

Alexis



De Tocqueville



*a biographical
study
in political
science*

by J. P. Mayer



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Alexis de Tocqueville

A Biographical Study in Political Science

J. P. MAYER

with a new essay, "Tocqueville after a Century"



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Such was the world in which Alexis passed his early childhood.

The upbringing of the children, of whom Alexis was the youngest, two brothers having been born before him, rested with the Abbé Lesueur, who had already been charged with the education of Alexis's father, Hervé de Tocqueville. Very little is known about the abbé beyond the fact that Alexis's grandmother, a deeply pious Catholic, had chosen him as her son's preceptor. When, in 1831, Alexis learned in America of his tutor's death, he was deeply moved, and wrote to his brother Edward: "I loved our good old friend as I did our father." Certain it is that Alexis owed the uprightness of his character to the old priest, who alone taught him the Christian virtues—to do the good and eschew the evil—and his gratitude did not cease with his teacher's death. "Never again," he writes from America to his beloved brother, "shall we meet a man whose whole faculties and affections are centered upon ourselves. He seems to have lived for us alone."

During the six years of Count Hervé de Tocqueville's prefectship in Metz, Alexis completed his studies at the *lycée* in that town. His career at school was a brilliant one, a special prize and two first prizes being awarded to him. There were many lonely hours, too, during which the boy browsed in his father's library. At sixteen years he was reading books hardly accessible to the average boy of his age. It was at this time that he lost the religious belief to which he was to return only in the last years of his life. Among his early papers are some fragments, included by Gustave de Beaumont in the biographical notice with which he prefaces the complete edition of his friend's works, which show a young mind wrestling hard with the theories of Descartes. "There is no Absolute Truth," writes de Tocqueville in these early papers. And again: "If I were asked to classify human miseries I should rank them in the following order: (1) Disease; (2) Death; (3) Doubt."³ Shattered for him was the strict Catholic belief of his ancestors, gone all but a Christian deism.

Alexis de Tocqueville's basic inclination for critical and original thinking seems to have been developing in these years. Sainte-Beuve truly established later that de Tocqueville had read com-

paratively little. His was a mind to concentrate on concrete matters, and to formulate their laws with devoted precision. He completed his studies of law at the age of twenty, and then set out with his brother Edward on an educational tour which took him to Italy and Sicily.

Gustave de Beaumont has given us some typical fragments from the voluminous journals kept by Alexis de Tocqueville during this journey, and these, for all their youthful character, foretell the methods of the mature man. There is, for instance, an account of the social structure of landed property in a part of Sicily. From the facts he proceeds to an explanation of causes, and from the causal analysis he educes the norm of appropriate political action. "Whence," asks the young thinker, "comes this extreme parcelling out of land, which in France is regarded by many intelligent people as an evil? Are we to consider it as advantageous or the reverse for Sicily? The explanation is not difficult. I note the fact that in an enlightened country, where the climate conduces to activity, and where all classes wish (as in England, for example) to grow rich, nothing but harm can come to agriculture and hence to the domestic prosperity of the country concerned, from the exaggerated parcelling-out of land, since this method stands in the way of great possibilities of improving the soil, and of the effectiveness of those persons who have the will and the capacity to exploit such possibilities. But when the opposite is the case, and it is a question of awakening and stimulating a miserable and half-paralysed people for whom passivity is a pleasure, and whose upper classes are dulled by vices or inherited indolence, I can think of no more welcome expedient than this parcelling-out of land. Were I king of England I would favour large estates; were I lord of Sicily I would vigorously support small holdings; but as I am neither I return with all speed to my diary."⁴ The typical habit of mind of the twenty-two-year-old writer, his exact eye for detail, his analytical dissection, and his abstraction of the structural political law underlying the details are unmistakable in this passage. Clear, too, is the political application, although it is presented in somewhat frolicsome

manner. De Tocqueville is, however, still far from an original comprehensive view of the whole social body-politic. With youthful uncriticalness he adopts the climatic theories of Bodin and to some extent also of Montesquieu, whose great works were doubtless familiar to him. Later he definitely rejected the fatalistic naturalism of the climatic dogma and its associated race theory. On this he was later to write on the last page of his book on America: "I know that several of my contemporaries have thought that the peoples of the earth are never their own masters, and that they must of necessity obey I know not what dark and unconquerable forces generated from early experiences of the race, from the soil, and from the climate. These are false and cowardly doctrines, which can produce only weak individuals and faint-hearted nations. Providence has created man neither wholly independent nor wholly enslaved. Doubtless each man has his own circle of destiny from which he cannot escape, but within its wide circumference he is powerful and free; and the same is true of nations."⁵ In these sentences speaks the mature mind of the thirty-five-year-old thinker, and they reveal how significant was de Tocqueville's development during the intervening thirteen years.

There is another passage in these sketches which should also, perhaps, be rescued from oblivion. Alexis is suddenly filled with an intense longing for home, for France. Perhaps it is only in a foreign land that one can appreciate the real worth of one's native land. He writes: "On foreign soil all things are tinged with sadness, often even pleasure itself."⁶ Not until one is far away do things which have become overfamiliarized by custom attain their true stature and appear in their authentic colors. The young de Tocqueville was no traveler for travel's sake. He missed France, *his* France, while he experienced foreign institutions. When later he set himself to obtain full knowledge of the institutions and structures of democratic America, his sole purpose was to understand the structure of his own country, then undergoing profound changes. Thus his last book, as will be seen, has for theme the French social structure, which he studies in transition from the

but do you not see that their passions, from being *political* have become *social*? [our italics]. Do you not see that little by little, ideas and opinions are spreading amongst them which aim not merely at removing such and such laws, such a ministry or such a government, *but at breaking up the very foundations of society itself?* [our italics]. . . . Such, gentlemen, is my deepest conviction: I believe that at this very moment we are sleeping on a volcano—I am profoundly convinced of it. . . .

“When I come to seek in different ages, different epochs, different peoples, for the effective cause that has led to the ruin of their governing classes, I see, indeed, such and such a man, such and such an event, such and such an accidental or superficial cause, but, believe me, the true cause, the effective cause of men’s loss of power, is that they become unworthy to wield it.”²¹

Four weeks later the February revolution broke out in Paris and became the prelude to a European movement whose momentum, following laws proclaimed by de Tocqueville, has continued down to our own day. De Tocqueville did not, however, prophesy alone. In 1842 Lorenz von Stein foresaw social revolution in the very near future, while both Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (whose composition preceded de Tocqueville’s speech by only a few months) recognized in the social antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat the basic problem of the coming decades.

The charge has been brought against de Tocqueville that during his parliamentary career his political bearing showed little sign of that “new sort of liberalism” which we have endeavored to characterize above. This reproach is, in our opinion, scarcely justified. De Tocqueville began with too much knowledge of the workaday political machine to make any attempt to correct “the clumsy commonplaces which direct and rule the world” by unintelligibly delicate distinctions. His sole—and well-justified—claim, in a parliament rendered for the most part corrupt and therefore complaisant by the Guizot government, was to the good faith, the solid and statesmanlike insight, which distinguished

thing most calculated to estrange it; they menaced it at the same time that they surrendered to it; they frightened it by the boldness of their projects and the violence of their language while inviting resistance by the weakness of their acts; they gave themselves the airs of preceptors and at the same time made themselves dependents."¹³ When seventy years later German Social Democracy was faced with a similar historic task its leaders showed that they had learned little from the experiences of the French February revolution. Actually, new events are always in essence merely a part of the same old human history, and what we call new events are all too often only forgotten events. The German Social-Democratic leaders in 1918 and later were, indeed, masters of forgetfulness.

De Tocqueville would certainly have given his political support to French socialism if he had believed that the socialistic movement of his day was in accord with the ideas, morals, and passions of the age. He never lacked courage, but he saw the socialist movement as a mere tendency which in the distant future of Western history might show itself stronger than in those spring days of 1848.

His decision was soon made. He would not stand for this government or for that but for the laws which constituted French society as such. His possessions, his peace, and his person weighed light with him while, as he believed, the very existence of the French state was at stake, and human dignity was in danger. Once again the *Souvenirs* give classic expression to what de Tocqueville conceived as his duty at the time. "To protect the ancient laws of society against innovators with the help of the new power with which the republican principle endows a government; to make the evident will of the French people triumph over the passions and desires of the workers of Paris; by so doing to conquer demagogy by democracy—such was my sole object. I have never had an aim at once so exalted and so plain to view."¹⁴

Democracy versus Demagogy—this was the banner under which de Tocqueville sought to serve. Shortly before the June rising he was voted on to the constitutional commission of the National Assembly. The great analyst of the American constitu-

tion thus obtained effective influence in the reformation of the French constitution.

The commission began its work with a discussion of communal decentralization, which de Tocqueville, as we have already seen, held to be one of the essentials of a democratic state. The discussion, however, brought out irreconcilable differences of opinion among the commissioners, so that the point was forthwith abandoned and the administrative centralization traditional in France remained untouched. There was more prolonged debate on the question of a one-chamber or a two-chamber system. De Tocqueville supported the setting-up of a two-chamber system, and Barrot backed him, but still he remained hopelessly outnumbered. It was accepted by the commission as axiomatic that the executive should be responsible to one chamber only. The question now arose as to how the supreme head of the republican state was to be chosen, and as to what constitutional limitations should be imposed on the president. Here, again, the commission worked too hastily without taking stock of all the possible consequences of this weighty problem. De Tocqueville had grave doubts about direct popular election of the president. Might not a president, elected by the people under the French system of centralization, which the revolution had not dared to touch, easily become a pretender to the throne? Louis Napoleon had recently been elected by Paris and three *départements* into the National Assembly. De Tocqueville's anxiety was but too well justified. "I remember," he says in the *Souvenirs*, "that all the time the commission was occupied with this business my mind was at work to discover on which side the balance of power ought habitually to lie in such a republic as I saw in the making; sometimes I thought it should lie with a single Assembly, sometimes with an elected president. This uncertainty troubled me greatly. Actually it was not possible to foresee how it would be; the victory of one or other of the two great rivals must depend on the circumstances and dispositions of the moment. *The only thing certain was that there would be war between them to the ruin of the republic*" [the italics are ours].¹⁵ De Tocqueville wrote this account, after the event, at Sorrento in

March 1851 to clear his own mind and to leave a valuable lesson for posterity. Rather more than six months later Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* put an end to the Second French Republic, even as de Tocqueville had prophesied. Of the remaining work of the commission perhaps only its rescue of the principle that judges should not be subject to dismissal deserves mention. Later, de Tocqueville regarded this as the one achievement of the 1848 commission which was certain to endure.

The commission's task was rushed through in less than a month and it gave de Tocqueville no satisfaction. The times were too unsettled, the necessities of the day too urgent, to give scope for thorough work. "One and all," writes de Tocqueville (in the *Souvenirs*) of these constitution-builders of the Second Republic, "they were very unlike those men, so sure of their aim, so much in command of the methods to be used to attain it, who, under Washington's presidency, drew up the American constitution sixty years ago."¹⁶ Yet for a man like de Tocqueville, who had a vision of the totality of the political sphere, these weeks must have afforded valuable study, not least in ripening his ideas on the relationship between political theory and political practice.

On December 10, 1848, Louis Napoleon was elected president of the Republic by an overwhelming majority. De Tocqueville had supported Cavaignac. On May 13, 1849, a new national legislative assembly was elected. De Tocqueville was returned again, although many of his friends failed to retain their seats. The socialists were stronger in the new parliament, holding a hundred and fifty seats. The conflicts of the previous June had found an echo in the country at large.

The cabinet was reconstructed, and on June 2 de Tocqueville was appointed foreign minister to the French Republic. "We wanted," we read in the *Souvenirs*, "to call the republic to life: he (the president) wanted to bury it. We were only his ministers, and he wanted accomplices."¹⁷ This sentence completely sums up the situation, even though written in retrospect. The new minister took up his task with a sure hand. "I felt perplexed, worried, discouraged, agitated, in face of small responsibilities. I ex-

perienced mental tranquillity, a strange calm, when in the presence of very great ones. The sense of the importance of the things I was then doing lifted me at once to their level, and kept me there. Hitherto the thought of defeat had been insupportable to me, yet the vision of resounding disaster in the role I had now undertaken on one of the greatest of the world's stages troubled me not at all—proving to myself that my weakness was not that of timidity, but that of pride. . .”¹⁸ He appointed trusted friends to the embassies—Lamorcière to St. Petersburg, Corcelle to Rome, Beaumont to Vienna. On these men he could build securely.

His task was lightened by his unerring judgment of human beings. “My secret, if it must be told, consisted in flattering their *amour-propre* while I ignored their opinions.”¹⁹ He handled even de Broglie, Molé, and Thiers by this method, which he certainly had not needed to learn from Machiavelli. His ten years in the French parliament had not been in vain. Of the “great matters” with which his new office confronted him it is sufficient to mention the Piedmontese incident, the Turkish question, the Roman question, and the problem of the Swiss rights of asylum.

Nothing conclusive can be said about de Tocqueville's handling of the Roman question until his correspondence with Corcelle has been made accessible to the public, but the other issues give convincing proof of his statesmanlike action. Some ten thousand revolutionary fugitives from Germany, Austria, and Russia had found a temporary refuge in Switzerland: Friedrich Engels, among others, had fled there from Baden. These three states now threatened to exercise police rights in Switzerland unless she expelled these turbulent “red” elements. De Tocqueville supported France's menaced neighbor and ally by declaring that France would go to war before she would allow Switzerland to be bullied or humiliated by other powers. At the same time he had the French-Swiss frontier closed, so that France's democratic ally was obliged to expel revolutionaries regarded by France also as dangerous. De Tocqueville did not find it hard to combine national honor with political ends. In his account in the *Souvenirs* of the

Swiss dispute he comments significantly on the relation between foreign and home politics in a democratic state: "Never has it been clearer that it is the nature of democracies to have, for the most part, most confused or erroneous ideas on external affairs, and to decide questions of foreign policy on purely domestic considerations."²⁰ This sentence shows how deeply he had pondered the principles of his new office.

He acted similarly in the Austrian-Piedmontese conflict. Austria had defeated Piedmont at Novara and peace was practically concluded, but for a quite small financial indemnity due from Piedmont. Suddenly Austria raised her demands. Once more the French foreign minister made an immediate threat of armed force. He stationed the Lyons army corps at the foot of the Alps, and thus secured the withdrawal of the Austrian demands, in his opinion unjust.

The Turkish question was more complex and far-reaching, threatening to attain European dimensions. Here again an emigrant question was the original cause of trouble. Hungarian revolutionaries, Kossuth among them, and Polish officers had found refuge in Turkey. Kossuth and Denbinski had furthermore put themselves expressly under the protection of the French embassy. Austria and Russia now demanded that Turkey should hand over the revolutionary leaders, and this Turkey refused to do. Even in those days there were lands more Christian than the seemingly Christian states of Europe. Turkey refused to give up the refugees; Austria and Russia thereupon broke off diplomatic relations with Constantinople, and war was imminent. England stood on the side of Turkey. De Tocqueville sent his ambassador definite orders, yet with instructions to use caution. Finally the tsar gave way. De Tocqueville had proved completely that he was fit to play in the European concert of powers.

Numerous documents show that he envisaged a close alliance with England as the basis of French foreign policy. He regarded England as a great example of political wisdom and political moderation: the spirit of British policy had been evolved through centuries of cool, un sentimental statesmanship. "I need not tell

nature opposes to him; the adversaries of the Russian are men. The former combats the wilderness and savage life; the latter, civilization with all its arms. The conquests of the American are therefore gained by the plowshare; those of the Russian by the sword. The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe."

These lines perhaps explain the contradiction in de Tocqueville's political thought as far as Germany is concerned. In addition, this contradiction also reveals an apprehension in his attitude toward Russia, an uncertainty which is today as disturbing as it was in 1850 when de Tocqueville wrote his *Recollections*.

On October 31, 1849, Louis Napoleon dismissed the Odilon-Barrot Government. "Our fall was due neither to public opinion nor to a parliamentary campaign," writes de Tocqueville; "the President was determined to rule alone and to regard his ministers as mere agents and creatures. He may be right in wishing this. I will not go into the question: but we could not serve him under such conditions."²² Later Louis Napoleon made frequent vain attempts to secure de Tocqueville's statesmanlike services again, but a politician for whom human dignity and human freedom were axiomatic political conceptions could come to no pact with that ruler.

De Tocqueville had no illusions about the character of the president, and I cannot resist quoting the pen picture of his lord and master which the ex-minister drew in his *Souvenirs*. It is one of the finest from de Tocqueville's masterly hand, and not even Plutarch modeled his heroes more convincingly.

"He was very superior to what his earlier life and his rash enterprises might justly lead one to expect him to be. This was my first impression in intercourse with him. In this respect he disap-

pointed his enemies, and perhaps even more his friends, if such a title may be given to the politicians who supported his candidature. The greater number of the latter chose him actually not for his good qualities but for his presumed mediocrity. They thought they would find him a tool which they could use at discretion and, when occasion arose, break at will. In this they were greatly mistaken.

“As a private person Louis Napoleon had certain attractive qualities; an amiable and easy disposition, a humane character, a gentle and even tender spirit, though one lacking in delicacy, great assurance in social intercourse, perfect simplicity, and a certain personal modesty co-existing with immense pride of descent. He was capable of feeling affection and of inspiring it in those about him. He had little conversation, and was a dull talker when he did speak. He had not the art of making others talk or of getting intimately *en rapport* with them. He lacked facility in self-expression, but he had literary habits and a certain vanity of authorship. His capacity for dissimulation, which was great as befitted a man who had passed his life in conspiracy, received singular reinforcement from the immobility of his features and the insignificance of his glance—for his eyes were spiritless and opaque, like those thick panes of glass in the windows of ships’ cabins which let in the light, but through which one cannot see. Utterly careless of danger, he had a fine cold courage in days of crisis, and at the same time, as is common enough, he was very vacillating in his plans. One often saw him change his direction, advance, hesitate, draw back—to his own great disadvantage, for the nation had chosen him to dare all, and what it expected of him was boldness, not prudence. It is said that he was always much addicted to pleasures, of which he was not delicate in the choice. This passion for vulgar satisfactions, this liking for comforts, grew with the opportunities afforded by power. He squandered his energies daily on these things and even clipped and curtailed his ambition for their sake. He had an incoherent and confused mentality filled with grandiose, ill-ordered ideas, borrowed sometimes from the example of Napoleon, sometimes from

the theories of socialism, sometimes from memories of England (where he had lived)—in fact from very various, and frequently contradictory, sources. He had laboriously assembled these ideas during solitary meditation, apart from contact with men and facts, for he was by nature a day-dreamer and fantasist. But when he was forced to leave these vague and vast regions and to apply his mind within the limits of the particular occasion it was capable of good judgment, sometimes of finesse and penetration, even indeed of a certain depth, but it was never sure, and it was always ready to place some bizarre idea side by side with a true one.

“In general it was hardly possible to be with him long or intimately without discovering a little streak of madness running thus through his common sense, and its appearance, constantly recalling the escapades of his youth, served also to explain them.

“For the rest one may say that it was to his madness rather than to his sense to which, thanks to circumstances, he owed his success and his strength: for the world is a strange theatre. There are times when the worst pieces are those which have the best success. If Louis Napoleon had been a wise man, or a man of genius, he would never have become president of the republic.

“He believed in his ‘star’; believed himself the instrument of fate, the man of destiny. I have always believed that he was really convinced of his rights, and I doubt if Charles X was ever more infatuated about his legitimacy than was Louis Napoleon about his. The latter was as incapable as the former, moreover, of rationalizing his faith, for while he had a kind of abstract adoration for the people, he had little taste for liberty. His most characteristic and fundamental trait in matters political was his hate and scorn for parliamentary assemblies. Constitutional monarchy seemed to him a less tolerable form of government even than a republic. The boundless pride he drew from his name was willing to bow to the nation, but revolted at the idea of submission to the influence of a Parliament.

“Before he came to power he had had time to reinforce the natural inclination of mediocre princes for flunkeyism by the habits of twenty years of conspiracy passed amidst low-class ad-

venturers, ruined and tarnished men, young debauchees—the only persons who during this period consented to serve him as boon-companions and accomplices. There showed even through his own good manners something that smacked of the adventurer and charlatan. He continued to take pleasure in such inferior company even when he was no longer compelled to seek it out. I believe that his difficulty in expressing his thoughts otherwise than in writing bound him to these people who had long been in touch with his ideas and familiar with his dreams, and that in general his inferiority in conversation made contact with men of intellect painful to him. He wanted above everything a devotion to his person and to his cause that seemed to owe its existence to that person and that cause—independent merit made him uneasy. He needed faithful believers in his star, vulgar worshippers of his fortunes.

“Such was the man whom the need of a leader and the power of a memory placed at the head of France.”²³ Any attempt to build up a sociological typology of the political leader of this modern era of mass societies must certainly set out from the figure of Louis Napoleon. His victory illustrates for the first time in modern history the triumph of political ineptitude. As has been seen, the Second French Republic extended the franchise from two hundred thousand to more than nine million people, without the provision of any sort of political education for them. The new electorate, into whose hands the fate of the nation had been placed as it were overnight, were certainly incapable of following the fine distinctions of parliamentary deliberations. They did not even wish to do so, but willingly transferred their mandate to the bearer of a “great name”—or rather to the man who accorded with, and knew how to appeal to, their own mediocrity. Later the Chamber restricted the franchise again, but not to the *status quo* of the Guizot regime. Louis Napoleon, however, insisted on the reintroduction of that universal suffrage which had brought him into power. December 2, 1851, saw the end of the debate on this matter, as also on that of the re-electability of

sophical book ever written on Democracy as it manifests itself in modern society; a book, the essential doctrines of which it is not likely that any future generations will subvert, to whatever degree they may modify them; while its spirit, and the general mode in which it treats its subject, constitute the beginning of a new era in the scientific study of politics."⁴

That which in 1840 appeared far distant or, as Sainte-Beuve said, "without example," has in 1959 become our present or immediate future.

It is necessary to reread the fourth part of the last volume of the *Democracy in America* to understand well the acuteness and depth of Tocqueville's analysis.

"As long as the democratic revolution was glowing with heat, the men who were bent upon the destruction of aristocratic powers hostile to that revolution displayed a strong spirit of independence; but as the victory of the principle of equality became more complete, they gradually surrendered themselves to the propensities natural to that condition of equality, and they strengthened and centralized their governments. They had sought to be free in order to make themselves equal; but in proportion as equality was more established by the aid of freedom, freedom itself was thereby rendered more difficult of attainment."⁵

Tocqueville's sociological analysis does not only reveal our past, it also penetrates the clouds of the future and describes our present. The new society is everywhere around us:

"A multitude of similar and equal individuals are working to procure themselves petty and vulgar satisfactions. Above these men there rears a monstrous tutelary power who provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living."⁶

The anticipation of what then was but a tendency gave Tocqueville that feeling of solitude which he sometimes expressed in his correspondence with his most intimate friends. "We are the last

have grown accustomed, and that in matters of social constitution the field of possibilities is much more extensive than men living in their various societies are ready to imagine."¹²

It may be seen with what prudence Tocqueville's thought bends itself under the pressure of social complexity.

While Marxism taught the slow death of the state—one of the most dangerous and fallacious utopias which could have been invented—the *Democracy in America* supplied us with a precise description of the very substance of the modern state as it surrounds us everywhere. "In proportion as the functions of the central power are augmented, the number of public offices representing that power must increase also. They form a nation, within each nation; and as they share the stability of the government, they more and more fill up the place of an aristocracy."¹³ It was evident to Tocqueville that this was a European phenomenon: "I assert that there is no country in Europe in which the public administration has not become, not only more centralized, but more inquisitive and more minute: everywhere it interferes in private concerns more than it did; it regulates more undertakings, and undertakings of a lesser kind; and it gains a firmer footing every day, about, above, and around all private persons, to assist, to advise, and to coerce them."¹⁴ In fact the state does not appear to be slowly dying.

It is certain that Tocqueville was not the first modern political writer who had analyzed the phenomenon of administrative centralization. Chéruel examined it almost at the same time as he; Dareste de La Chavanne and Béchard preceded him; but Tocqueville was the first to have a presentiment of the dangers of administrative centralization for the condition of man; moreover his paramount aim was to suggest institutional devices to safeguard the soul of man rather than to protect his economic security. There it seems that he was under the influence of his father, Hervé de Tocqueville, who married the granddaughter of Lamoignon de Malesherbes. Tocqueville inherited the legacy of the great liberal magistrates and administrators of the eighteenth

century which was directed against the pernicious administrative absolutism of the Old Order.

It has always seemed capital to me that Tocqueville could give a description and a definition of the modern state but could not find a name for this monster: "It is a new thing, it is therefore necessary to attempt to define it as I cannot name it."¹⁵ Would he perhaps have found the name managerial state acceptable? Without a doubt Tocqueville's sociology analyzes the state and modern society in a more adequate manner than does Burnham or more recently Hans Freyer (who has, however, reminded us of the greatness of Tocqueville).¹⁶

It is not surprising that the political thought of the great sociologist could not form a school. Almost always in the history of political thought only the secondary or inessential ideas become widespread. This was the case with Montesquieu, whose theory of the separation of powers had an enormous influence in Europe and America, though this theory hides rather than reveals the real substance of Montesquieu's sociology. As far as Tocqueville is concerned we are up against the same phenomenon. Barthélemy assures us in his *Treatise on Constitutional Law* (Paris, 1933, p. 46): "The political education of the generation which produced the constitution of 1875 was based a little on Proudhon, a great deal on the *Democracy in America* and lastly and above all on the works . . . of de Broglie and Prévost-Paradol."¹⁷ As in the case of Montesquieu only the constitutional mechanisms of the first two volumes of this great work touched this generation. The substance of Tocqueville's political sociology remained almost uncomprehended. It is we who have to perform this task.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether the historians of the nineteenth century showed a more adequate appreciation of Tocqueville. Without a doubt his *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, the first edition of which appeared in 1856, had a great influence on French and non-French historiography. I have already mentioned Burckhardt; I might add Ranke and Sybel, and in England Acton, not to mention other German historians. With Dilthey, however, we reach a different plane. His was the

of the three great European nations, France, England, and Germany, at their sources. The central problem in both books is, moreover, the same. "I think," Tocqueville wrote in the *Democracy in America*, "that in the democratic centuries that are beginning, individual independence and local freedom will always be the product of art. Centralisation will be the natural government."²⁰ And here is the passage in the *Ancien Régime* which reiterates this great lesson of French history: "The first efforts of the revolution have destroyed that great institution, monarchy, which was restored in 1800. It was not, as has been said so often, the principles of 1789 on the subject of public administration which triumphed in that time and since, but rather, on the contrary, those of the old order were all put in force again and have remained."²¹

"If I am asked how this fragment of the state of society anterior to the Revolution could thus be transplanted in its entirety and incorporated into the new state of society which has sprung up, I will answer that the principle was itself the precursor and the commencement of the Revolution; and I will add that when a people has destroyed Aristocracy in its social constitution, that people is sliding by its own weight into centralisation. Much less exertion is then required to drive it down that declivity than to hold it back. Amongst such a people all powers tend naturally to unity, and it is only by great ingenuity that they can still be kept separate."²²

Without a doubt, Tocqueville is more certain of himself when he describes the process of centralization and its human implications in their totality than when he undertakes to discover institutional means of guaranteeing the independence of the individual. His pensive and slightly melancholy vision never led him to wish to become a political romantic; but he never ceased to ask that the new democratic, administrative and centralized system should at least accommodate the values of individuality. These values, he postulated, must be realized in a society in which rights and duties are balanced. I do not think Tocqueville went as far as one

might go today. But he shows us the direction, our direction. Hic Rhodus, Hic salta! . . .

In England he found, if not the solution, at least a possible solution; and he probably was not wrong, given that this precious liberty is well protected there. Three characteristics of British political life seemed to him to make the groundwork for a conciliation between the necessities of the modern state and the imprescriptible rights of man. There was above all the coexistence of a strong central government with an efficient and vital local autonomy. Furthermore there was the role of the judiciary, with its total independence and its position above all those authorities, all of whose actions are submitted to the law. Finally, there was the fact of the openness of the English aristocracy into which everyone had the chance of rising. In spite of the fact that its younger sons formed part of the "people," they stayed linked to the aristocracy by all sorts of personal and social connections.

It is not impossible that these considerations retain their importance for us. They may require a certain transposition; and if they are capable of this, that would prove that not only Tocqueville's questions, but also his attempts to answer them, still affect us.

What Tocqueville really was aiming at was a political philosophy in which rights and duties are adequately related to one another. He fully realized that you could not have a medieval world-order, a medieval hierarchy in which everyone had his preordained place, for naturally it was evident to him that the modern class struggles have destroyed the feudal hierarchy. So the question was for him how to establish such a hierarchy on the basis of our modern world. Now this modern world has certainly established rights, more rights than we deserve. You recognize the picture of our contemporary welfare state. But the trouble with such a state is that it has only established rights and no duties. While a vague conception of duties still exists, as in my country—Great Britain—and if I knew your country better, I would venture to add the U.S.A., these traditions are vague for they are based on traditions which are no more alive and valid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 527.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 531.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 538.

¹⁶ The MS. of this study was completed in all essentials by February 1939. George Wilson Pierson's comprehensive book *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America*, published since then (New York, 1938), has not induced me to alter anything in my own presentation.

CHAPTER FIVE

(I advise the reader to consult for this chapter the book by E. T. Gargan: *Alexis de Tocqueville: The Critical Years 1848-1851*, Washington, D.C., 1955.)

¹ *Souvenirs*, pp. 13 et seq.:

² *Œuvres*, vi, pp. 67, 68. (*Memoir*, ii, pp. 30, 31.)

³ Ibid., p. 483. (Ibid., vol. ii, p. 466.)

⁴ Redier, op. cit., p. 161.

⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

⁶ Ibid., p. 163.

⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

⁸ *Souvenirs*, pp. 9 et seq.

⁹ Cf. Ch. Seignobos, *Histoire politique de L'Europe contemporaine: évolution des partis et des formes politiques, 1814-96*, Paris, 1908, p. 136.

¹⁰ Arthur Rosenberg has recently given a general view of the February Revolution in France in relation to European social history since 1789 in his book *Demokratie und Sozialismus*, Amsterdam, 1938. (See also the English edition *Democracy and Socialism*, New York and London, 1939.)

¹¹ *Souvenirs*, pp. 102, 103.

¹² Ibid., pp. 103, 104.

¹³ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 160, 161.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 276, 277.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 260, 261.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 297.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 361.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 378.

²¹ *Œuvres*, vii, p. 326, and *Marcel*, op. cit., pp. 408, 409.

²² D'Eichthal, op. cit., p. 167.

²³ *Souvenirs*, pp. 313 et seq.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 279 et seq.

²⁵ *Memoir*, ii, pp. 177, 178.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 189 et seq.

²⁷ Cf. Maurice Paléologue's *Cavour*, London, 1927, pp. 41 et seq., and Helmuth Goering's *Tocqueville und die Demokratie*, pp. 201 et seq., Munich, 1928.

²⁸ Cf. B. Croce, *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1934, p. 211.

CHAPTER SIX

¹ *Œuvres*, vii, p. 258.

² *Ibid.*, p. 258.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 264.

⁸ On the historiography of the literature of the French Revolution, cf. Lord Acton's *Lectures on the French Revolution*, appendix. The *Literature of the Revolution*, pp. 345 et seq., London, 1910. Also J. M. Thompson's *Robespierre*, vol. i, p. 15 et seq., Oxford, 1935. Also E. Fueter's *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, Munich, 1911. Also Crane Brinton's *A Decade of Revolution: 1789-99*, New York, 1934, especially the Bibliographical Essay, pp. 293 et seq. Brinton's book is to date the best modern presentation of the French Revolution as a whole.

⁹ *Œuvres*, i, p. 309.

¹⁰ Hedwig Hintze, German historian, in her important work, *Staatseinheit und Föderalismus im alten Frankreich und in der Revolution*, Stuttgart, 1928, gives a somewhat critical account from the research side of the administrative and institutional problems of French political development, but this does not in any way detract from the historical-philosophical viewpoint of *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*.

¹¹ *Œuvres*, iv, pp. 18, 19. (*France before the Revolution*, p. 15.)

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 116. (*Ibid.*, p. 97.)

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 118. (*Ibid.*, p. 98.)



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