

THE RESTLESS LIBERALISM OF ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

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TLOLKA, J.: The Restless Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville
FILOZOFIA, 72, No. 9, 2017, pp. 736-747

This essay attempts to contextualise the purported novelty of Alexis de Tocqueville's particular brand of liberalism. It regards the author not as an heir or precursor to any given political tradition, but rather as a compelled syncretist whose primary philosophical concern was the moral significance of the democratic age. It suggests that Tocqueville devised his 'new political science' with a keen view to the existential implications of modernity. In order to support that suggestion, the essay explores the genealogy of Tocqueville's moral and political thought and draws a relation between his analysis of democracy and his personal experience of modernity.

Keywords: A. de Tocqueville – Modernity – Liberalism – Inquiétude – Religion

Introduction. Relatively few authors in the history of political thought have produced an intellectual legacy of such overarching resonance as Alexis de Tocqueville. Even fewer, perhaps, have so persistently eluded ordinary analytical and exegetical frameworks, presenting to each astute observer a face so nuanced as to preclude serious interpretive consensus. As writes Lakoff (Lakoff 1998), 'disagreement over textual interpretation in the study of political thought is not uncommon'. However, 'it usually arises around those who left writings of a patently divergent character' (p. 437). When we thus consider the 'extraordinarily coherent and consistent nature' of Alexis de Tocqueville's political philosophy, it appears somewhat odd that the academic consensus surrounding that author relates almost exclusively to the grandeur of his intellectual achievement (Lukacs 1959, 6). Beyond that, the legacy of 'the unclassifiable Alexis de Tocqueville' continues to attract spirited debate (Lukacs 1982, 8).

It warrants mention that Tocqueville's enigma is by no means a product of intellectual archaeology. As remarks Lakoff (Lakoff 1998), the Frenchman's political convictions became subject to dispute almost immediately after the publication of *Democracy in America*, with John Stuart Mill contesting Sir Robert Peele's supposed appropriation of that volume's significance (p. 436). Mill, writes Lakoff, 'preferred to think that Tocqueville's work transcended partisan controversy', (ibid.) and his intuition was likely justified, seeing as Tocqueville (Tocqueville 2006) himself proclaimed in the introduction to the first volume of *Democracy* that his book was 'not suited to anybody's taste', and that in writing it he 'did not intend to serve or to combat any party' (p. 20).

Just as Tocqueville's most reputable work transcended partisan sentiment, so did his political identity elude conventional taxonomy. In a letter to Henry Reeve, author of the first English translation of *Democracy*, Tocqueville writes: 'They're determined to make

me a man of party, and I'm no such thing. They impute passions to me, and I have only opinions, or rather just one passion, the love of liberty and human dignity... I came into the world at the end of a long revolution which, after it destroyed the former state, created nothing lasting of its own. Aristocracy was already dead when I began to live, and democracy didn't yet exist. My instincts, therefore, didn't draw me blindly toward either one' (in Damrosch 2011, 209).

However, while he resented all ideological imputation, Tocqueville never cared to properly lay out the specifics of his political philosophy. He has therefore been classified variously as a 'conservative liberal', a 'liberal conservative', and an 'aristocratic liberal'.¹

Given the ambivalence of Tocqueville's positions, not one of these classifications can be definitively discarded. As remarks Boesche (Boesche 2008), Tocqueville's political philosophy indeed blended elements of 'the "liberalism" of Mill and Constant, the "conservatism" of Burke and Chateaubriand, and the "radical republicanism" of Michelet and Lamartine' (p. 50). However, although this insight certainly accounts for the interpretive cacophony surrounding Tocqueville's work, it does not shed much light on the subtleties of his thought.

One of the aspects that are strangely neglected in many analyses of Tocqueville's political philosophy is the purported novelty of his liberalism. I believe this is unfortunate for two reasons. First, perusing Tocqueville's works and private correspondence, one finds that he cared profoundly about his political project. Consider the following excerpt from his letter to Eugène Stoffels: 'I shall... avow my attachment to liberty, and my desire to see it carried into every political institution in my country; but at the same time, I hope to show so much respect for justice, such sincere love of order and law, such a *deliberate* attachment to morality and religion, that I cannot but believe that I shall be discovered to be a *liberal of a new kind*' (Tocqueville 1861, vol. 1, 402-403, emphases added).

Tocqueville purposely set himself apart from his contemporaries. He regarded his own political convictions as being virtually incompatible with any of the prevailing doctrines, and he frequently emphasised their particularity.² For Tocqueville, no difference in creed, however minute, was irrelevant. To conclude that his political philosophy arose simply from creative bricolage is therefore to obscure the historical significance of his scholarship and position.

Second, novelty is a persistent theme throughout Tocqueville's work. In *Democracy* he repeatedly highlights the unprecedented nature of the American political arrangement and of the conditions which had rendered it possible. In *The Ancien Régime* he attempts to unravel the latent dynamics of historical flux, exploring the confrontation between the old

¹ See Mahoney (Mahoney 2004, 20), Aron (Aron 1998, 311), and de Dijn (Dijn 2005, 680) respectively.

² In an 1841 letter to Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard, Tocqueville writes, 'A liberal but not revolutionary party, which is the only kind that would suit me, does not exist... So I'm pretty much alone, and all I can do is express my personal opinion... on events and laws as they come up, with no hope of altering them' (in Damrosch, 2011, 211).

and new social realities. Also Tocqueville's private correspondence indicates that he was acutely aware of living in transitional times – in an era when, as Wolin (2001) succinctly remarks, “disruption was the continuity” (p. 5). In Tocqueville's period, ‘a world entirely new’ was taking shape, and he was determined to devise a ‘new political science’³ for it (Tocqueville 2006 12).

This essay therefore suggests that, when interpreting Tocqueville's ‘new liberalism’, we ought to seriously consider the meaning of novelty in his work. Rather than simply analyse his distinctive yet indistinct political philosophy against either the intellectual climate of post-aristocratic France or the emerging liberal orthodoxy, we can dive into Tocqueville's personal history and view his project as an overarching attempt to identify the moral and political implications of the ‘new’, modern age.

My proposal is that Tocqueville conceived his political science with a keen view to existential consternation, which he thought would become emblematic of modern democratic life, and that it was specifically due to this forward perspective that his liberalism was new. The argument laid out in the forthcoming sections could be summarised as follows: In order to grasp the novelty of Tocqueville's liberalism, we must first contextualise his philosophical development. Tocqueville was greatly influenced by his situation at an important historical juncture – that between pre-democratic and democratic modernity. He viewed democracy as both a moral and a political phenomenon, and his apprehension thereof was based chiefly on moral concerns. These are dually attributable to his preoccupation with *inquiétude* – a sense of anxiety rooted in the acute realisation of one's freedom – and to religious disillusionment, which he himself had experienced as a young man, and from which he never recovered. For Tocqueville, *inquiétude* and religious doubt – and the existential trepidation consequent thereupon – represented almost universal traits of modern life, and this significantly coloured the way in which he viewed democratic society.

Tocqueville was supposedly determined to rescue democracy from deteriorating into a novel form of despotism which threatened to exploit the vices and vulnerabilities of modern man. He was intimately acquainted with these vulnerabilities and so premised his philosophy on a robust conception of political liberty, necessary for the preservation of human dignity in a new world.

In the first section, I construct an account of Tocqueville's philosophical development and establish *inquiétude* as being central to his moral and political thought. This section proposes mainly to highlight the historical-philosophical underpinnings of Tocqueville's analysis of the democratic age, outline his complicated relationship with Christianity, and establish the meaning of ‘novelty’ in his work. In the second section, I briefly examine an alternative interpretation of Tocqueville's ‘new liberalism’ and identify

³ It warrants mention that, for Tocqueville, ‘political science’ is an intensely practical affair concerned with educating the polity as well as with guiding the ethics of statecraft. Hence, when Tocqueville speaks of the need for a ‘new political science’, he is referring both to a means of understanding democratic society and to a means of its efficient governance.

its failure to fully appreciate its forward-looking characteristics. In the third and final section, I provide a sketch of Tocqueville's conception of modern political liberty.

Ia. Tocqueville on the Cusp of Modernity. Before constructing an account of Tocqueville's philosophical thought, it is necessary to address the issue of his rather fraught relationship with philosophy itself. As remarks Lakoff (Lakoff 1998), Tocqueville was notoriously 'leery of abstract dogmas' and speculative principles (p. 442). In consequence, he often criticised those eager to see them introduced into political practice. He was most unsparing in his treatment of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. In Book III of *The Ancien Régime* he levels the following indictment of their political accomplishments: 'It was no accident that the philosophers of the eighteenth century all conceived of notions so incompatible with those that still served as a basis for their society... Living as they did almost totally removed from practical life, they had no experience that might have tempered their natural passions. Nothing warned them of the obstacles that existing realities might pose to even the most desirable reforms' (Tocqueville 2011, 129).

It is not difficult to see why Tocqueville did not harbour much affection for the *philosophes*. As far as he was concerned, their ideas had lent credence to the Revolution, which he vehemently despised. His family had been persecuted during the Terror; his maternal great-grandfather had been guillotined and his parents had escaped execution only by a hair's breadth. Furthermore, as Tocqueville later opined, the Revolution had succeeded only in dissolving the 'former state', and for all its ambitious violence, it had 'created nothing lasting of its own' (in Damrosch 2011, 209).

Tocqueville's scepticism about the transformative potential of philosophy – and especially of political philosophy – is therefore understandable. That said, although he never pined for a life in the ivory tower, Tocqueville was firmly captivated by philosophy. In a letter to Louis de Kergorlay, dated October 10, 1836, he writes, 'I pass a short portion of every day with... Pascal, Montesquieu, and Rousseau' (Tocqueville 1861, vol. 1, 327). Rahe (Rahe 2010) notes that, of these three thinkers, Tocqueville regarded especially the former two with marked reverence, and indeed, on a closer look at Tocqueville's work, one finds that both his lexicon and his method of inquiry had been profoundly influenced by those of Pascal and Montesquieu.

How then should we reconcile Tocqueville's avowed aversion for the *philosophes* with his penchant for philosophy? As remarks Kahan (Kahan 2013), Tocqueville was a man of divided inclinations. As a politician, he favoured institutional circumspection and moral austerity over lofty intellectual doctrines. As an author and scholar, he employed philosophical insights with great facility, all the while steering completely clear of metaphysical speculation. However, as a private individual, Tocqueville found philosophy quite indispensable.

Ib. Tocqueville, Pascal, and Montesquieu – Freedom as a Source of Inquiétude. To better appreciate Tocqueville's use of philosophical insights, we must briefly visit his analysis of democracy and 'new despotism'. For Tocqueville, the advent of modern

democracy represents a point of both moral and political culmination in the ‘irresistible progress’ of equality. In political terms, democracy tends to eliminate the authority of established pastoral and hierarchic institutions, thereby producing a new *état social* [social state] wherein each individual is treated as being by nature equal to every other. As politics becomes a matter of both public and private importance, every citizen is obliged to acquaint himself with the principles of (self)government. So emerges a body politic where equality rules supreme and where the mind of each should be minister to the interests of all.

The moral aspect renders the democratic arrangement still more extraordinary. As far as Tocqueville is concerned, democracy comes with a distinctive emancipatory and levelling ethic whereby every individual is regarded as the only legitimate arbiter of his self-interest. Free as he is from social regimentation, he may direct and redirect his efforts toward a variety of discretionary ends. However, faced with such possibility, no individual is ever likely to be ‘fully satisfied with his present fortune’ (ibid., 637). He is possessed by *inquiétude* – a sense of vague restlessness whereby the mind is constantly occupied by the (perceived) absence of a desired good.

Inquiétude can technically facilitate both the commercial and the political advancement of a democratic people, insofar as it can encourage unrelenting activity in either sphere. At the same time, though, it fosters in every citizen an effectively insatiable taste for paltry material pleasures. These are a kind of analgesic to the individual, but precisely as such, they do little to promote the welfare of society at large. Tocqueville fears that overindulging in such pleasures will distract the citizens from the public realm, and that a desertion of democratic politics will usher in a novel form of despotism whereby all social bonds will be dissolved and all political initiative thwarted (or rendered wholly unnecessary), and wherein the people’s every need will be procured by a custodial political authority. This form of despotism owes its novelty, first, to the fact that the people do not appreciate its stultifying effects because it rarely interferes with their private pursuits, and second, to the fact that it is made possible by an unprecedented moral disposition rooted in democratic *inquiétude*.

Tocqueville’s conception of *inquiétude* borrows partly from Pascal and partly from Montesquieu⁴ - two of the three philosophers he always kept in his mind’s eye. For Pascal (Pascal 1958), ‘inconstance, ennui, and *inquiétude*’ summarise the very ‘condition of man’ (§127). Inconstance, he writes, proceeds from one’s ‘consciousness of the falsity of present pleasures’ (§110), and ennui from ‘leaving pursuits to which we are attached’ (§128) and being ‘completely at rest, without passions [or] diversion’ (§131). Where *inquiétude* is concerned, Pascal aphorises, ‘If a soldier, or labourer, complain of the hardship of his lot, set him to do nothing’ (§130).

As Vogelin (1982) explains, ‘what Pascal tries to describe by this array of terms is... the “anxiety of existence”... When passion subsides, the experience of a fundamental

⁴ In all likelihood, it is also partly inspired by Rousseau, specifically by his account of *amour propre*. For an informative treatment of Rousseau’s influence on Tocqueville, see Rahe (2010).

emptiness and metaphysical forlornness emerges unobscured' (p. 53). Amidst this overwhelming desolation, 'anxiety springs up crying to be assuaged, and the ordinary method of assuaging anxiety is new activity' (ibid.). Hence, inquiétude does not merely denote distress from idleness, as might seem from Pascal's aphorism, nor does it denote restlessness stemming from unfulfilled ambition, as one might infer from Tocqueville's account of the democratic spirit. Rather, it is encompassing of both these sentiments and denotes a particular species of dread in the face of bare existence, that is, of existence independent of passion or purpose. Inquiétude is therefore nothing less than a natural concomitant of freedom.

It was likely in some recognition of the above that Montesquieu (Montesquieu 2012) identified inquiétude as also being the catalyst of political change. In his *Thoughts*, he writes: 'Just as the physical world continues to exist only because each part of matter tends to move away from the centre, so too the political world is maintained by that restless inner desire [*desir inquiet*] possessed by everyone to leave the situation in which he is placed' (§5).

In his analysis of democracy, Tocqueville produces a synthesis of Pascal's and Montesquieu's conceptions of inquiétude. As far as he is concerned, the democratic age represents the apogee of free social and political organisation. The democratic individual affirms his freedom with virtually every action he takes. However, when he is completely free – that is, free from activity and diversion – the democratic individual is overcome with existential anxiety. In order to escape the emptiness of bare existence, he resorts to new activity – often in commerce, less so in politics – but the moment he achieves his objective, he is driven still further, for his desolation once again occupies his every thought.

Rahe (2001) writes that inquiétude is 'the distinguishing feature of modern republican man' (p. 88). For Tocqueville (Tocqueville 2011), however, it may well be the distinguishing feature of modern man as such, for even before the birth of the modern republic, men were 'restless and dissatisfied with [their] situation and eager to change it' (p. 153).

The likely reason why Tocqueville was so acutely sensitive to inquiétude is that he, self-avowedly, was profoundly tormented by that same sentiment. In a letter to Eugène Stoffels, which he composed in 1831 while still travelling across America, Tocqueville writes: 'When I am leading an agitated, wandering life, the idea of the tranquillity of home is delightful. When I return to regular habits, the monotony is fatal to me; I am possessed by an internal restlessness [*inexprimable inquiétude de cœur*]' (Tocqueville 1861, vol. 1, 392-393).

This is by far not the only reference Tocqueville made to his excitable nature. In another letter, which he composed almost ten years later, he writes, 'I have [a] restless, anxious mind, [a] continual craving for excitement... This temperament has at times enabled me to do great things. But in general, it tortures, agitates, and afflicts to no purpose' (ibid., vol. 2, 59). Even in his declining years, Tocqueville's anxious disposition continued to cause him considerable anguish, as he intimates in a letter to his confidante,

Madame Swetchine: 'I have always been subject to a vague restlessness... I wonder that I suffer from it so much under circumstances in which I ought to enjoy peace' (ibid., 371).

Tocqueville was in constant turmoil. On one hand, he harboured great ambitions and pursued them with admirable tenacity. On the other, there were times when he felt overwhelming 'distaste for the future' and for 'every sort of ambition' (ibid., vol. 1, 438). Like the individuals he describes in *Democracy*, he was painfully aware that, upon the accomplishment of any given intellectual or political feat, he would be thrust back into a state of inquiétude, and he would have to embark on another grand project to satisfy his cravings.

It is because Tocqueville was so familiar with the psychological implications of inquiétude that he could apply that concept in his analysis of democratic society. In the following section, I argue that, in Tocqueville's view, inquiétude was bound to become the defining trait of the modern age. In order to better understand the perils of inquiétude, especially when combined with religious and moral confusion, we must briefly examine Tocqueville's biography and visit his relationship with the Enlightenment.

Ic. Tocqueville, Religion, and the Enlightenment: Doubt and Inquiétude as Defining Traits of the Modern Age. There is some disagreement about the precise nature of Tocqueville's relationship with the Enlightenment. It is beyond doubt that he, like most of his contemporaries, was greatly indebted to its philosophical legacy. Many of the authors who had left a significant imprint on his thought are today associated with the Enlightenment tradition. That being said, Tocqueville was something of a reluctant heir, seeing as he always struggled to reconcile his intellectual inclinations, which he had acquired through his exposure to Enlightenment thought, with his moral and spiritual convictions.

Tocqueville was born into a Catholic family. In his youth, he was tutored by abbé Lesueur, a devout Catholic priest who had also supervised the education of Tocqueville's father and older brothers. The young Alexis was thus firmly attached to the Catholic faith. However, as writes Damrosch (Damrosch 2011), at age sixteen, Tocqueville 'began devouring books by eighteenth-century sceptics and... experienced a shattering loss of religious faith that still haunted him when he described it to a confidante thirty-five years later: "Then doubt entered my soul... I was overwhelmed with distress and terror at the sight of the road that lay ahead of me"' (p. 5).

What available evidence there is suggests that Tocqueville never recovered his faith⁵. But even though he could no longer 'accept the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church', as comments Goldstein (1960), Tocqueville did remain attached to 'Christian ethical and philosophical concepts' (p. 384).

In a letter to his tutor Lesueur, Tocqueville writes, 'I believe but I cannot practice'

⁵ There has been some disagreement about Tocqueville's alleged deathbed conversion. The only source that corroborates this account is a testimony by his friend Beaumont. Its veracity has been challenged on multiple grounds. For more see Hadari (pp. 135-139).

(in Lukacs 1982). It has been suggested that, given Tocqueville's aristocratic bearing – that is, given his painstaking efforts to 'conform to social expectations' – he perhaps was not entirely sincere when conveying this and other sentiments related to faith (Kahan 2013, 9). Some authors thus contend that Tocqueville's treatment of religion was only perfunctory. Damrosch (Damrosch 2010), for example, maintains that when Tocqueville describes the progress of equality as a providential fact, he invokes divinity, 'not out of piety, but in the hope of persuading readers that it would be foolish to resist the irresistible current of history' (p. 139). However, the matter is demonstrably more complex than Damrosch makes it out to be.

As remarks Hinckley (Hinckley 1990), Tocqueville 'believed that the future of liberal democracy depended on the continued influence of religion' (p. 39). In *Democracy* he writes, 'despotism may be able to do without faith but freedom cannot', insofar as 'one cannot establish the reign of liberty without that of mores, and mores cannot be firmly founded without beliefs' (Tocqueville 2006, 294, 17). Admittedly, these quotes can be construed as being quite utilitarian in tone. However, neither Tocqueville's emphasising the political utility of religion, nor his own incapacity for authentic faith, is incongruous with having sincere religious concerns.

Hinckley (Hinckley 1990) notes that Tocqueville's admiration of Pascal was based partly on the latter's capacity for 'genuine faith' (p. 50). Like Pascal (Pascal 1958), Tocqueville believed that 'faith is a gift of God' and could not be attained through reason alone (§279). He lamented that he personally could neither reason away his unbelief, nor acquire the kind of religious confidence he attributed to Pascal. Hence 'the anguish that [he] suffered over his religious beliefs was not the anguish of a sceptic trying to believe in God, but the anguish of a believer deprived by his Creator of the unwavering certitude that characterises faith of the highest order' (Hinckley 1990, 43).

Tocqueville suspected that, in a world shaped by the same historical-intellectual currents that had made him relinquish his dearly-held religious beliefs, religious disillusionment would become viral. He was painfully aware that, in the absence of faith, modern individuals were consigned to a life of ennui, inconstance, and inquiétude. The doubt he felt as a consequence of religious disillusionment was, for him, a defining feature of the modern condition.

Tocqueville maintained that liberty and faith went hand in hand. He also considered religion to be the only effective counterbalance to the equality of conditions and the ravenous commercial spirit typical of democratic society. However, we must bear in mind that, for Tocqueville, equality and commerce were the driving passions among democratic individuals. The triumph of equality over freedom, which he so dreaded, would ultimately dissolve not only the individual's bonds with the community, but also his attachment to God⁶. The moral situation of a society in which every individual's relationship with God

⁶ According to Tocqueville, where the equality of conditions is such that no individual sees himself as being naturally inferior to his peers, God represents the only insuperable authority, and hence the only point of reference upon which to base one's subservience.

had been obliterated was clear to Tocqueville – ubiquitous existential anxiety which would eventually facilitate the advent of new despotism. That is why he maintained that some (political) religion was better than no religion at all.

Tocqueville's greatest fear for the modern age was the following: Beleaguered as he is by the moral and intellectual currents of the day, the modern individual is unlikely to form or to maintain a genuine relationship with God, and therefore, to prize his liberty as he should, given that liberty is a gift from God. In the absence of faith, he completely embraces equality and surrenders his freedom, as that for him is a cause of inner torment. In order to escape inquietude, he turns to 'the government for relief from the burden of self-government', ultimately enabling the advent of new despotism (Hinckley 1990, 45).

Tocqueville claimed that his only passion was his 'love of liberty and human dignity' (in Damrosch 2011, 209). However, in the modern age, with its irresistible tendency toward equality, neither of the prevailing conceptions of liberty (that is, Constant's 'modern liberty' – freedom from interference – and 'ancient liberty' – the exercise of self-government) could be expected to hold, insofar as neither could render the individual unsusceptible to inquietude. Therefore, in order to prevent democracy's despotic turn, Tocqueville resolved to construct a novel conception of liberty and thus provide a blueprint for maintaining human dignity in the modern world.

In conclusion of this section, the novelty of the democratic age inheres in the fact that individuals are morally and existentially deracinated. They are torn between liberty and equality (but tend always to the latter) and have no stable moral reference point in the divine. Tocqueville's 'new political science' must therefore reckon with the fact that democratic mores cannot be based on authentic religious belief. This is the principal cause of the novelty of Tocqueville's era and of his liberalism.

II. Alternative Interpretations of Tocqueville's New Liberalism. In this section, I briefly examine an alternative interpretation of Tocqueville's 'new liberalism'. Before I proceed, I should like to make clear that my critique does not question the merits of this interpretation; rather, it hopes to expand its framework.

Ossewaarde (Ossewaarde 2004) argues that Tocqueville's political philosophy can be understood 'as an attempt to reconcile liberalism with democracy' (p. 4). He writes that Tocqueville viewed liberty as a 'religious passion' – an 'ideal of... independence from political and social authority' (ibid., 84, 95). His liberalism therefore allegedly 'strives towards rousing the latent passion for [such] liberty in the individual' (p. 8).

Ossewaarde suggests that Tocqueville mourned 'the lowering of the standards for human action' (ibid.). His political project should therefore be understood as aiming to elevate the individual to his God-intended moral eminence. Quite rightly, to my mind, Ossewaarde comments that, in Tocqueville's view, 'the Church [had] lost its authority and [was] powerless to direct a democratic society' (ibid., p. 16). However, Ossewaarde does not appear to appreciate that, in modern democracy, God too risks losing his authority. Tocqueville acknowledges this when he writes that democratic individuals often 'throw themselves frantically into the world of the spirit' not because they hold

sincere religious beliefs, but because they seek repose from commercial endeavours (in Damrosch, 51).

According to Ossewaarde, 'Tocqueville believes that when people are free they will "naturally" arrive at a state of faith' (ibid., 20). Tocqueville (2006) indeed remarks that 'incredulity is an accident' and that 'faith is the only permanent state of mankind' (p. 297). However, as attested by his own example, in the modern age, the accident of incredulity occurs with notable frequency. That, after all, is the likely reason why 'the struggle for conviction, that is, the attempt to overcome doubt, is an important element of Tocqueville's "new liberalism"' (Ossewaarde 2004, 24).

Ossewaarde writes that '[Tocqueville's] intellectual project is not the discovery of new principles, but rather the protection of an existent normative order' (p. 32). However, Tocqueville recognised that the existent normative order would likely be an insufficient check against the temptations of modern democratic life. Inquiétude would torment the minds of men even when they professed to hold sincere religious beliefs. As I have said previously, it is inquiétude that thrusts them into 'the world of the spirit' in the first place.

In conclusion, for all its undeniable merits, Ossewaarde's account of Tocqueville's liberalism ultimately portrays the author as a Catholic integralist committed above all to maintaining a moral and political order grounded in Catholic doctrine. The novelty of Tocqueville's liberalism, for Ossewaarde, consists in the Frenchman's reconciling liberalism with divine authority, which, as I have suggested, is hardly compatible with the realities of the modern age.

III. Tocqueville's New Liberalism – Concluding Suggestions. How else, then, can we understand Tocqueville's 'new liberalism'? My suggestion is the following: Tocqueville recognised that freedom was a source of inner turmoil. At the same time, he recognised that the democratic social arrangement could only be maintained if the citizens made active use of their freedom in the political sphere. He did not believe that the anxiety of freedom could ever be completely allayed by religion, though he did maintain that religion would temper democratic passions. He feared that, if modern individuals were sufficiently enfeebled by inquiétude, they would be tempted to relinquish their freedom and surrender themselves to a custodial political power. In the absence of liberty, democracy would deteriorate into new despotism, which would corrode human dignity.

Tocqueville's liberalism therefore has to reckon with the fact that, in the modern world, dignity and inquiétude are inseparable. His conception of liberty cannot be based in Catholic doctrine, insofar as that presupposes that individuals hold unshakeable beliefs about the nature of moral truths. Modernity, however, tends to undermine the individual's confidence in religion, and hence in its moral precepts. Tocqueville's liberalism can therefore be understood as being grounded in the belief that inquiétude must be given a meaningful outlet in the political realm, if only for the sake of preserving a society based on human dignity.

For Tocqueville, the tendency of history was irreversible. He could not advocate a return to either Catholic or aristocratic ethics because any attempt to reinstate either of

these two authorities to their former status would only affirm the existing state of affairs. Several such attempts were made during his lifetime, and they never produced the desired results. This is why Tocqueville could not identify with any of the extant political parties in his time. No political programme could adequately accommodate his principal concern: that for liberty *and* human dignity.

Tocqueville realised that modern democracy presented a new paradigm in socio-political organisation and sought to devise for it a new moral paradigm. This was based on a certain ambiguity of freedom. On one hand, freedom causes unbearable anxiety to the individual. On the other, an individual without freedom is an individual without dignity. Classifying Tocqueville's political thought as liberal, conservative, or something in between, misses the crucial point that Tocqueville is trying to make: That 'a world entirely new' is unfolding in our midst; a world that carries with it currents too strong for any doctrine to withstand. Such a world requires not so much a politics of dignity and religion, but a religion of dignity and politics – the last religion on offer.

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