “collective individualism.”¹⁴⁰ Solidarity of whatever sort persist as meaningful so long as it is experienced as natural rather than conventional - born into rather than constructed, inherited rather than intended. It is only in nature that the democratic individual feels as if alone with others, perfectly equal and free. Feeling at home with others, he can let go and “act naturally.” He can lose himself without ever forgetting himself.

Democratic Informality: Association Without Mediating Conventions

In the years leading up to the French Revolution, Tocqueville writes, people were “simultaneously immensely proud of humanity and exceptionally humble with respect to their own time and country.” The “idea of the greatness of man in general, the

omnipotence of his reason, the unlimited extent of his intellectual abilities, penetrated all minds and filled them; with this proud notion of humanity as a whole there was combined an unnatural contempt for the particular time in which they lived and the society of which they were part. ... Everywhere people spoke of nothing but institutions' weakness, their incoherence, the absurdities and vices of contemporaries, society's corruption, its rottenness." Written works were "full of diatribes against the present and predictions of a coming catastrophe."¹⁴¹ Man in abstract and humanity in general were idealized as the figures of limitless potential and true grandeur. All things pertaining to the particular situations of particular people were devalued as corrupt and absurd. The pride people felt in relation to the democratic abstraction was matched only by the contempt they felt for their own time and place.

I want to suggest that this dialectic of idealization and devaluation is not contingent upon the facts preceding the French Revolution, but rather intrinsic to the democratic social state born of revolution. Relative to the sublime ideas that seize the imagination with the collapse of hierarchy - of the expansive liberty of the savage, of a society ordered and animated only by fraternity and a humanitarian compassion, of the union of this natural liberty and natural love - the world we inhabit can only seem rotten and always tending toward catastrophe. Relative to the open self, society, and world of democracy, the particular practices and institutions of the here and now can only seem a theater of the absurd - a play full of trite, repetitive, clichéd, nonsensical jargon that obstructs authentic expression and meaningful communion; an unsatisfying play where nothing happens while we perpetually wait for an opening onto the new.

Take, for example, the simultaneous idealization and devaluation of democratic politics today. On one hand, democracy is idealized as the grand political movement of humanity spontaneously coming together in a global "green revolution," over and against our presently polluted condition. Or democracy is idealized as synonymous with freedom, the "seeds" of which will spontaneously spring up the world over once obstructing power-formations are cleared away, whether by means of revolutionary or military action. Or democracy holds the promise of the new politics we are all waiting for but which never seems to come, regardless of which plain-spoken, outsider, agent-of-change president next appears on the scene to get things back on track. Conversely, the democratic political system is precisely a theater of the absurd, wherein everyone is "playing politics" in a routine that seems bizarrely disconnected from the real world. And try as we might, we can never revolutionize, escape, or transcend the confines of this system, the institutions and conventions of which stand in the way of the beautiful possibility of democracy. It is in this sense, I suggest, that we can understand the great optimism and great cynicism that together constitute our political discourse. The democratic movement seems given, inevitable, and entirely meaningful. The democratic political systems, processes, and organizations that are supposed to be a vehicle for this idea seem entirely - indeed constitutively - beyond reform. Democratization (democracy-as-verb) is idealized, democracy (democracy-as-noun) is devalued.

More generally, in a social state ordered by the idea of democratic openness - whether imagined to be of the pre-modern past or the post-modern future - that which is perceived to be of human contrivance is devalued as obstructing and confining artifice. Conventionality is undermined as a limiting, unnecessary, arbitrary barrier separating us from the real and the possible - a not-at-all beautiful illusion. "Democracy," Tocqueville

thus writes, “destroys or obscures nearly all the old social conventions and prevents men from easily settling on new ones.”¹⁴² We might say that while the principle of democratic equality subverts hierarchical conventions, the concomitant principle of democratic openness subverts the conventional as such.

In this context, think of the divergent representations of the American Constitution. On one hand, arriving to us from the distant past, as the quasi-sacred work of quasi-divine Founders, the Constitution is untouchable - the vehicle of timeless and placeless rights. On the other hand, as the product of particular people in a particular time and place, the document is no more than an artifact of wealthy dead white men - the often unjust and even stupid political norms and forms that have been foisted upon us. The Constitution is idealized as the bedrock of our civil religion, or devalued as the source of our undemocratic political economy, with nothing in between.

In the transition from aristocracy to democracy, the collapse of conventionality manifests itself in the dissolution of manners, etiquette, and codes of honor. “In aristocratic societies,” Tocqueville writes, “outward relations among men are subject to mostly stable conventions,” wherein the “customs of the leading class ... serve as a model for all others.” Conventions stand upon stable and visible authority, and so “everyone thinks he knows precisely what signs are appropriate to indicate respect or good will, and etiquette is a science of which no one is supposed to be ignorant.” Society is ordered and animated by “rules of politeness,” which constitute a “complex piece of legislation” governing every form of association, including the family.¹⁴³

Equality/openness dissolves these leading models and precise signs, and promises a mode of association simplified of all this rigid, complex, encumbering legislation. Should the inhabitants of democracy chance to meet, their approach is “natural, frank, and open.”¹⁴⁴ People are no longer bound to meet, as it were, by reciprocal obligation, but when they do meet their interactions are easier and more relaxed. Tocqueville explains that as “distinctions of rank vanish and men of diverse education and birth mix and come together in the same places, agreement about rules of proper behavior is almost impossible.”¹⁴⁵ And “men who live in democracies are too mobile to allow some group of them to establish and enforce a code of etiquette. Each individual therefore behaves more or less as he pleases ... , rather than conforming to an ideal model held up in advance for everyone to imitate.”¹⁴⁶ In turn, where aristocratic manners display the virtues of “regularity and grandeur,” democratic manners display “simplicity and freedom.” Aristocratic manners “adorn and hide what is natural,” democratic manners are “more sincere,” a “thin and poorly woven veil, through which each person’s true feelings and individual ideas can easily be seen.”¹⁴⁷ Authenticity of expression supplants formality of presentation in facilitating association. Where the aristocrat is recognized in his demonstrable knowledge of the intricate rules of etiquette, democratic peoples are “accustomed to consider the feelings and ideas rather than the manners of the people they meet,” and they “attach more importance to the substance of actions than to the form.”¹⁴⁸ In the end, Tocqueville writes, “it is fair to say that the effect of democracy is not precisely to give men certain manners but to prevent them from being mannered.”¹⁴⁹

Along similar lines, the effects of democracy prevent men from being honored, at least on Tocqueville’s understanding of “honor.” “Men seem to employ two quite distinct methods in making public judgments of the actions of their fellow men:

sometimes they rely on simple notions of the just and unjust that exist everywhere; at other times they use very particular notions associated with one country or period.” The former, which take shape around “the permanent and general needs” of the “human race,” are what Tocqueville calls “moral laws.” “Honor,” on the other hand, “is nothing other than a particular rule based on a particular state that a people or class uses to assign blame or praise.” Tocqueville cites as an example the refusal to fight a duel as a moral act that many peoples would consider dishonorable.¹⁵⁰

Thus, “whenever men gather to form a particular society, a characteristic form of honor immediately springs up among them, that is, a distinctive set of opinions regarding what is to be praised or blamed. And these particular rules always have their source in the special habits and special interests of the association.”¹⁵¹ The “feudal aristocracy was born in war and for war, and so nothing was honored above “martial courage.”¹⁵² The “American classification of vices is no less arbitrary.” In America, where “there is no door that work cannot open,” honor is directed against idleness while the “passion for wealth . . . is honored.” “What our ancestors in the Middle Ages called servile greed, the American calls noble and estimable ambition, just as he ascribes the name ‘blind and barbaric fury’ to the conquering ardor and warlike spirit” of the Middle Ages.¹⁵³ Courage is not effaced but rather transformed, from “martial valor” to “audacity” and “boldness in industry.”¹⁵⁴

In aristocratic times, when peoples are divided and subdivided by a million little distinction, the “prescriptions of honor” are “numerous” and “bizarre.”¹⁵⁵ As with manners and etiquette, the democratic abstraction smoothes over and simplifies these complexities of aristocratic honor. As the “men who make up the nation *revert* to being similar and equal,” “honor will be limited to a small number of precepts, and the distance between those precepts and the moral laws adopted by the common run of humanity will diminish.”¹⁵⁶ And as all nations merge into one people, the particularities of honor dissolves entirely into the generalities of morality. Were there “to come a day when all races coalesced and all the peoples of the world had the same interests and needs and no characteristic features any longer set them apart, then people would cease to ascribe any conventional value to human actions altogether” and the “general needs of mankind, revealed by consciousness to every man, would be the common measure.”¹⁵⁷ Were the empire of democracy ever to achieve universal equality and similarity, democratic honor would become synonymous with human morality.

In all of these cases, informality replaces formality as the norm of propriety governing human relations. The more simply and directly one conveys one’s ideas and feelings to others, the more open and genuine one is in one’s relationships, the more one is as if at home with others, the more meaningful is the experience of association.

In a theme he returns to time and again, Tocqueville writes that, in their politics, in their religion, and their in thought in general, “nothing is more repugnant to the human mind in ages of equality than the idea of submitting to forms.”¹⁵⁸ Tocqueville explains this in part as the popular sovereign’s or sovereign individual’s impatience with all limitations and constraints. Democratic peoples “harbor an instinctive disdain” for all the settled, rules, regulations, and procedures because such things “continually slow or halt the realization of their designs.” They don’t see why they should abide such petty

inconveniences and red tape, which get in the way of common sense and just getting things done.

The “arrogant disdain” for formalities, Tocqueville writes, is one of the great dangers of democratic times. This is particularly so when a contempt for forms carries over into political life, where their “principle merit” is to serve as barriers between the strong and weak, the governing and the governed, slowing the former while allowing the latter time to take his bearings.” In democratic times, then, when a disrespect for forms is a “very natural - and very dangerous - instinct,” only the most “imperious necessity” justifies neglecting one’s political manners.¹⁵⁹ It is primarily along these lines that Tocqueville famously argues for the value of lawyers and lawyerly ways to democracy: “Men who make a special study of the law take from their work certain habits of order, a taste for forms, and a sort of instinctive love of regular sequences in ideas that naturally foster in them a strong opposition to the revolutionary spirit and the unthinking passions of democracy.”¹⁶⁰

Tocqueville identifies a second, more subtle, reason why forms arouse the contempt of democratic peoples. Beside placing inhibitions on the free exercise of power, conventional norms and forms are experienced as obstructing the immediacy of understanding and experience. The American “cast of mind,” for instance, is to “be free of the systematic spirit,” to “seek on one’s own and in oneself alone the reason for things,” and to “aim beyond form at substance.”¹⁶¹ To this end, Americans “will strip away as much of the outer husk as they can, remove anything that stands between them and the object of their attention, and eliminate whatever is hiding the thing and preventing them from getting a good, close look. This habit of mind soon leads them to despise all outward forms, which they regard as useless and inconvenient veils placed between them and truth.”¹⁶² Seeking “the real in all things,” deep down beneath the opaque surface of particular and passing conventionality, the democratic individual tends to base his “opinions on the very nature of man.”¹⁶³ In this sense, Tocqueville concludes, “equality cannot fail to destroy what is purely conventional and arbitrary in forms of thought.”¹⁶⁴ “Forms will usually be neglected and occasionally scorned” and an “uncultivated, almost savage vigor will dominate thought.”¹⁶⁵

Tocqueville suggests, in turn, that religions should be wary of burdening themselves with “external forms” and “external practices in democratic ages.” Democratic peoples are impatient of figurative images. Symbols strike them as puerile artifices used only to veil or embellish the truth that it would be more natural to present openly. Ceremonies leave them cold, and they are naturally inclined to look on the details of religious worship as a matter of secondary importance.¹⁶⁶ Whatsoever seems ceremonial will be deemed without significance - just for the sake of show - and even scorned as unnecessary artifice that inhibits authentic faith.

Tocqueville writes of the France of his time: “Political institutions are like religions, where worship usually long outlives belief.”¹⁶⁷ On the above account, it seems that the opposite would tend to be the case - that belief, whether religious or political, would long outlive worship in democratic times. Indeed, insofar as externally imposed forms of worship are thought to be superficial fetters upon real and vital belief, it seems the politics and religion of democracy would be better served by seeking to engage ideas and emotions via the rejection of all secondary doctrines and dogmas. The passions are

stirred not by the empty rhetoric of religious rituals and political ceremonies, but by vehement genuineness in adherence to deep, primitive, even original principle - by revolutionary return to source. In turn, a brazenly untouched, undomesticated fundamentalism, as it were, will capture the democratic imagination as much as the expansive openness of globalization discussed above. The former drops below the artifice of conventional forms, the latter expands beyond the constraining borders of conventional forms. Both, we might say, are born of a contempt for the particular time in which one lives and the society of which one is a part.

These quasi-familial and humanitarian relations take on great normative weight in democracy, then, precisely because they don't seem mannered. As modes of association that do not require agreement (or compromise), their organization seems before or beyond the need for mediating procedures and meaningless rules of etiquette. In his cast of mind, Tocqueville writes, the democratic individual seeks to remove anything that stands between him and the object of his attention; in his relationships, we might add, he seeks to remove anything that stands between him and the object of his affection. Such relations seem spontaneous and real, a natural way of being with others that transcends the artificiality and escapes the unfreedom of the here and now. As when he is alone, democratic man feels at home in such intimate and informal relationships.

The Separation of Democracy and State

In the previous chapter, we saw how democracy's revolutionary movement overflowed all territorial boundaries and spread like a religion. This is because the modern democratic abstraction, mirroring monotheistic, and above all Christian, abstraction, transcended all particularities and distinctions. In the ancient world, Tocqueville writes, "there were, so to speak, as many gods and human species as there were nations. . . . Several religions kept particular social or political institutions . . . , like slavery, which made them inadmissible in countries which did not accept these institutions." But the Christian religion "placed itself absolutely outside particular institutions which can exist among men, social or political, all legal conventions, in order to consider the human species as a single whole, composed of similar individuals, all subject to the same moral law . . ." ¹⁶⁸

The social state of democracy is similarly based "on principles so general, so natural, so much founded on the nature of human society outside any particular society, that it can be understood and adopted by all people." Democratic society, Tocqueville seems to suggest, is simply society as such - society in its natural form, taking shape around natural laws and human reason alone. It is for this reason that the empire of democracy "has been able to aim at conquering not only one people, but all humanity." ¹⁶⁹ Indeed, as we have seen, the democratic empire makes the very idea of humanity - of a human association - thinkable. Like the Christian religion, the "political gospel" of the democratic revolution considers "man in the abstract," with "prescriptions . . . that claim to regulate the relations of men between themselves, independently of the positions these men occupy in each society. These are the natural relationships. Those of father to son, son to father, brother to brother, men to men." ¹⁷⁰ As with Christianity, democracy's tenet's speak directly and solely to the family and the species.

Now, in an argument that is still often heard today, Tocqueville writes that the authority of religion, its moral force, lies precisely in its distance from temporal power.

The separation of church and state morally empowers the former. The continued vitality of religion in America, for instance, is due to the fact that members “of the clergy ... steer clear of power voluntarily and take a sort of professional pride in having nothing to do with it.” “When a religion” Tocqueville explains, “seeks to found its empire solely on the desire for immortality that torments the hearts of all men equally, it can aim for universality. But when it joins forces with a government, it must adopt maxims applicable only to certain peoples.”¹⁷¹ Religious codes lose their “expansive properties” when bound to “particular civil or political law,” which render them “applicable only to certain countries, certain nationalities, certain climates, certain civilizations, certain races.”¹⁷² Moreover, religion cannot seek “the support of worldly interests” without becoming as “ephemeral” and “fragile as any temporal power.” Nor can religion “share the material might of those who govern without incurring some of the hatred they inspire.” In these three ways, “diminishing a religion’s apparent strength ... (makes) it more powerful.”¹⁷³

Beyond the separation of church and state, we might surmise that the same argument holds for the separation of religion and church, at least insofar as the institution of the church itself seems in any way spatially or temporally bounded, or to wield worldly power. Establishing a house of religion can only diminish that which should be eternal, infinite, and immaculate - boxing the transcendent into the here and now, into present but passing conventional forms. Along these lines, we might consider the often heard notion of ‘spiritual but not religious’ an extension of Tocqueville’s reasoning behind the of the separation of church and state.

Democracy, I want to suggest, founds its moral empire in precisely the same fashion. To ensure the victory of its idea, democracy must cast off all particular, embodying, encumbering forms. Like the Christian religion, democracy aspires to universality and so must forsake affiliation with all temporal, material power. In this sense, democracy’s increasingly unquestioned authority lies in its pristine powerlessness. We might say that the continued vitality of democracy depends upon the separation of democracy and state, and ultimately of democracy and politics - at least insofar as by “politics” we mean a practice organized and animated by particular, conventional forms. To house democracy would be to domesticate democracy. The spiritual impulse is strengthened by its distance from its religious instantiation; the democratic impulse is strengthened by its distance from its political instantiation. Spiritual but not religious has its logical concomitant in democratic but not political.

Political Atheism and the Democratic Way of Life

In an letter to Eugène Stoffels, Tocqueville writes: “You speak of what you call *your political atheism*, and you ask me if I share it. On this we must understand each other. Are you disgusted only with parties or also with the ideas they exploit? In the first case, you know that such has always more or less been my way of thinking. But when it comes to the second, I am no longer your man in the least.” Wary of such a formulation, though, he goes on to write that “I am trying not to construct two worlds: the one moral, in which I am still enthusiastic for what is beautiful and good; the other political, in which I lie down flat on my face in order to smell more at my leisure the dung on which we walk. ... I am seeking not to divide what is indivisible.”¹⁷⁴

I suggest that the democratic revolution has led precisely to such a two-worlds construction of the moral versus the political. Whether as an archaic past long lost to us or as a dreamt of future that seems tantalizingly inevitable but always just over the horizon, the world of democratic openness harbors the types of freedom and association we experience as meaningful. This is an always pristine world, before or beyond the particulars of our time and place, simplified of all that is not by nature good and right and beautiful. The practice of politics - and to some extent even the concept of the political - has no place in this world. Never wholly moral, the practice of politics - and practical action in general - once stood in a world that took shape around particular norms of honor and dishonor. As the democratic phenomena subverted all codes of honor, though, politics was left without standards of judgment, save amoral efficiency. When thinking about and evaluating politics, we end up demanding a politics of the impossible (crafted with geometrical precision to be moral without exception), or a politics that looks like war by other means.

If the world of democratic moral principles stands as a sort of untouchable and unrealizable New World, then, the world of democratic political practices is debased as compromised, corrupt, and ultimately absurd. If the pristine first world is inherently unreachable, it is in this polluted second world that we feel always stuck without means of escape. "Democracy" (or better, "democratization") takes on a quasi-religious sense of promising revolutionary transcendence to a natural state of openness; "politics" is degraded to an economic sense of being all and only about personal power, petty self-interest, material well-being, and so forth. The democratic revolution, which began as an essentially political revolution, ends up subverting democratic politics. Democratic faith ends in political atheism.

Along these lines, Tocqueville's description of the common view of politics in 1840's France is no less common today. "We all consider the greatest evil and the greatest danger of the present situation to be the profound indifference into which the country is falling There are many causes of this evil; but surely one of the principle ones is the belief that . . . political life is no more than a game in which each person seeks only to win; that politics has nothing serious in it but the personal ambitions of which it is the means; that there is a sort of gullibility and almost stupidity and shame in growing impassioned for a game that lacks reality and for political chiefs who are only actors not even interested in the success of the play, but only in that of their particular roles."¹⁷⁵ One wonders whether Tocqueville wouldn't immediately recognize this outlook today in, for instance, the media's reflexive representation of every politician as acting solely to stage the "photo-op" or "sound-bite" - in the representation of every speech, action, and image as "PR" and "spin" meant to manipulate the demographically determined opinions of the electorate. What are we to think of a politics wherein politicians running for the honor of office refer to the time of elections as "the silly season." There is a sense in which cynicism tends toward its logical endpoint here, in the assumption not so much of politics as corrupt (which would be to presume that there was something meaningful to be corrupted), but in the assumption of politics as simply absurd (recognized by all as meaningless). Liberal democratic politics - the politics of parties and representative, of constitutions and institutions - seems as fake and absurdly out of place today as would a formal code of etiquette, and for much the same reason. No wonder today's political

satire has such an easy time of it, not even needing to exaggerate the features everyone already recognizes as ridiculous. The Daily Show is just CNN with a studio audience.

Tocqueville writes that in times past, “kings, sensing the almost divine character that cloaked their authority in the eyes of the multitude, drew from the very respect they inspired the will not to abuse their power.”¹⁷⁶ One wonders what today’s politicians draw from the disrespect they inspire.

The political atheism of democratic society, Tocqueville suggests, is no less than tragic. Contrary to a prevailing opinion of democratic times, he argues that democracy needs a robust politics even more so than previous social states. The health of democratic society is inextricably bound to the health of its politics. We might say that the practice of politics - of arguing and acting in association with equal others - serves as a remedy to the pathologies of democratic culture. Politics is the venue for a type of freedom removed from the idea of savage independence - for the exercise of power in between the aspirations to mastery and escape. Politics is the venue for a type of association in between isolated individualism and the collective individualism of the familial and the human association.

For Tocqueville, man is a social animal, and so public life is largely an end in itself. “Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart expands, and the human spirit develops only through the reciprocal action of human beings on one another.” Tocqueville therefore concludes that “the science of association is the fundamental science. Progress in all the other sciences depends on progress in this one.” This science is increasingly important as equality promotes individualism and materialism. “If men are to remain civilized, . . . they must develop and perfect the art of associating to the same degree that equality of conditions increases among them.”¹⁷⁷ Democratic society requires a countervailing “place where a large number of men can freely exchange their feelings and their thoughts on any subject whatsoever.”¹⁷⁸ Moreover, public associations of whatever sort obstruct administrative centralization, the tyranny of the majority, and the despotism of the state. As we have already touched upon, the key here is that associations stand as quasi-aristocratic actors, above the undifferentiated mass of insignificant individuals. Great associations “artificially create something analogous” to great individuals. Here, “ordinary citizens, by associating can constitute very opulent, very influential, and very powerful entities - in a word, they can play the role of aristocrats. . . . A political, industrial, commercial, or even scientific or literary association is an enlightened and powerful citizen that cannot be made to bow down at will or subjected to oppression in the shadows” Like the aristocratic actor, the democratic association is always seen and heard, and so can stand up to “the exigencies of power.”¹⁷⁹

As necessary as such public associations are, though, they are not sufficient. This is because only political associations convey the experience of political liberty. Political associations are those wherein divergent people (not only people of like-mind) must learn to exercise power together (rather than merely obstruct power). “It is through political associations that Americans of all walks of life, all casts of mind, and all ages . . . see and speak to one another” and potentially “come to a common understanding.”¹⁸⁰ In political associations, people with differences try to reach an understanding by means of arguing together, to the end of exercising their political rights, liberties, and powers through political action. These are associations that bring people out of silent isolation, but not by

means of unspoken familial resemblance. They teach us not so much how to trust one another, but how to argue with one another despite our passion for equality and desire for independence.

“Unfortunately,” Tocqueville writes, “the same social state that makes associations so necessary in democratic nations makes them more difficult to achieve there than anywhere else.”¹⁸¹ In aristocratic times, people were bound and obliged to associate. They were habituated to incorporation as a sort of second-nature. In equality and independence, in the socialized state of nature, democratic individuals are disinclined to associate voluntarily, at least beyond their private circle of immediate friends and family. In turn, Tocqueville argues, the inhabitants of democracy must at first be forced to associate, and so to be free. Only over time will they become habituated to life in association and freedom. Freedom and association are in the fullest sense practices to which one must be disciplined.

Here again, the specifically political practice of liberty in associations is vital. “In civil life, anyone may . . . persuade himself that he is capable of meeting all his own needs. In politics, such a thing is unimaginable.”¹⁸² “When citizens are forced to concern themselves with public affairs, they are inevitably drawn beyond the sphere of their individual interests, and from time to time their attention is diverted from themselves.” Only by being in effect thrust into political independence does each see “that he is not as independent of his fellow men as he initially imagined.”¹⁸³ The absence of compulsive political life is perhaps above all what divided the course of democracy in France from democracy in England and America. With the centralization of the French old regime, the different classes were deprived of the opportunity for political association and action, but they were also never compelled to associate and act together. With the government and bureaucracy taking every initiative, “they no longer felt the need to come together and reach agreements” By the eighteenth century, they “never met except by chance in private life.”¹⁸⁴ In England, conversely, “freedom always forced them all to stay in touch with one another, in order to be able to reach an understanding when necessary.”¹⁸⁵ And America proves that over time association might become if not entirely voluntary than at least dispositional as people “acquire a general taste for association and familiarize themselves with its use.”¹⁸⁶ Only “politics generalizes the taste for and habit of association. It takes a crowd of men who would otherwise have lived alone and makes them want to unite, and it teaches them the art of doing so.”¹⁸⁷ The practices that take shape around democratic self-government, Tocqueville concludes, are “constant reminders to each and every citizen that he lives in society.”¹⁸⁸

In this sense, Tocqueville values political liberty as integral to the overall health of the democratic social state. While democratic culture subverts the political practice of democracy, democratic politics cures the ills of democratic culture. “I maintain,” Tocqueville writes, “that to combat the evils that equality may engender there is only one effective remedy: political liberty.”¹⁸⁹ We have seen how in the political sphere democratic association and action combats the tutelary despotism born of equality by conveying some of the bearing of nobility. In society more generally, political liberty inoculates us against both democratic individualism and democratic materialism. “Liberty alone can effectively combat the natural vices of (democratic) societies Only freedom can bring citizens out of the isolation in which the very independence of their circumstances has led them to live, can daily force them to mingle, to join together

through the need to communicate with one another, persuade each other, and satisfy each other in the conduct of their common affairs. Only freedom can tear people from ... the petty daily concerns of their personal affairs ... (and) substitute higher and stronger passions for the love of material well-being, ... and create the atmosphere which allows one to see and judge human vices and virtues.”¹⁹⁰ The need to come together in common affairs to generate and use political power forces people to hear and see one another, to cooperate with and depend upon one another, to argue with and attempt to persuade one another, and so to judge and honor one another. While such a practice of liberty might engender “particular hatreds,” it always works against “general indifference.”¹⁹¹

More generally, we might say that the practice of political liberty counters freedom’s dialectic of idealization and devaluation. The extremes of mastery and escape come to seem unnecessary, impossible, and even undesirable. With his stake in political liberty, the citizen stands as it were in between the savage and the slave - neither wild nor domesticated. And in bringing different people together in argument, political liberty serves to remedy both the excessive notions of similarity and difference characteristic of democratic association. Assumed similarity - whether in the abstraction of humanity or in familial resemblance - is supplanted by the airing of differences between particular people, and so for the possibility of coming together through persuasion. At the same time, the assumption of impermeable difference - whether of caste, class, or culture - is potentially overturned. There is, Tocqueville writes, an “anticaste influence” to “common discussion about common interests.”¹⁹²

In all of these ways, I think we can say that politics for Tocqueville is a venue for the mediation of democratic extremes. As just discussed, political associations and institutions and arguments draw - or force - people together from out of their private lives in such a way that they might both recognize and mediate their differences. From a broader perspective, politics serves as an intermediary between principle and practice. It is in the process of political association and action that we temper our ideals by putting them into everyday practice, and elevate our everyday lives out of the shadows of isolation, insignificance, and petty materialism. In the practice of politics, Tocqueville suggests, the demands of morality and expediency may moderate one another, imagination is made to meet experience, and the sense of limitless possibility is tested against necessity.

Today’s tendency toward representing politics as either religion or economics by other means erodes this unique and uniquely important place of politics in democratic society. Every “I believe ...” sermon about “core convictions” delivered in strident voice by today’s politician-preachers, and every cynically knowing assertion that to understand the way politics works one need only “follow the money” or realize that “it’s the economy, stupid” subverts democratic politics. Pulled toward these opposite poles, it seems the middle-place of democratic politics cannot hold. Political life, which Tocqueville theorizes as the venue for the potential mediation of the religious and the economic, collapses into one or the other.

From a different angle, we might say that the democratic revolution signifies the transition from political bonds to natural bonds, and from political freedom to natural freedom. Tocqueville writes, for instance: “The same aristocratic institutions that had made creatures of the same species so different nevertheless bound them together with a

very tight political bond,” born not of “natural interest” and “natural right” and “genuine sympathy,” but of “duty and honor,” “mutual obligation” and “political right.”¹⁹³ Natural versus conventional becomes the master normative dichotomy of our modern democratic way of life, where the former stands as good, true, and beautiful, and the latter is at best useful and necessary. In such a context, only a politics that seems natural - based on natural interest, natural right, genuine sympathy - can stand as meaningful.

Tocqueville wrote of America that (as with the artificially simulated aristocracy of democratic associations) “the sovereignty of the Union is a work of art. The sovereignty of the states is natural; it exists by itself, without effort.”¹⁹⁴ “Everything is conventional and artificial” and a matter of “legal fictions” in the former. The latter is “like ... a family.”¹⁹⁵ Today, that which is like a family has split into the familial village and the global village - the pre-conventional “tribe” and post-conventional humanity. These are the modes of association that seem to exist by themselves, without effort - before or beyond the need for conventional mediation, independent of human intentions. Certain religious and economic formations hold such normative significance in our democratic way of life precisely because they seem in accord with these spontaneous, given and inevitable ways of being with others. The church and the market, as it were, are taken as the alternative modes of natural association. The political forum, consequently, is thought to necessarily reduce to one or the other these formations (or else seem a matter a mere “legal fictions”). Political organizations are represented as either “communities” or “special interest” groups, with nothing in between. More so than dissociation, this sort of depoliticization of society - wherein the actual practice of politics seems always the mere epiphenomenon of something deeper, more real, more natural - is for Tocqueville the tragedy of democracy.

Conclusion: The Fate of Politics in Democratic Society

Following and building upon Tocqueville, I have attempted over the course of the previous two chapters to think through the place of politics in democratic society. Beginning with the equality of conditions, the generative fact and principle of the democratic social state, we went on to consider the notions of elevation and degradation inscribed in equality, then onto the related ideas of freedom and its loss inscribed in equality, and finally to the norms of human association inscribed in this freedom-in-equality. I argued that the interpretive key to the democratic way of life is the idea of openness. The flip-side of the equality of conditions is the collapse of the principle of hierarchy, with the concomitant dissolution of the principle of landedness or place. It is in this sense that the democratic revolution in the nature and source of authority signifies an opening of society and the world. Inextricably intertwined with the condition equality, mediocrity, and banalization is the passion for revolutionary, creative openness. In space and in time we are and should be restless, never settled and never stopping, always on the move, taking to the open road. In principle, everything is and should be possible except the closure of possibility. Henceforth we can imagine rising above the level of humanity, even in a way transcending our materiality, and sinking below the level of humanity in our material neediness. We imagine a sort of unlimited, savage freedom wherein we possess all the power, or wherein nobody possesses any power, even as we fear the slave’s domestication. And we imagine a society wherein we continue to enjoy the uncompromised and untouched independence of nature, or wherein we enjoy the

simultaneous freedom and belonging conveyed by the intimacy and informality of being at home with others.

To put all of this in the context of one of Tocqueville's most important arguments, political revolutions will be rare in times of democracy not so much because the passion for revolution dissipates into bourgeois timidity and conservatism, but because politics can no longer be envisioned as a venue for meaningful revolution - indeed, politics can only seem an obstruction to society's proper order of revolutionary openness. Put in the context I have developed, the unspoken oneness of "soul-mates" is, in effect, Berlin's positive freedom similarly deprived of political venue.

I argued that while the idea of nature is radically transformed in the move to modernity - from hierarchical to open - nature remains a central standard of judgment. And I argued that in relation to this new norm of nature, the practice of politics cannot but seem unnatural. Moreover, insofar as it is premised upon political relations, society itself seems unnatural. In relation to the irreducible conflict and competition of Hobbes's state of nature, political civilization seems a bit of a charade, a well-meant illusion that masks the way things really work. In relation to the authenticity and compassion of Rousseau's state of nature, political civilization seems degraded, an obstruction to the way things could and should be. The notion of politics as a mode of *congregation*, of coming together from out of difference, is supplanted here by politics as a mode of *community*, of being together as one in resemblance, whether private or universal. This politics is as noisy as it is silent - cacophonous in the family feud and clashing authenticities of what has come to be called "the culture wars," silent insofar as it is devoid of argument. Arguments are taken as useless words and just so much standing around talking, as a shady way of "persuading" others to do what one wants (force by means of verbiage), or as a sad reminder that we are still so petty and bickering as to always fall short of beautiful union.

The fate of politics in democratic society, I suggested, can be summed in the proposition that democratic man does not consider himself a political animal. We can take this in two senses. First, democratic man imagines himself at once transcending the practice of politics, and so beastly as to be incapable of the practice of politics. And second, political life seems like it should either be above the ordinary world of material needs, self-interest, disagreement, and so forth, or that it is so beastly as to best be avoided. A politics that does not reflect the experience of being in the market or of being at home, of struggling for mastery or of striving for escape, seems to have no place in our social state of nature. The democratic way of life takes shape around not argument and persuasion, but around unrelenting competition and unconditional love.

In the following chapter, I turn to Claude Lefort's theory of democracy to further explore the idea of democratic openness - what Lefort calls the "dissolution of the markers of certainty" - and the norms of freedom embedded therein. After talking with people about the meaning of freedom, C. Fred Alford writes: "Remarkable is how similar diverse people sounded, not how different." "Aren't race, sex, and ethnicity the leading categories of existence, the experience that structures everything we hold dear? Perhaps, but not as far as freedom is concerned. In half a dozen different accents, American freedom sounds much the same."¹⁹⁶ In this chapter, I suggested why people might be disposed to believe that race, sex, and ethnicity are the leading categories of existence. In

the next chapter, I argue that the idea of democratic openness is the focal point for the unargued meeting of the minds between disparate individuals Alford describes. Tocqueville writes that it is “impossible to eliminate the existence of dogmatic beliefs,” meaning “the opinions that men accept of faith without discussion.”¹⁹⁷ Openness, I argue, is uniquely suited to serve as the dogmatic belief of democratic times. Taken as at once a *fact* of the world as we necessarily experience it after the democratic revolution (the original phenomenon of opening), and as the core *value* of a rightly ordered society, democratic openness itself seems natural and normatively determinate. The consequence, I go on to argue, is less that conventional norms and forms are denatured and subject to questioning than that the “closed” world of settled conventions is debased as such, without question. To paraphrase Tocqueville: in democratic society there will appear a great, restless mobility of human actions and a singular fixity of the principle of openness.¹⁹⁸

NOTES

¹ C. Fred Alford, *Rethinking Freedom: Why Freedom Has Lost Its Meaning and What Can Be Done to Save It* (hereafter *RF*) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

² Alford, *RF*, 1-2, 16.

³ Alford, *RF*, 50.

⁴ Alford, *RF*, 7, 4.

⁵ Alford, *RF*, 50.

⁶ Alford, *RF*, 31.

⁷ Alford, *RF*, 52 (my emphasis).

⁸ Alford, *RF*, 19-20.

⁹ Alford, *RF*, 20.

¹⁰ Alford, *RF*, 4.

¹¹ Alford, *RF*, 50.

¹² Alford, *RF*, 14. Recall from the previous chapter the emphasis on not having to compromise in the definitional statements of what it means to be soul-mates.

¹³ Alford, *RF*, 16, 29.

¹⁴ Alford, *RF*, 12.

¹⁵ Alford, *RF*, 29.

¹⁶ Alford, *RF*, 12, 29.

¹⁷ Alford, *RF*, 25.

¹⁸ Alford, *RF*, 34.

¹⁹ Alford, *RF*, 9, 27.

²⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. Arthur Gold Hammer (hereafter *DA*) (New York: Library of America, 2004) 584.

²¹ Alford, *RF*, 1.

²² To illustrate this point to my students, I encourage them to admit, after having catalogued all of the rampant inequalities in our society, that they are better than me, or each other, or other people. Their consequent squeamishness attests to Tocqueville’s point.

²³ The exception to the general equality of conditions in America lies, of course, in the utterly hierarchical relationship between master and slave, or even former slave. “When

the Negro is no more, his bones are tossed aside, and the difference in his condition manifests itself even in the equality of death.” “No amount of money can buy him the right to sit next to his former master in a theater.” Tocqueville, *DA*, 396.

²⁴ “Most people are,” Alford writes, “would-be stoics, desperate to preserve an inner realm of freedom from the intrusions of the world. At the same time, most people believe they are too weak to be true stoics, and so must pursue power and money, lest they end up with no freedom at all.” Alford, *RT*, 14.

²⁵ Along these lines, Alford argues that there is not only a borderline and narcissistic quality to freedom today, but also an element of paranoia. Alford, *RT*, 6-7.

²⁶ Daniel Plainview, of Paul Thomas Anderson’s 2007 film “There Will Be Blood” is a spectacular representation of this way of being in society. A few are let in as family and everyone else is a competitor.

²⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 369-70.

²⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 367-8.

²⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 367-8 (my emphasis).

³⁰ Alford himself writes: “Perhaps the best analog in political theory to what most people practice” in terms of freedom “is what ... (Tocqueville) called ‘individualism.’” Alford, *RT*, 45.

³¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 586.

³² Tocqueville, *DA*, 586.

³³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 588.

³⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 486 (my emphasis).

³⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 589.

³⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 72.

³⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 458, 63.

³⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 458.

³⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 522, 585, 484.

⁴⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 586.

⁴¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 574.

⁴² Tocqueville, *DA*, 586.

⁴³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 484 (my emphasis).

⁴⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 793 (my emphasis).

⁴⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 667.

⁴⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 574.

⁴⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 491.

⁴⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 362.

⁴⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 667.

⁵⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 819.

⁵¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 592 (my emphasis).

⁵² Tocqueville, *DA*, 590-91.

⁵³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 595. “Men in aristocratic societies,” by contrast, “do not need to join together in order to act, because they are firmly bound to one another. Each wealthy and powerful citizen is like the head of a permanent, compulsory association comprising all who are dependent on him and whose cooperation he enjoins in furtherance of his designs.” Tocqueville, *DA*, 596.

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- ⁵⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 750-51.
- ⁵⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 731.
- ⁵⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 532.
- ⁵⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 326.
- ⁵⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 646 (my emphasis).
- ⁵⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 410, 465.
- ⁶⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 464.
- ⁶¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 465.
- ⁶² Tocqueville, *DA*, 646.
- ⁶³ “Imagination,” Mélonio and Furet write in their introduction to *The Old Regime*, is the “ambiguous blessing of modern democracy.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution, Vol. I: The Complete Text*, Trans. Alan S. Kahan (hereafter *OR I*) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 53.
- ⁶⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 681.
- ⁶⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 241.
- ⁶⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 548.
- ⁶⁷ Interestingly, everything from bookstores to videogames go by the name of “Pandemonium” today.
- ⁶⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 466.
- ⁶⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, Ed. Roger Boesche, Trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche (hereafter *Letters*) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 40; Tocqueville, *DA*, 548.
- ⁷⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 432.
- ⁷¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 203.
- ⁷² Tocqueville, *OR I*, 323.
- ⁷³ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 323-24.
- ⁷⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 717, 523.
- ⁷⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 740.
- ⁷⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 736, 523, 794 (my emphasis).
- ⁷⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 794.
- ⁷⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 523.
- ⁷⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 625. In part, Tocqueville attributes this grabbing expansiveness to democratic man’s perceived finitude. “The man who has given his heart entirely to the quest for the goods of this world is always in a hurry, for he has but a limited time to find, possess, and enjoy them. The memory of life’s brevity constantly spurs him on. . . . This thought . . . keeps his soul in a state of constant trepidation that impels him again and again to change plans and places.” On this account, democratic man’s restlessness is less an expression of his freedom (as I have been trying to argue) than of the conjunction of materialism and mortality. Tocqueville, *DA*, 626.
- ⁸⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 278.
- ⁸¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 640.
- ⁸² Tocqueville, *DA*, 627.
- ⁸³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 623.
- ⁸⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 624.
- ⁸⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 623.

⁸⁶ Along these lines, Tocqueville writes of the “restless ambition to which equality gives rise,” and that the “same causes that make citizens independent of one another daily give rise to novel and restless desires.” Tocqueville, *DA*, 521, 747. In keeping with Tocqueville’s analysis of the French Revolution as not primarily a consequence of material suffering, democratic restlessness here is not primarily a consequence of material ease.

⁸⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 324.

⁸⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 326.

⁸⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 58.

⁹⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 623.

⁹¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 229.

⁹² Tocqueville, *DA*, 435.

⁹³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 356. Here again comparison to Tocqueville’s representations of the savage’s “habits of the wandering life” and the “solitude in which he lived free” proves illuminating. Tocqueville writes that “in order to civilize a people, one must first persuade them to settle in one place” and cultivate the soil, but men “who have tasted the idle and adventurous life of the hunter feel an almost insurmountable distaste for the constant, disciplined labor required by agriculture. . . . The Indians of North America view labor as not only an evil but also a disgrace, and their *pride combats civilization* almost as obstinately as their indolence. . . . He likens the farmer to the ox hitched to its plow and in our arts sees nothing but the labors of slaves.” Tocqueville, *DA*, 384, 378 (my emphasis).

⁹⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 58 (my emphasis).

⁹⁵ In Hobbes’s Western, a semblance of security is brought about only by the outside intervention of the vigilante law-man who seems less a man than a sovereign force of nature. In Rousseau’s Western, isolation is ended only in the union of the general will.

⁹⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 277. These lines are from one of the many passages in which Tocqueville draws a parallel, whether implicit or explicit, between the way of life of the slave-holding South and the social state of aristocracy.

⁹⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 466.

⁹⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 467.

⁹⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 279-281.

¹⁰⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 103.

¹⁰¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 751-752.

¹⁰² Tocqueville, *DA*, 760.

¹⁰³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 524. Something of this ambivalence comes through in a later fragment in which Tocqueville writes that “along with the American peasant, the Russian peasant is the one who is least attached to a place, to a profession, who most easily changes himself to all new things . . . a striking similarity in the spectacle which unfolds at the two opposed extremities of civilization!” Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution, Vol. II: Notes on the French Revolution and Napoleon*, Trans. Alan S. Kahan (hereafter *OR II*) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 291.

¹⁰⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 601.

¹⁰⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 830. We return to the idea that democratic peoples love the power but hate the power holder when we turn to the democratic theory of Claude Lefort.

¹⁰⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 736.

¹⁰⁷ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 117. One of the decisive blows against the old regime came when the Catholic clergy was deprived of its land. Above all, “what contributed to giving the clergy the idea, needs, feelings, often the passions of the citizen, was landownership.” Cut that link, and the clergyman “no longer belongs to any place in particular. In the place where chance has dictated his birth, he lives as a stranger in the midst of a civil society almost none of whose interests can directly concern him.” Tocqueville, *OR I*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 176; Tocqueville, *OR II*, 425.

¹⁰⁹ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 176-178. Tocqueville writes that without a “place in society where they could be seen” or a “voice capable of making itself heard,” the “lower classes alone . . . found themselves almost powerless to resist oppression other than by violence.”

¹¹⁰ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 179.

¹¹¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 600.

¹¹² Tocqueville, *DA*, 586. Tocqueville concludes that in democracy “the bond of human affection stretches and slackens.”

¹¹³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 710.

¹¹⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 558.

¹¹⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 710.

¹¹⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 474-475. “Accordingly,” Tocqueville continues, “one finds less difference between Europeans and their descendants in the New World today, despite the ocean that divides them, than between certain thirteenth century towns separated by nothing more than a river.”

¹¹⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 805.

¹¹⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 660-661.

¹¹⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 658.

¹²⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 667. “When an American calls upon the cooperation of his fellow Americans,” Tocqueville elaborates, “they seldom refuse, and I have often seen them offer their assistance spontaneously and enthusiastically. When there is an accident on a public way, people will rush to the victim’s aid from every direction. If a great and sudden misfortune should befall a family, a thousand strangers will generously open their purses. Modest but numerous gifts will pour in to alleviate the family’s misery.”

¹²¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 549.

¹²² Tocqueville, *DA*, 558.

¹²³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 530.

¹²⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 586.

¹²⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 556.

¹²⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 832.

¹²⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 475.

¹²⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 818.

¹²⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 585 (my emphasis).

¹³⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 686-687.

¹³¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 689.

¹³² Tocqueville, *DA*, 685.

¹³³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 688.

¹³⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 690.

¹³⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 688 (my emphasis).

¹³⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 689.

¹³⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 714.

¹³⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 688.

¹³⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 691.

¹⁴⁰ Tocqueville hardly develops the very interesting idea of collective individualism, and when he does mention it he describes it as a transient phenomenon limited to the caste-bound old regime - a stepping stone between aristocratic solidarity and democratic individualism. "Our ancestors lacked the word 'individualism,' which we have created for our own use, because in their era there were, in fact, no individuals who did not belong to a group and who could consider themselves absolutely alone; but each one of the thousand little groups of French society was composed thought only of itself. This was, if one can use the word thus, a kind of collective individualism, which prepared people for the real individualism with which we are familiar." Tocqueville, *OR I*, 162-3. Tocqueville argues that this individualism-with-others will dissolve in democratic times, leaving only the single, isolated individual and the general mass of humanity. But insofar as democratic association takes shape around the norm of the democratic family - intimately bound to one or a few others, cut off from the many - democratic society would seem to harbor collective individualism. "Clan" supplants "caste."

¹⁴¹ Tocqueville, *OR II*, 29.

¹⁴² Tocqueville, *DA*, 690.

¹⁴³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 663.

¹⁴⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 661.

¹⁴⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 663.

¹⁴⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 712.

¹⁴⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 712-713.

¹⁴⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 664.

¹⁴⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 713.

¹⁵⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 725-726.

¹⁵¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 730.

¹⁵² Tocqueville, *DA*, 728.

¹⁵³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 730-731, 733.

¹⁵⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 731-732.

¹⁵⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 734.

¹⁵⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 737, 733 (my emphasis).

¹⁵⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 737.

¹⁵⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 506.

¹⁵⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 826. Tocqueville writes that this democratic disposition is only made worse in "a state of revolution." "When any nation changes leaders, opinions, and laws several times within a short period, the men who compose ... (grow) accustomed to the idea that all change occurs rapidly with the help of force. They then naturally conceive a contempt for forms" Tocqueville, *DA*, 827.

¹⁶⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 303.

¹⁶¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 483.

¹⁶² Tocqueville, *DA*, 484.

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- ¹⁶³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 522, 497.
- ¹⁶⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 551.
- ¹⁶⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 542.
- ¹⁶⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 506.
- ¹⁶⁷ Tocqueville, *OR II*, 198.
- ¹⁶⁸ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 327.
- ¹⁶⁹ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 325. Tocqueville notes: “The French Revolution is founded on general ideas like a religion, which is what made it possible for it to spread like one.” By comparison, the English Revolution did not have the same import or effect because, “even though it ended up in the same dogmas, (it) surrounded them with a particular form.” Tocqueville, *OR I*, 326.
- ¹⁷⁰ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 325-26.
- ¹⁷¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 342-343.
- ¹⁷² Tocqueville, *OR I*, 326.
- ¹⁷³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 342-343.
- ¹⁷⁴ Tocqueville, *Letters*, 81-82.
- ¹⁷⁵ Tocqueville, *Letters*, 181-182.
- ¹⁷⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 8.
- ¹⁷⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 598-599.
- ¹⁷⁸ Tocqueville, *Letters*, 144.
- ¹⁷⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 824. Tocqueville writes, “nowhere are associations more necessary to prevent either the despotism of the parties or the arbitrariness of the prince than in democratic countries whose social state is democratic. In aristocratic nations, secondary bodies constitute natural associations that halt the abuse of power. In countries where such associations do not exist, unless private individuals can artificially and temporarily create something that resembles them, I see no impediment to any form of tyranny” Tocqueville, *DA*, 219.
- ¹⁸⁰ Tocqueville, *DA*, 608.
- ¹⁸¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 597.
- ¹⁸² Tocqueville, *DA*, 604.
- ¹⁸³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 590.
- ¹⁸⁴ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 155.
- ¹⁸⁵ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 163.
- ¹⁸⁶ Tocqueville, *DA*, 608.
- ¹⁸⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 604.
- ¹⁸⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 593.
- ¹⁸⁹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 594.
- ¹⁹⁰ Tocqueville, *OR I*, 88. In America, for instance, “the electoral system permanently brings together a multitude of citizens who would otherwise remain strangers.” In this way, “American’s have used liberty to combat the individualism born of equality, and they have defeated it.” Tocqueville, *DA*, 591.
- ¹⁹¹ Tocqueville, *DA*, 591.
- ¹⁹² Tocqueville, *OR I*, 283. In pre-revolutionary France, Tocqueville maintains, “the slightest contact with ‘self-government’ would have brought about the ‘rapprochement and mingling’ of the different classes.”

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- ¹⁹³ Tocqueville, *DA*, 656.
¹⁹⁴ Tocqueville, *DA*, 189.
¹⁹⁵ Tocqueville, *DA*, 187, 189.
¹⁹⁶ Alford, *RF*, 6-7.
¹⁹⁷ Tocqueville, *DA*, 489.
¹⁹⁸ Tocqueville, *DA*, 753.