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### ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE'S LIFE AND VISION

Alexis-Charles-Henri de Tocqueville was born in Paris on July 29, 1805. He was the son of Count Herve (landed proprietor and prefect) and Louise de Tocqueville, and the great-grandson of Lamoignon de Malesherbes, an eighteenth-century statesman of renown. Tocqueville was of noble descent on both his father's and mother's side and the family now had its main estates in Normandy. His parents had suffered badly during the French revolution. They were imprisoned and came within a few days of being guillotined.

Tocqueville was tutored by the Abbe Lesueur, an important moral and intellectual influence upon him and largely brought up by his father. He then attended the lycee at Metz until 1823. From 1823 to 1827 he studied law in Paris. In 1826-7 he travelled in Italy and Sicily with his brother. He served as a **juge-auditeur** (magistrate) at the Versailles Tribunal from 1827-1831. During this period he attended Guizot's lectures on the history of Europe and philosophy of history and became engaged to be married to an English lady, Mary Mottley.

From May 1831 to February 1832 Tocqueville visited America with Gustave de Beaumont. They travelled as far north as Quebec and as far south as New Orleans. In 1833 he went for five weeks to England and from September 1833 he spent twelve months writing the first volume of **Democracy in America**, which was published in 1835. He also made a second, longer trip to England from May to September 1835. In October 1836 he married Mary Mottley and travelled to Switzerland.

In 1837 Tocqueville failed to get elected to the Chamber of Deputies but did achieve this in 1839. During these years he had been writing the second volume of **Democracy in America** which was published in 1840. In 1841 he was elected a member of the French Academy and travelled with Beaumont to Algeria. He was elected to the General Council of La Manche in 1842 and later became president. From 1841-3 he worked on a study of India. In 1844-5 he became involved in a progressive newspaper, **Le Commerce**, which advocated various liberal programmes. In 1846 he made a second trip to Algeria with his wife.

In 1848 Tocqueville made a speech to the Chamber warning of the coming Revolution, and in that year was elected to the Constituent Assembly and was involved in writing a new constitution. In 1849 he was elected to the new Legislative Assembly and was briefly minister of foreign affairs. In 1850-51 he wrote **Recollections**, an account of the period 1848-51. In December 1851 he and other members of the Assembly opposed a coup and he was arrested and held for one day. In 1853 Tocqueville started to study in the archives at Tours as a preparation for his work on the **Ancien Regime**. In 1854 he travelled to Germany to study feudalism and social structure. In 1856 he published the **Ancien Regime**. In 1857 he visited England again and was greeted with high acclaim. On April 16th 1858 he died at Cannes, aged 53.

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What strikes one most forcefully about Tocqueville's life is that the central motif behind his work

was a set of contradictions, which he was always seeking to resolve in his writing.<sup>1</sup> He described how, 'I passionately love liberty, legality, the respect for the law, but not democracy; that is the deepest of my feelings.'<sup>2</sup> In a discarded note a different formulation was 'Mon Instinct, Mes Opinions.' 'I have an intellectual taste for democratic institutions, but I am an aristocrat by instinct, that is I fear and scorn the mob (la foule).'<sup>3</sup> He wrote to a friend in 1835, that 'I love liberty by taste, equality by instinct and reason. These two passions, which so many pretend to have, I am convinced that I really feel in myself, and that I am prepared to make great sacrifices for them.'<sup>4</sup> The clash between his mind and his heart was caught by Sainte-Beuve when he wrote that Tocqueville's whole doctrine had been 'a marriage of reason and necessity, not at all of inclination.'<sup>5</sup> As Pierson writes, 'Wrestling with contrary impulses, his spirit torn by opposing loyalties, his career was to be one long, never-ending struggle to reconcile the powerful forces clashing for mastery within him. In the end, it was only as a crier in the wilderness, only as the solemn, foreboding prophet of equality that he was to achieve some measure of spiritual peace.'<sup>6</sup>

This clash between the aristocratic and democratic sides of his nature meant that although he had always refused to use the title of comte, he remained attached to his aristocratic family line. In 1858 just before he died he wrote to his wife 'We will not be replaced, as I often tell myself sadly...We are part...of a world that is passing. An old family, in an old house that belonged to its forefathers, still enclosed and protected by the traditional respect and by memories dear to it and to the surrounding population - these are the remains of a society that is falling into dust and that will soon have left no trace. Happy are those who can tie together in their thoughts the past, the present, and the future! No Frenchman of our time has this happiness and already few can even understand it.'<sup>7</sup>

He summarized the reasons for his own ambivalence in a letter in 1837. 'All forms of government are in my eyes only more or less perfect ways of satisfying this holy and legitimate passion of man. They alternately give me democratic or aristocratic prejudices; I perhaps would have had one set of prejudices or the other, if I had been born in another century and in another country. But the chance of birth has made me very comfortable defending both. I came into the world at the end of a long Revo-

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<sup>1</sup> For a further analysis of the deep contradictions in his personality, background and views see Boesche, **Tocqueville**, 16,264-6

<sup>2</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 15

<sup>3</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 15

<sup>4</sup>Tocqueville, **Letters**, 100 (1835)

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Pierson, **Tocqueville**, 750

<sup>6</sup>Pierson, **Tocqueville in America**, 13-14

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 377

lution, which, after having destroyed the old state, had created nothing durable. Aristocracy was already dead when I started life and democracy did not yet exist, so my instinct could lead me blindly neither toward one nor toward the other. I was living in a country that for forty years had tried a little of everything without settling definitely on anything; therefore I was not susceptible to political illusions. Belonging to the old aristocracy of my homeland, I had neither hatred nor natural jealousy against the aristocracy, and that aristocracy being destroyed, I did not have any natural love for it either, since one only attaches oneself strongly to what is living. I was near enough to it to know it well, far enough away to judge it without passion. I would say as much about the democratic element. No family memory, no personal interest gave me a natural and necessary bent toward democracy. But for my part I had not received any injury from it; I had no particular motive for either loving or hating it, independent of those that my reason furnished me. In a word, I was so thoroughly in equilibrium between the past and the future that I felt naturally and instinctively attracted toward neither the one nor the other, and I did not need to make great efforts to cast calm glances on both sides.<sup>8</sup>

It was this placing half-way between which allowed him to see so clearly. It led him to advocate a middle road which was both revolutionary and conservative, monarchist and republican, centralizing and de-centralizing. He gave a summary of this creed in a letter of 1836. 'I do not think that in France there is a man who is less revolutionary than I, nor one who has a more profound hatred for what is called the revolutionary spirit (a spirit which, parenthetically, is very easily combined with the love of an absolute government). What am I then? And what do I want? Let us distinguish, in order to understand each other better, between the end and the means. What is the end? What I want is not a republic, but a hereditary monarchy. I would even prefer it to be legitimate rather than elected like the one we have, because it would be stronger, especially externally. What I want is a central government energetic in its own sphere of action...But I wish that this central power had a clearly delineated sphere, that it were involved with what is a necessary part of its functions and not with everything in general, and that it were forever subordinated, in its tendency, to public opinion and to the legislative power that represents this public opinion.'<sup>9</sup> He was aware of the difficulty of achieving this balance between contrary pressures, yet believed, as shown in the same letter, that 'all these things are compatible,' and 'that there will never be order, and tranquillity except when they are successfully combined.'<sup>10</sup>

As to whether they would be combined, and that he and France and the world would reach tranquillity, he was not sure. Just as his personality was a mixture of hope and despair, so his writings are an exact blend of pessimism and optimism about the future, as well as the past and the present. Towards the end of the second volume of **Democracy in America** he wrote that 'I find that good things and evil in the world are fairly evenly distributed.'<sup>11</sup> He noted that 'Men tend to live longer, and their property is more secure. Life is not very glamorous, but extremely comfortable and peaceful.'<sup>12</sup> A

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<sup>8</sup>Tocqueville, **Letters**, 115-16 (1837)

<sup>9</sup>Tocqueville, **Letters**, 113 (1836)

<sup>10</sup> Tocqueville, **Letters**, 114 (1836)

<sup>11</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 913

<sup>12</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 914

middling condition had been attained. 'Almost all extremes are softened and blunted. Almost all salient characteristics are obliterated to make room for something average, less high and less low, less brilliant and less dim, than what the world had before.'<sup>13</sup>

Yet he was also full of fear and regret. 'When I survey this countless multitude of beings, shaped in each other's likeness, among whom nothing stands out or falls unduly low, the sight of such universal uniformity saddens and chills me, and I am tempted to regret that state of society which has ceased to be.'<sup>14</sup> But the worst might never happen. 'I am full of fears and of hopes. I see great dangers which may be warded off and mighty evils which may be avoided or kept in check; and I am ever increasingly confirmed in my belief that for democratic nations to be virtuous and prosperous, it is enough if they will to be so.'<sup>15</sup> Laski suggests that his later work, the **Ancien Regime**, is even more uncertain and pessimistic.<sup>16</sup> Certainly Tocqueville felt exactly balanced between the two emotions of hope and despair, and this was a feeling which he seems to have had over much of his life.

This then was the man who stands in the tradition of Montesquieu and Smith as one of the deepest thinkers about the riddle of the modern world. At every level his experiences placed him in a position to stand outside the great turmoils of the time. Yet he was close enough to them to be able to see their inner causes. As he put it, writing specifically of the French Revolution, 'It would seem that the time for examination and judgment on it has arrived. We are placed to-day at that precise point, from which this great subject can be best perceived and judged. We are far enough from the Revolution not to feel violently the passions which disturbed the view of those who made it. On the other hand we are near enough to be able to enter into and to understand the spirit which produced it. Very soon it will be difficult to do so. For great successful revolutions, by effecting the disappearance of the causes which brought them about, by their very success, become themselves incomprehensible.'<sup>17</sup> In order to analyse and try to understand the puzzles and confusions that faced him as the industrial and political revolutions took their hold he needed other weapons beyond deep sensitivity and a brilliant mind. He needed a theoretical system and wide experience of a changing world.

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The essence of Tocqueville's method, as it was of Montesquieu's, was to try to penetrate to the **Spirit of the Laws**, that is to say the principles which generated the system.<sup>18</sup> And again, like

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<sup>13</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 914

<sup>14</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 914

<sup>15</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 916

<sup>16</sup>Laski, 'Tocqueville', 111

<sup>17</sup> Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 6-7

<sup>18</sup> For a good overview of Tocqueville's very considerable theoretical debt to Montesquieu, see Richter, 'Uses of

Montesquieu, this spirit was not composed of **things**, but relations between things - between liberty and equality, individual and group, centre and periphery. What he sought to do was to practice a kind of mental cartography, to discern the plan or map behind a civilization - how it was laid out. He commended the 'sagacity which penetrates through the passions of the time and of the country, down to the general character of an epoch, and to its place in human progress.'<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes the pattern was simple and symmetrical, as in a new country like America which is relatively easy to understand. The man whom you left in the streets of New York you find again in the solitude of the Far West; the same dress, the same tone of mind, the same language, the same habits, the same amusements.<sup>20</sup> There is less difference over the thousands of miles in America than there is between the tens of miles between different regions of France. Thus, 'In America, more even than in Europe, there is but one society, whether rich or poor, high or low, commercial or agricultural; it is everywhere composed of the same elements. It has all been raised or reduced to the same level of civilization.'<sup>21</sup> The principle of America is equality, and this generates everything. 'In America all laws originate more or less from the same idea. The whole of society, so to say, is based on just one fact: everything follows from one underlying principle. One could compare America to a great forest cut through by a large number of roads which all end in the same place. Once you have found the central point, you can see the whole plan in one glance. But in England the roads cross, and you have to follow along each one of them to get a clear idea of the whole.'<sup>22</sup>

England is an old country, where there are contradictions and inconsistencies, and the winding tracks of a thousand years of history. William the Conqueror had set up a consistent system of government: 'the system made a more coherent whole than in any other country, because one head had thought out all the machinery and so each wheel fitted better.'<sup>23</sup> Yet over time it had evolved and twisted into new shapes. In America, with its sparse population and short history this had not happened. It lacked the contradictions of class and the overgrowths of one system superimposed on another that one found in European countries. When he arrived in England he expressed the contrast thus. "So far this country seems to me, still, to be one vast chaos. This is certainly a different sort of difficulty to overcome than in the study of America. Here, there is not that single principle which tranquilly awaits the working out of its consequences, but instead lines that cross one another in every direction, a labyrinth in which we are utterly lost."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 358

<sup>20</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 146

<sup>21</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 146

<sup>22</sup>Tocqueville, **Journeys**, xviii

<sup>23</sup>Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 4

<sup>24</sup>Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 235

Much of Tocqueville's brilliance arises out of his explicitly comparative method. He wrote 'no one, who has studied and considered France alone, will ever, I venture to say, understand the French Revolution.'<sup>25</sup> At more length he summarized his method as follows. 'In my work on America....Though I seldom mentioned France, I did not write a page without thinking of her, and placing her as it were before me. And what I especially tried to draw out, and to explain in the United States, was not the whole condition of that foreign society, but the points in which it differs from our own, or resembles us. It is always by noticing likenesses or contrasts that I succeeded in giving an interesting and accurate description...'<sup>26</sup> Again and again on his American tour he stressed this necessity. 'In this examination, one great obstacle arrests me. Each fact is without particular physiognomy for me, and without great significance because I can make no comparisons. Nothing would be more useful for judging America well than to know France.'<sup>27</sup> Thus he testifies to the fact that France was always in his mind, night and day, as he observed America. 'In the midst of all the theories with which I am amusing my imagination here, the memory of France is becoming like a worm that is consuming me. It manages to surprise me by day in the midst of our work, by night when I wake up.'<sup>28</sup> In fact, by making a three-way triangulation of France, England and America he was able to develop an especially powerful version of the comparative method.<sup>29</sup>

The problem was how one was to grasp the whole of a civilization for comparative purposes. Tocqueville stressed the difficulty on a number of occasions. 'Every foreign nation has a peculiar physiognomy, seen at the first glance and easily described. When afterwards you try to penetrate deeper, you are met by real and unexpected difficulties; you advance with a slowness that drives you to despair, and the farther you go the more you doubt.'<sup>30</sup> It was important to grasp the first impressions of another country, 'For he had remarked that the first impression gives itself utterance almost always in an original shape, which, once lost, is not recovered.'<sup>31</sup> Yet this first impression was only that. 'It would take a very fatuous philosopher to imagine that he could understand England in six months. A year has

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<sup>25</sup>Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 21

<sup>26</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 359

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Pierson, **Tocqueville**, 404.

<sup>28</sup> Tocqueville, **Letters**, 58.

<sup>29</sup> See, for further comments and examples, Pope, **Tocqueville**, 34ff; Schleifer, **America**, 71, 279.

<sup>30</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 304

<sup>31</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 18

ever seemed to me too short a time for a proper appreciation of the United States, and it is infinitely easier to form clear ideas and precise conceptions about America than about Great Britain.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, at times, he thought the task was impossible. 'You are right when you say that a foreigner cannot understand the peculiarities of the English character. It is the case with almost all countries.'<sup>33</sup> Yet one should still attempt to penetrate this otherness, even if it meant, in true anthropological fashion, a kind of willing suspension of disbelief or almost surrendering one's identity. 'I do not know how national character is formed, but I do know, that when once formed, it draws such broad distinctions between nations, that to discover what is passing in the minds of foreigners, one must give up one's own nationality, almost one's identity.'<sup>34</sup>

His basic aim was to see how the separate parts of a social system work and are connected together into a general, functioning, integrated whole. He may have received much of this vision from Montesquieu, whom we have seen also espoused such an approach.<sup>35</sup> He was also strongly influenced by Guizot. For example in his notes on a lecture by Guizot on July 18, 1829, Tocqueville wrote: 'the history of civilization...should and does try to embrace everything simultaneously. Man is to be examined in all aspects of his social existence. History must follow the course of his intellectual development in his deeds, his customs, his opinions, his laws, and the monuments of his intelligence...In a word, it is the whole of man during a given period that must be portrayed...'<sup>36</sup>

This involved both general theory and an attention to the smallest details. The use of the microscope was as important as that of the telescope. Thus he wrote during his last visit to England in 1857 'Besides, there is not a single one of my theoretical ideas on the practice of political liberty and on what allows it to function among men that does not seem to me fully justified once again by everything I have been seeing before me. The more I have delved into the detail of the way in which public affairs are conducted, the more these truths seem to me to be demonstrated: for it is the manner in which the smallest of affairs are managed that leads to a comprehension of what is happening in the great ones. If one were to limit oneself to studying the English political world from above, one would never understand anything about it.'<sup>37</sup>

Yet while delving into the minutiae, it was always necessary to connect each of these details into something larger. 'Is it enough to see things separately, or should we discover the hidden link connecting

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<sup>32</sup>Tocqueville, **Journeys**, xviii

<sup>33</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 365

<sup>34</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 365

<sup>35</sup>See also Boesche in Nolla, **Liberty**, 180

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 82

<sup>37</sup>Tocqueville, **Letters**, 355-6 (1857)

them?<sup>38</sup> His answer is clear in his writings. He always attempted to convert specific observations into the broadest generalities that the fact at hand could be made to bear...<sup>39</sup> When he did this and his readers failed to see the links he had made he became upset. He wrote to Stoffels, having explained the purpose of the first volume of **Democracy**, 'There is the mother-idea of the work, the idea which links all the others in a single web, and which you should have perceived more clearly than you did.'<sup>40</sup> The web metaphor hints at his aims. Even while exploring a particular thread or track, be aware of how it fits into the whole. He never became too involved in either thread or web, but kept a balance between them.

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As a disciple of Montesquieu, Tocqueville was an heir to a mixed inheritance but one which put quite a heavy emphasis on geographical determinism. Thus when he went to America he expected this vast new world with its dramatic geography and climate and sparse population to show the predominant influence of the ecology. In fact, what he found shocked him. 'By a strange inversion of the ordinary order of things, it is nature that changes, while man is unchanging.'<sup>41</sup> One example was the contrast between the French and the English parts of Canada. Despite a similar ecology, the two groups of settlers were entirely different. He found the extreme case when he travelled into the wildest part and found that 'The inhabitants of this little oasis belong to two nations which for more than a century have occupied the same country and obeyed the same laws. Yet they have nothing in common. They still are as distinctly English and French as if they lived on the banks of the Seine and the Thames.'<sup>42</sup> He saw it clearly at a higher level in the difference between the English-settled world of North America, and the Spanish and Portuguese parts of South America.<sup>43</sup>

His next theory concerning the causes of things followed another strand in Montesquieu's thought, that is to say 'The Spirit of the Laws'. As Lerner writes, 'He learned relatively early to regard legal custom, statute, and code as keys for unlocking the inner meaning of social structure and national character. On this score the influence of Montesquieu and his **L'Esprit des Lois** on his thinking must be considered a capital one.'<sup>44</sup> But even this was not enough. Tocqueville began to realize that 'there must

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<sup>38</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 675

<sup>39</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 26

<sup>40</sup>Tocqueville, **Letters**, 99 (1835)

<sup>41</sup>Tocqueville, **Journey to America**, 183

<sup>42</sup>Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 193

<sup>43</sup> Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 378-9

<sup>44</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, xl



be some other reason, apart from geography and laws, which makes it possible for democracy to rule the United States.<sup>45</sup> This 'other reason' was what anthropologists term 'culture'. 'The importance of mores is a universal truth to which study and experience continually bring us back. I find it occupies the central position in my thoughts; and all my ideas come back to it in the end.'<sup>46</sup> He had found the key. 'It is their mores, then, that make the Americans of the United States, alone among Americans, capable of maintaining the rule of democracy; and it is mores again that make the various Anglo-American democracies more or less orderly and prosperous.'<sup>47</sup>

How could one explain these mores? They did not just suddenly appear, and they varied so surprisingly between cultures. Here he developed one of his most important ideas. Drescher describes how 'It was also in connection with the analysis of American self-government that Tocqueville and Beaumont hit upon a primary organizational concept for their later works - the idea of the 'point de depart', or point of departure. Methodologically, an inductive discovery of the basic tendencies or fundamental social fact of the present led to a historical search for the original act or circumstances from which the present could be seen to have unfolded.'<sup>48</sup> He then points out that 'From the **Democratie** to the **Ancien Regime**, unless Tocqueville could discover a social context with objectively discernible characteristics from which all subsequent developments could be logically explained, he did not feel that he had successfully encompassed the problem.'<sup>49</sup>

Drescher quotes Tocqueville to the effect that "'One can't help being astonished at the influence, for good or evil, of the point of departure on the destiny of peoples.'<sup>50</sup> This can be paralleled by many similar observations in his works. In his notebooks of the American trip he wrote, when listing the causes of what he saw before him, '1st. **Their origin**: Excellent point of departure. Intimate mixture of the spirit of religion and liberty. Cold and rationalist race.'<sup>51</sup> In the first volume of **Democracy** he stresses this approach. Nations, like people, are deeply influenced by their birth and formative years. 'People always bear some marks of their origin. Circumstances of birth and growth affect all the rest of their careers.' 'Something analogous happens with nations.'<sup>52</sup> Thus, in general, he believed of nations, as

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<sup>45</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 380

<sup>46</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 381

<sup>47</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 381

<sup>48</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 30

<sup>49</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 31

<sup>50</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 33

<sup>51</sup>Tocqueville, **Journey to America**, 181

<sup>52</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 35

of individuals, that 'If we could go right back to the elements of societies and examine the very first records of their histories, I have no doubt that we should there find the first cause of their prejudices, habits, dominating passions, and all that comes to be called the national character.'<sup>53</sup>

This was particularly obvious in the case of a 'new' nation like America. 'When, after careful study of the history of America, we turn with equal care to the political and social state there, we find ourselves deeply convinced of this truth, that there is not an opinion, custom, or law, nor, one might add, an event, which the point of departure will not easily explain.'<sup>54</sup> Putting it in an extreme and aphoristic form, he came to believe that 'When I consider all that has resulted from this first fact, I think I can see the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritan who landed on those shores, as that of the whole human race in the first man.'<sup>55</sup>

It was this insight that makes his later reflections on the nations of 'old' Europe so rich. He realized how important it was to trace the history of present structures back into the past. Particularly in the **Ancien Regime** he gave a brilliant exposition of the way in which certain ideas spread out from a particular 'point of origin' until they came to influence the whole of a civilization. In a footnote to that work he explained how 'Every institution that has long been dominant, after establishing itself in its natural sphere, extends itself, and ends by exercising a large influence over those branches of legislation which it does not govern. The feudal system, though essentially political, had transformed the civil law, and greatly modified the condition of persons and property in all the relations of private life.'<sup>56</sup> This shows that the 'point of origin' was not a static concept. He saw a set of ideas changing and branching. It is an organic metaphor which could be interpreted as a partial anticipation of that evolutionary paradigm which was already widespread in the minds of Wallace, Darwin, Robert Chambers, Herbert Spencer and others, even if the **Origin of Species** was still three years from publication.

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Tocqueville was well aware of the need for precision in the use of key terms. For instance, he wrote 'I would like to take apart the word **centralization**, which, by virtue of its vague immensity, wears the mind without leading it to anything.'<sup>57</sup> Yet he seems to have left his most important words, democracy and equality, deliberately ambiguous. Part of the difficulty was pointed out by J.S. Mill in the review of volume one of **Democracy** in 1835. He wrote that 'M. de Tocqueville then has, at least apparently, confounded the effects of Democracy with the effects of Civilization. He has bound up in one abstract idea the whole of the tendencies of modern commercial society, and given them one name - Democracy; thereby letting it be supposed that he ascribes to equality of conditions, several of the

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<sup>53</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 35

<sup>54</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 36

<sup>55</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 345

<sup>56</sup>Tocqueville, 'Notes', 253

<sup>57</sup>Tocqueville, **Letters**, 60 (1831)

effects naturally arising from the mere progress of national prosperity, in the form in which that progress manifests itself in modern times.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear that Tocqueville himself realized that he had failed to define or distinguish his two key terms. Drescher points out that 'In the notes for the **Democratie** of 1840 Tocqueville had considered drawing a distinction between 'democratie' and 'egalite': "When I understand [the new society] in the political sense, I say 'Democratie'. When I want to speak of the effects of equality, I say 'egalite'."<sup>59</sup> Yet Drescher also points out that "This clarification, whether because it would have aesthetically weakened the impact of the term, or for some other reason, remained buried in his papers and his book went to press with "equality" and "democracy" used interchangeably.<sup>60</sup> Others have also noted the ambiguities. Pierson asks 'how he ever allowed himself to use "democratie" in seven or eight different senses is still something of a mystery. It was his key word.<sup>61</sup> It appears that Tocqueville found it logically unsatisfactory to split the two. Indeed his skill lay in connecting, in holding pairs in tension. Here he fused two separate meanings into one and his work would have been clearer but less insightful if he had subsequently split them again. As he might have put it, tranquillity and peace of mind might have been gained - but at the price of logical interconnections.

The other main criticism of his approach lies in the assertion that, particularly in his later work, as he moved further away from the 'facts' of America, he came to rely too much on the deductive method; in other words he worked out the theories first and fitted the facts to them, rather than keeping a blend between them. Two of his wisest contemporaries alluded to such a charge. Lerner writes that even when he went to America 'Saint-Beuve's famous quip about the young Tocqueville, that "he began to think before having learned anything," has a light sting of truth in it. There is little question that he had a whole trunkful of ideas stored away in his mind, the result of his reading of the political classics, his work as a magistrate, his observation of men and nations.<sup>62</sup> Royer-Collard tried to explain why the 'prodigious effort of meditation and patience' of the second volume of America had caused misunderstanding, writing that Tocqueville was constructing ideal types, a procedure with which people were not familiar. "There is not one chapter that could not be different in certain respects from the way you have done it. That, of course, is because of your intention. You set out to imagine, to invent rather than to describe, and invention, within certain limits, is arbitrary."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Mill, **Essays**, 257

<sup>59</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 215

<sup>60</sup>Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 215

<sup>61</sup> Pierson, **Tocqueville**, 757; see also Boesche, **Tocqueville**, 120 for a further discussion.

<sup>62</sup>Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, xliii

<sup>63</sup>Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 274

Tocqueville himself felt hurt by these charges, for he believed that "I have never knowingly moulded facts to ideas instead of ideas to facts."<sup>64</sup> He perhaps took comfort from the views of the greatest nineteenth century expert on logical methods in the social and physical sciences, J.S. Mill. Mill pointed out that, on the surface, there were indeed grounds for doubt, 'It is perhaps the greatest defect of M. de Tocqueville's book, that from the scarcity of examples, his propositions, even when derived from observation, have the air of mere abstract speculations.'<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless he believed that 'The value of his work is less in the conclusions, than in the mode of arriving at them. He has applied to the greatest question in the art and science of government, those principles and methods of philosophizing to which mankind are indebted for all the advances made by modern times in the other branches of the study of nature. It is not risking too much to affirm of these volumes, that they contain the first analytical inquiry into the influence of democracy.'<sup>66</sup> He believed that Tocqueville had blended the two approaches. 'His method is, as that of a philosopher on such a subject must be - a combination of deduction with induction: his evidences are laws of human nature, on the one hand; the example of America and France, and other modern nations, so far as applicable, on the other.'<sup>67</sup>

Mill's summation places Tocqueville as the man who combined the deductive and the inductive methods. 'His conclusions never rest on either species of evidence alone; whatever he classes as an effect of Democracy, he has both ascertained to exist in those countries in which the state of society is democratic, and has also succeeded in connecting with Democracy by deductions **a priori**, showing that such would naturally be its influences upon beings constituted as mankind are, and placed in a world such as we know ours to be. If this be not the true Baconian and Newtonian method applied to society and government...'<sup>68</sup> Mill concluded his assessment with an affirmation of Tocqueville's genius. He wrote that 'though we would soften the colours of the picture, we would not alter them; M. de Tocqueville's is, in our eyes, the true view of the position in which mankind now stand...'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Quoted in Gargan, **Tocqueville**, 43

<sup>65</sup>Mill, **Essays**, 238

<sup>66</sup>Mill, **Essays**, 216

<sup>67</sup>Mill, **Essays**, 216

<sup>68</sup>Mill, **Essays**, 216-7

<sup>69</sup>Mill, **Essays**, 181