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HOW THE MODERN WORLD EMERGED

Although Tocqueville's interest in American origins was a contributing factor in taking him to England, his interest in that country anticipated his voyage to America. In October 1828 he wrote a long summary essay on England based on the work of the historian Lingard, which Gargan rightly describes as 'brilliant'.[1] When he attended Guizot's lectures, he heard a good deal more about the constitutional and social differences of France and England which intrigued him and deeply influenced his later interpretation.

When Tocqueville finally arrived in England in August 1833, for a first brief visit of five weeks, he was initially confused and in some ways disappointed. Part of the disappointment was social. He confessed to 'a continual dizziness and a profound feeling of my nullity. We were a great deal in America, we are hardly anything in Paris, but I assure you that it is necessary to go to below zero and to use what mathematicians call negative numbers to compute what I am here.'[2] A second disappointment was that at first sight his hunch that America was England writ large seemed not to be the case.

Tocqueville and Beaumont had planned to 'return to France by way of England' from America. They were unable to do so but, as Beaumont put it in 1833, they had hoped to find out what heritage "John Bull, father of Jonathan" had transmitted to his son.[3] Yet when Tocqueville arrived in England he found that 'I am no longer in America.'[4] Indeed, as Drescher puts it, 'Nothing struck him more than the difference between the two societies.' "Nowhere," he observed, "do I find our America."'[5] Above all he seemed to find that while America was based on the premise of equality, England was still a deeply 'aristocratic' rather than 'democratic' society in terms of its class structure - indeed in some ways more so than France. 'The position that fortune joined to birth gives here appears to me to be still a million feet above all the rest. You are aware that I cannot yet speak of the spirit of the English people: what I can say, what strikes me most up to the present in its mores, is their aristocratic exterior. The aristocratic spirit appears to me to have descended into all classes; **every marquis wants to have pages**, make no mistake about it. In short, I do not recognize our America here in any point.'[6]

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[1] Gargan, **Tocqueville**, 23; the essay is reprinted in Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 1-23

[2] Tocqueville, **Letters**, 82 (1833)

[3] Quoted in Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 197

[4] Tocqueville, **Letters**, 83 (1833)

[5] Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 37

[6] Tocqueville, **Letters**, 82 (1833)

Yet what at first came as a disappointment turned out to be a great advantage. Instead of a simple contrast between **Ancien Regime** Europe on the one hand, and Anglo-American civilization on the other, Tocqueville was forced to consider a third case, overlapping with both France and America, yet very different from either. This provided a three-way comparison which helps give his speculations far greater depth and subtlety. Like Montesquieu before him, he found in England a world very different from France, and one which gave him hope. "'It is the greatest spectacle in the world, though all of it is not great," he wrote. "One encounters, above all, things unknown in the rest of Europe - things which consoled me.'"[7] As Drescher notes, it seemed to him to contain both the old world and the new in almost equal measure and to stand on the exact intersection. 'With a pattern peculiar to itself, England seemed to contain so many elements of both social conditions that none could say whether it had not already crossed the invisible boundary.'[8]

Tocqueville never wrote a great book on England, like his **Democracy in America**. This is one of the reasons why his thoughts on that country have been for so long time over-shadowed by his writing on America and his work apparently devoted to France in the **Ancien Regime**. In fact, as Drescher's excellent book on **Tocqueville in England** shows, England was as important a 'thought experiment' for Tocqueville as was America. Drescher points out that 'The British Isles were the source of some of his greatest insights, especially into the historical connection between the rise of democracy and the extension of bureaucratic centralization.'[9] His experiences in England 'gave him a comparative basis for a theory of the relation of ideas to social change, of the causes of and antidotes for revolutions.'[10] In particular his second, longer, visit of 1835, stimulated him immensely. As Drescher writes, 'the spoils of the eleven-week expedition were immense. Tocqueville and Beaumont had undertaken a complete revaluation of what aristocracy and the democratic revolution meant in their English context.'[11] Thus 'When Tocqueville and Beaumont left England early in July 1835, it marked the end of the fullest experience of their lives.'[12] It is clear that the stimulus was not just intellectual but also moral and emotional.[13] We have seen that Tocqueville often felt isolated in his thought. In England and especially with his English friends and English wife he found support for his new evaluation of the world. As Tocqueville himself wrote to an English friend, 'So many of my sentiments and ideas are English, that

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[7]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 191

[8]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 123

[9]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 221

[10]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 221

[11]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 103

[12]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 99

[13]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 99

England has become intellectually my second country.'[14]

It was a country which, in another way, could provide a model for France. It had undergone the immense urban and industrial revolutions, yet not had to suffer the torment of continuing political revolutions. As he revisited it over time, he was constantly surprised how it managed to change and yet to remain the same. Thus when he revisited it in 1857, after revolutions had swept across Europe, 'English society surprised him by being so consistent with its old pattern. It appeared that if England had changed it was in reverse - that she was now even less agitated by revolutionary passions than in 1835.'[15] America had many advantages in its newness. England had achieved the even more difficult route from a mediaeval to a modern society without needing a political revolution of the kind that had occurred elsewhere.[16]

The English case, with all its obvious success as the greatest technological and military power in the world, provided Tocqueville with a rod with which to beat his fellow country-men. His last great book on the **Ancien Regime** could not have been written without the English counter case, which became far more important than the American one. His indictment of France was severe. 'No Frenchman could put down the "Ancien Regime" without noticing with equal terror that its author had assailed almost every class, every institution, and every event in recent French history.'[17] No wonder he felt morally isolated, for he also loved France. He was able to make his powerful attack only because of his emotional and intellectual contacts with England.

Once again following Montesquieu, Tocqueville increasingly saw beneath the surface and realized that England was an object lesson. His illuminating account now seems self-evident. Yet it was less obvious in the 1820s as he developed his thoughts. '"England itself, poorly known in any event, had not yet furnished the striking arguments in favour of liberty that it has since done. Free institutions produced internal and unseen effects which were hidden to foreigners; their fecundity and their greatness were not yet manifest."'[18] His interest in the country was increased by two further facts. Just as America was a case where one could watch England spreading out in a new space, likewise England was a place where one could see the European revolutions rippling out in a new environment. As he put it in a letter, referring to the English Civil War period for instance, the 'The previous revolutions that the English have undergone were essentially English in **substance** and in **form**. The ideas that gave birth to them circulated only in England; the form in which these ideas clothed themselves was unknown to the continent; the means that were used in order to make them victorious were the product of mores, habits, laws, practices different or contrary to the mores, the habits, and laws of the rest of Europe (all of that up to a certain point). Those previous revolutions in England thus were an object of great curiosity to the

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[14]Quoted in Drescher, **Tocqueville**, vii

[15]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 191

[16]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 221

[17]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 216

[18]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 204-5

philosophers, but it was difficult for them to give rise to a popular book among us. It is no longer so today: today it is the European revolution that is being continued among the English, but it is being continued there by taking wholly English forms.[19]

The second reason for being interested in England was because of its growing Empire, and particularly its increasing dominance in India. As he wrote in 1840, "'Nothing is less well known in France than the causes that produced and that sustain the astonishing greatness of the English in India. This subject, which has always been interesting, is wonderfully so now that all the great affairs of Europe have their centre in Africa.'"[20] He decided to work on the subject and wrote in 1841 "'My intention is to occupy myself with India...'"[21] He worked hard for two years. As it was, he gave up this projected book in December 1843 under the pressure of other work. We are left with a few hints of his attraction to the subject and an unmeasurable influence on his **Ancien Regime** when he discusses 'caste'.

Thus England was important to Tocqueville at many different levels. It might contain the secret of the extraordinary New World. It held the key to successful imperialism. It had somehow moved from ancient to modern without the trauma of anything analogous to the French Revolution. It had industrialized and urbanized two generations before anywhere else. And it espoused those values of liberty which he cherished. For all these reasons he devoted much of his thought to the country, though his insights are scattered through his letters, journals, and unpublished papers and in asides in his major works. What did he find?

Despite the Revolution, France was still largely an **ancien regime** country in Tocqueville's childhood. That it to say, it was still divided into the four estates of **paysans, bourgeois, clerge** and **nobilite**, even if this was officially below the surface. It was still largely an agrarian country, with pockets of commerce. It is because of this background that Tocqueville, like Montesquieu almost exactly a century before him, felt a sense of shock and otherness when he went to England in 1833. Indeed he approvingly quoted Montesquieu's remark that 'I am here in a country which hardly resembles the rest of Europe.'"[22] Though France had changed enormously in the century since Montesquieu, England had changed equally fast, not through political revolution but through the socio-economic transformation of the industrial revolution and the widening of the franchise in 1832. If France was one end of the continuum, England was in the middle, something that needed to be understood as a bridge between old Europe and the new world of America.

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One thing that struck Tocqueville was the general affluence of England. 'A Frenchman on seeing

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[19]Tocqueville, **Letters**, 106-7; see also Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 73

[20]Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 339

[21]Jardin, **Tocqueville**, 339

[22]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 89

England for the first time is struck by the apparent comfort and cannot imagine why people complain.'[23] He found "'a nation among whom the upper classes are more brilliant, more enlightened and wiser, the middle classes richer, the poor classes better off than anywhere else.'"[24] In contrast, writing in 1857 about the 1820s and 1830s , Tocqueville gives a picture of France as it was then, at least in the countryside. 'Thirty years ago the peasant was dressed in linen all the year round; now, the poorest family wears warm and substantial woollens. Then he ate black bread; his bread now would have appeared a luxury even to the rich of those days. Butcher's meat was then almost unknown. Twenty-five years ago the little town of St. Pierre had only a single butcher: he killed a cow once a week, and had great difficulty in selling his meat. Now there are nine, and they sell more in a day than was then sold in a week. Nor is this peculiar. I have observed a similar change in Touraine, in Picardy, in all the Ile-de-France, and in Lorraine.'[25] Yet, despite the improvement of conditions in France, England's industrial progress was such that by the mid-century Tocqueville could write 'is there any single country in Europe, in which the national wealth is greater...society more settled and more wealthy?'[26] What then were the reasons for this relative wealth?

Of course the possession of India helped.'It is an inexhaustible resource for it, all the more because the climate is so deadly that the odds are three to one that an Englishman will die there; but if he does not die, he is **sure** of getting rich.'[27] That England's agricultural system was 'the richest and most perfect in the world' was likewise important.[28] It was also obviously becoming the workshop of the world. Tocqueville knew that 'We live in a century, not of monasteries, but of railways and Exchanges.'[29] He visited Manchester and Birmingham, and described the latter as 'an immense workshop, a huge forge, a vast shop.'[30] He realized that 'manufacture and trade are the best-known means, the quickest and the safest to become rich.'[31] The English understood this. 'Newton said that he found the world's system by

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[23]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 44

[24] Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 110

[25]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 370

[26]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 184

[27]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 62

[28]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 34

[29]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 376

[30]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 82

[31]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 105

thinking about it the whole time. By doing the same, the English have got hold of the trade of the whole world.'[32] Yet Tocqueville realized that all these explanations themselves needed an explanation.

The English obsessions with money-making was particularly important for he had already found the same phenomenon in America. In England also 'all the resources of the human spirit are bent on the acquisition of wealth.[33] He observed that 'In all countries it is bad luck not to be rich. In England it is a terrible misfortune to be poor. Wealth is identified with happiness and everything that goes with happiness; poverty, or even a middling fortune, spells misfortune and all that goes with that.'[34] Everything was permeated with monetary values. 'Intelligence, even virtue, seem of little account without money. Everything worthwhile is somehow tied up with money. It fills all the gaps that one finds between men, but nothing will take its place.'[35] All of men's powers were attracted towards it. 'In a nation where wealth is the sole, or even the principal foundation of aristocracy, money, which in all society is the means of pleasure, confers power also. Endowed with these two advantages, it succeeds in attracting towards itself the whole imagination of man.'[36] The same was true in America. It was not just the growing towns where the commercial passion ruled. Although it was a vast, largely agricultural, land, 'the Americans carry over into agriculture the spirit of a trading venture, and their passion for industry is manifest there as elsewhere.'[37] Even in the remotest parts of the apparent wilderness, where you might expect illiterate peasants, 'In these so called villages you find none but lawyers, printers and shopkeepers.'[38]

Tocqueville at times suggested that there had been a change to this attitude quite recently, in the late eighteenth century in England. 'Fifty years ago, more or less, this was an accomplished revolution in England. Since that time birth is but an ornament of, or at most a help towards getting wealth. Money is the real power.'[39] At other times he argued that the drive towards economic acquisition was much older - and hence its enormous effects visible all over the world. 'Take into account the progressive force of such an urge working for several centuries on several millions of men, and you will not be surprised to

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[32]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 105

[33]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 105

[34]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 105

[35]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 78

[36]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 230

[37]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 716

[38]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 159

[39]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 104

find that these men have become the boldest sailors and the most skillful manufactures in the world."[40]

All this obsession with accumulating wealth seemed peculiar to a French nobleman. How much more so to the vast majority of mankind who had lived outside the market economy. When Tocqueville came into contact with the native Americans, 'I determined to have recourse to their cupidity. But there is no such a philosopher as the Indian. He has few wants, and consequently few desires. Civilization has no hold over him. He neither knows, nor cares for its advantages."[41] Such a person 'smiles bitterly when he sees us wear out our lives in heaping up useless riches. What we term industry he calls shameful subjection. He compares the workman to the ox toiling on in a furrow. What we call necessaries of life, he terms childish playthings, or womanish baubles. He envies us only our arms."[42]

So if the new man of England and America was obsessed with wealth acquisition, why was this? The direction to look towards, Tocqueville believed, was the social structure and the political system. This obsession with wealth was the result of numerous intersecting forces, and among the most important was the insecurity and restlessness generated by the absence of a fixed social hierarchy and by a competitive and balanced political system. The restlessness and dynamism was European, and Tocqueville, as we have seen, felt it himself. Thus the preparations for an invasion of China, he thought was an example of 'European restlessness pitted against Chinese unchangeableness,"[43] but the restlessness was most extreme where, as in the 'perpetual restlessness of the Americans"[44], there was least formal hierarchy, political or social. The fear of failure, the constant insecurity and ambition, he saw as follows. 'In democratic countries, not matter how rich a man is, he is almost always dissatisfied with his fortune, because he finds that he is less wealthy than his father was, and he is afraid that his son will be less wealthy than he."[45]

In such 'democracies', that is to say in societies where wealth and power were based on achievement rather than on birth, people were involved in a vast competitive gambling match. Fortune's wheel was constantly turning, opportunities to rise and fall abounded. The vision of Adam Smith had come to pass and the zestful pursuit of wealth had developed into a passionate, restless and never-ending game which contributed to the wealth of the nation. 'Chance is an element always present to the mind of those who live in the unstable conditions of a democracy, and in the end they come to love enterprises in which chance plays a part. This draws them to trade not only for the sake of promised gain, but also because

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[40]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 105

[41]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 186

[42]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 195-6

[43]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 54

[44]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II 246

[45]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 714

they love the emotions it provides.'[46]

Thus the answer to the puzzle of English and American wealth and dynamism seemed to lie in the area of politico-social structures. Echoing Montesquieu, Tocqueville thought that England's wealth and security 'does not flow from the goodness of all the individual laws, but from the spirit which animates the complete body of English legislation. The want of perfection in certain organs is no impediment, because its spirit throbs with life.'[47] In fact, there was a circular causation. Commercial wealth was both a cause and consequence of the instability and dynamism.

The commercial nature of England meant that wealth could be acquired from sources other than land and hence a parallel 'aristocracy' was constantly emerging and challenging the older families. 'In this way an aristocracy of wealth was soon established and, as the world became more civilised and more opportunities of gaining wealth presented themselves, it increased, whereas the old aristocracy, for the same reasons, continually lost ground.'[48] The consequences were status competition and uncertainty, a constant pre-occupation with small marks of difference and attempts to out-do others. Paradoxically this meant that in the middle of the nineteenth century, England was more snobbish than France. 'The French wish not to have superiors. The English wish to have inferiors. The Frenchman constantly raises his eyes above him with anxiety. The Englishman lowers his beneath him with satisfaction.'[49]

Ranks still existed in England, but they were confused. 'When birth alone, independent of wealth, decides a man's class, each knows exactly where he stands on the social ladder. He neither seeks to rise nor fears to fall.' But 'when an aristocracy of wealth takes the place of one of birth, this is no longer the case.'[50] This is because 'As a man's social worth is not ostensibly and permanently fixed by his birth, but varies infinitely with his wealth, ranks still exist, but it cannot be seen clearly at first sight by whom they are represented. The immediate result is an unspoken warfare between all the citizens. One side tries by a thousand dodges to infiltrate, in fact or in appearance, among those above them. The others are constantly trying to push back these usurpers of their rights. Or rather the same man plays both parts...Such is the state of England today...'[51]

One aspect of the difference which particularly struck Tocqueville was the difference of mentality between the French peasant and the English and American small rural farmer. Tocqueville gave an account of the French and German peasantry in the eighteenth century. For instance, 'as in our own day,

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[46]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 715

[47]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 184-5

[48]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 104

[49]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 60

[50]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 731

[51]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 732

the peasant's love for property in land was extreme, and all the passions born in him by the possession of the soil was aflame.'[52] This was totally different from England.[53] In England, 'land is a luxury; it is honourable and agreeable to possess it, but it yields comparatively little profit. Only rich people buy it.'[54]

As for America, it was like England. Tocqueville concluded after his many travels that 'there are no peasants in America.'[55] What he meant is shown when he described his journey into the wildest parts of America. In the most remote region, 'you think that you have at last reached the abode of an American peasant: you are wrong. You enter his hut, which looks the abode of misery; the master is dressed as you are; his language is that of the towns. On his rude table are books and newspapers; he takes you hurriedly aside to be informed of what is going on in Europe, and asks you what has most struck you in his country. He will trace on paper for you the plan of a campaign in Belgium.'[56]

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Tocqueville was impressed by the freedom and balance of the politico-legal system in England and even more so by its offspring in America. Alluding to Montesquieu's thoughts on England, he wrote that 'Their **constitution** was famous already and was thought to be different from that of other countries.'[57] He felt that 'Nowhere else in Europe as yet was there a better organised system of free government. No other country had profited so much from feudal organisation.'[58] And when all this was taken to America it shed much of the snobbery and many of the contradictions of the mother country and settled for a purer form of commercial, middle-class, orientation. It was both a continuity and a transformation. 'In the North, the English background was the same, but every nuance led the opposite way...the two or three main principles now forming the basic social theory of the United States were combined...Their influence now extends beyond its limits over the whole American world.'[59] Above all it refined and strengthened the freedom and self-rule brought from the old country. When he visited America, Tocqueville wrote that 'The two things that I chiefly admire here are these: First, the extraordinary

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[52]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 7

[53]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 29

[54]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 7

[55]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 159

[56]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 147-8

[57]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 13

[58]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 13

[59]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 39

respect entertained for law: standing alone, and unsupported by an armed force, it commands irresistibly.'[60] This he believed was because 'they make it themselves and are able to repeal it.' The 'second thing for which I envy these people is, the ease with which they do without being governed. Every man considers himself interested in maintaining the safety of the public and the exercise of the laws. Instead of depending on the police he depends on himself.'[61]

He found these trends in England also. '"When I see the force given to the human spirit in England by political life, when I see the Englishman sure of the aid of his laws, relying on himself and seeing no obstacle but the limits of his own powers, acting without constraint...animated by the idea that he can do everything...seeking the best everywhere; when I see him thus, I am in no hurry to observe whether nature has carved out ports around him, and given him coal and iron. The cause of his commercial prosperity is not there; it is within himself."'[62] How was one to explain this? Here Tocqueville rejected race. When he visited Switzerland with its famed republic, he concluded 'The kingdom of England is a hundred times more republican than this republic. Others would say that this results from the differences in the races. But that is an argument that I will never admit except at the last extremity, and when there remains absolutely nothing to say.'[63] So how could it be explained? Obviously the key must lie in the particular histories of different nations over the last five hundred years. One aspect of this could be seen in the contrast between the English and French revolutions.

Tocqueville summarized his views forcefully to an English correspondent, Lady Theresa Lewis, who had written a book on Lord Clarendon's contemporaries. 'Your biographies show the truth of your remark, that no two things can be more unlike than your Revolution of 1640 and ours of 1789. No two things, in fact, can be more unlike than the state of your society and of ours at those two periods.'[64] He continued that 'These differences, added to those between the character and the education of the two nations, are such that the two events do not admit of even comparison.'[65] In England, the dispute was between two segments of the ruling elite. 'They were divided; they were opposed to one another, and they fought; but never, for a single day, did they abdicate.'[66] Whereas in France there was a real ideological and class revolution. The results of this difference could be seen, for instance, in the nature of the events. Tocqueville's father's hair had turned white and his mother had become the neurotic

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[60]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 311

[61]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 311-2

[62]Quoted in Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 127

[63]Tocqueville, **Letters**, 108 (1836)

[64]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 377

[65]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 377

[66]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 377

character whose anxiety had overshadowed his youth as a result of the Terror. In England, in contrast, the fact that the ruling classes were always in control meant that 'The consequences were, less boldness of intention, less violence of action, and a regularity, a mildness, even a courtesy, admirably described by you, which showed itself even in the employment of physical force.'[67] In France there was a great rupture, a real turning over or revolution, a change in the rules. In England there had been Clarendon's 'Great Rebellion' where one power group replaced another temporarily but the rules were not changed at a deep, structural, level.

Tocqueville greatly admired the harmony and freedom of thought in England. The 'union of all the educated classes, from the humblest tradesman to the highest noble, to defend society, and to use freely their joint efforts to manage as well as possible its affairs'. 'I do not envy the wealth or the power of England, but I envy this union. For the first time, after many years, I breathed freely, undisturbed by the hatreds and the jealousies between different classes, which, after destroying our happiness, have destroyed our liberty.'[68]

Yet this union had the effect of leading to that turbulence and public confrontational behaviour which Montesquieu had noticed as a necessary feature of democracy. Thus Tocqueville noted that 'No people carry so far, especially when speaking in public, violence of language, outrageousness of theories, and extravagance in the inferences drawn from those theories. Thus your A.B. says, that the Irish have not shot half enough landlords. Yet no people act with more moderation. A quarter of what is said in England at a public meeting, or even round a dinner table, without anything being done or intended to be done, would in France announce violence, which would almost always be more furious than the language had been.'[69] This was a real gap between the English (and Americans) and everyone else. 'There is one point in which the English seem to me to differ from ourselves, and, indeed, from all other nations, so widely, that they form almost a distinct species of men. There is often scarcely any connection between what they say and what they do.'[70] The result was, once again, the confusion of foreigners who were misled by English irony or apparent hypocrisy.

Tocqueville's balance between praise and criticism also comes out in his assessment of English justice. On the positive side 'My general impression is that English procedure is much more expeditious than ours; that it often excludes incriminating evidence; that the system of "examination and cross examination" is better than ours for petty cases; that the position of the accused would be infinitely better than in France.'[71] On the other, 'It is impossible to imagine anything more detestable than the criminal investigation police in England.'[72] On the one hand it is a country where the citizen is safe from absolutist

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[67]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 378

[68]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 397

[69]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 353

[70]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 352-3

[71]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 131

[72]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 47

power. In France 'Aided by Roman law and by its interpreters, the kings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries succeeded in founding absolute monarchy on the ruins of the free institutions of the middle ages. The English alone refused to adopt it, and they alone have preserved their independence.'[73] On the other hand, speaking of England, 'There is not a country in the world where justice, that first need of peoples, is more the privilege of the rich.'[74] The backbone of the system 'is administered by the Justices of the Peace who are nominated by the King.'[75] This is a source of strength and independence, but there is also a danger that unelected and unaccountable individuals will gain too much power, for as Lord Minto warned Tocqueville, the administrative system 'rests almost entirely on the Justices of the Peace, magistrates who are responsible to no one and are not paid for the performance of their duties.'[76]

In fact he had noted another paradox. The English judicial system was confused, unprincipled, inefficient and cumbersome. Yet it somehow protected the citizen against the State better than anywhere else in the world. 'English law may be compared to the trunk of an old tree on which lawyers have continually grafted the strangest shoots, hoping that though the fruit will be different, the leaves at least will match those of the venerable tree that supports them.'[77] On the surface the French system of law appeared greatly superior. If one looked at English law 'Here are astounding defects. Compare this old-fashioned and monstrous machine with our modern judiciary system, and the contrast between the simplicity, the coherence, and the logical organisation of the one will place in still bolder relief the complicated and incoherent plan of the other. Yet there does not exist a country in which, even in Blackstone's time, the great ends of justice were more fully attained than in England; nor one where every man, of whatever rank, and whether his suit was against a private individual or the sovereign, was more certain of being heard, and more assured of finding in the court ample guarantees for the defence of his fortune, his liberty, and his life.'[78]

Tocqueville ended up by commending the English system with its Gothic extravagances and deep inconsistencies as far superior to his own sleeker system. 'Studying the judiciary system of England by the light of this principle, it will be discovered that while defects were allowed to exist which rendered the administration of justice among our neighbours obscure, complicated, slow, costly, and inconvenient, infinite pains had been taken to protect the weak against the strong, the subject against the monarch; and the closer the details of the system are examined, the better will it be seen that every

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[73]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 428

[74]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 78

[75]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 56

[76]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 66

[77]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 331

[78]Tocqueville, 'Notes', 301

citizen had been amply provided with arms for his defence, and that matters had been so arranged as to give to everyone the greatest possible number of guarantees against the partiality and venality of the courts, and, above all, against that form of venality which is both the commonest and the most dangerous in democratic times - subserviency to the supreme power.'[79] Thus the judicial system, as he had already argued in relation to America, was at the heart of the freedom of the English. The other central protection was the degree of decentralized power.

Beaumont and Tocqueville soon noted the importance of local institutions in England. "'One must go to the meetings of a Vestry," wrote Beaumont, "to judge what extraordinary liberty can be joined to inequality. One can see with what independence of language the most obscure English citizen expresses himself against the lord before whom he will bow presently. He is not his equal, of course, but within the limits of his rights he is as free, and he is fully aware of it.'"[80] The vestry was but one of the numerous local associations which were important and made each parish an almost self-governing community. As Drescher puts it, quoting Tocqueville and then adding his summary, "'The ensemble of English institutions is doubtless an aristocratic government, but there is not a parish in England which does not constitute a free public." The parish, then, was the fundamental unit of public participation, the centre of a multitude of interests vital to everyone in the community. For Tocqueville it was a complete democracy at the base of the social edifice.'[81] We are told that 'In his notes, Tocqueville wrote that if he were a friend to despotism, he would allow "the deputies of the country [to deliberate] freely about peace and war, about the nation's finances, about its prosperity, its industries, its life. But I would avoid agreeing, at any price, that the representatives of a village had the right to assemble peacefully to discuss among themselves repairs for their church and the plan for their parsonage."'[82]

This led Tocqueville onto one of his greatest themes - the need for a balance between centralization and de-centralization. He was convinced that it was here, ultimately, that the secret of England and America's greatness must lie. Speaking of England he wrote 'In that country the system of decentralisation, restricted from the beginning to proper limits, has attached to it nothing but notions of order, prosperity, and glory. The system of decentralisation has made, and still makes, the strength of England. England has had strong despotic kings at a time when the kingship was too primitive to want to undertake everything. The kings established centralisation of government; morals and the state of society caused administrative decentralisation.'[83]

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After his examinations of the political, social and legal factors which encouraged liberty, Tocqueville

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[79]Tocqueville, 'Notes', 302-3

[80]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 91

[81]Drescher, **Tocqueville**, 91-2

[82] Boesche, **Tocqueville**, 246

[83]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 1026-7

tended to come up with a version of the same theme that we have seen in Montesquieu and Smith, that a characteristic of the modern world, and one which distinguishes it from earlier civilizations, is that political and religious freedom seem to have a close association with the generation of economic wealth through the production of artefacts.

He believed that 'Geographical position and freedom had already made England the richest country in Europe.'[84] Freedom was necessary because, as Smith had argued, it allowed the acquisitive urges to fulfil themselves. 'Freedom in the world of politics is like the air in the physical world. The earth is full of a multitude of beings differently organized; but they all live and flourish. Alter the condition of the air, and they will be in trouble.'[85] Thus one should, in estimating the likelihood of wealth, 'Examine whether this people's laws give men the courage to seek prosperity, freedom to follow it up, the sense and habits to find it, and the assurance of reaping the benefit.'[86] That assurance of reaping the profit was equally important. Like Montesquieu and Smith he realized that political and legal security, and in particular the safeguarding of a person's assets against the vagaries of war, arbitrary taxes and capricious law, were essential. The outstanding English encapsulation of this security was in their security of property. The extensive national and individual wealth of the English he linked to the fact that such wealth was 'more secure' than anywhere else.[87] This was linked to private property, 'exclusive proprietorial jealousy being so far developed here that it counts as one of the main national characteristics.'[88] That same English spirit had been carried to its overseas Empire. 'The English colonies - and that was one of the main reasons for their prosperity - have always enjoyed more internal freedom and more political independence than those of other nations.'[89]

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Tocqueville had explained in what ways England was already a 'modern' country when it colonized America. He had shown that it was by the seventeenth century very different in its basic structure from most continental countries, especially France. Yet this left a further set of puzzles, in particular the dating of the divergence from Europe and the reasons for that parting of the ways. Essentially his answer to these questions is an expansion, with the historical sources carefully checked, of Montesquieu's argument. He suggested that out of a common European feudalism, that is the odd mixture which arose out of a decomposing Roman civilization and Germanic customs, the subsequent trajectory of

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[84]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 15

[85]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 107

[86]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 106

[87]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 184

[88]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 74

[89]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 45

continental Europe and England was different.

Tocqueville started with the premise that there had been very little difference between the parts of western Europe in the Dark Ages. The system which emerged in about the ninth century covered the whole of western and central Europe. 'If the feudal system is due to chance in France, by what odd coincidence does it turn up again among the Germans, among the Poles where it still exists, among the Goths in Spain, and even in Italy, the Southern extremity of Europe?'[90] It was already established in principle well before the eleventh century, and thus the best place to study it was in the earliest Saxon and Danish laws. Thus '...if you want to understand the first underlying principles of the feudal system, and you need to understand them to see how the wheels work in the finished machine, you cannot do better than study the time before the Norman conquest, because, as I said before, we know of no people nearer to their primitive state than the Saxons and the Danes.'[91] Many of these ancient principles never disappeared and, paraphrasing Montesquieu's famous remark about the origins in the German woods, Tocqueville thought that '...the customs of the Saxons are interesting in themselves and especially interesting in the context of English history. Their legal procedure is the oddest which has ever existed, and one can find in it all the elements of the present-day procedure, some parts of which we have adopted ourselves.'[92]

Then came the invasion of England by Tocqueville's Norman ancestors. William the Conqueror and his successors were able to lay out a complete 'system' so easily because they were merely codifying what was already there. 'Clearly the feudal system of the twelfth century is but the result of an underlying cause. It sprang fully armed from the peoples of the North, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, needing only the hatchet's blow.'[93] At this point, Normandy and much of France, as well as most of the Continent, were identical to England. 'In comparing the feudal institutions in England immediately after the conquest with those in France, you find between them not only an analogy, but a perfect resemblance...In reality, the system in the two countries is identical.' However this identical system produced contrary results. He notes that Macaulay in his **History of England** 'alludes to the fact that England developed an open class structure, and France developed closed "castes", but he does not try to explain it.' Yet, why this divergence occurred is the key question, for there is no other which would provide 'so good an explanation of the difference between the history of England and that of the other feudal nations in Europe.' [94]

Tocqueville's conviction concerning the important difference between English social structure and that of the Continent, and his puzzlement as to why it should have occurred, continued in his **L'Ancien Regime** of 1856. He starts with the same assertion of a common starting point. 'I have had occasion to

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[90]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 2

[91]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 3

[92]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 3

[93]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 2-3

[94] Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 223-4

study the political institutions of the Middle Ages in France, in England, and in Germany, and the greater progress I made in this work, the more was I filled with astonishment at the prodigious similarity that I found between all these systems of law...' Thus '...in the fourteenth century the social, political, administrative, judicial, economic, and literary institutions of Europe had more resemblance to each other than they have perhaps even in our own days...'[95] He was struck by the fact that 'At that time many of the episodes of our history look as if they were drawn from the history of England. Such events never occurred in the following centuries.'[96] His picture is again one of divergence from a common origin. Starting with the thirteenth century, 'At this time there were to be found, as I have already said, many analogies between the political institutions of France and England; but then the destinies of the two peoples parted, and became ever more unlike with the passage of time. They resembled two lines which, starting from neighbouring points but at a slightly different angle, the longer they become, the more indefinitely fall apart.'[97]

Hence by the seventeenth century there was a great difference. All over the continent, there was 'caste', that is to say a system of stratification based on legal differences between groups arising from blood and birth and re-inforced by marriage rules, and its accompaniment, political absolutism. 'As all European monarchies became absolute about the same time, it is not probable that the constitutional change was due to accidental circumstances which occurred simultaneously in every country. The natural supposition is that the general change was the fruit of a general cause operating on every country at the same moment.'[98] This he partly relates, as had Montesquieu, to the reception of Roman Law, for in its principles 'to do with the relations between subjects and sovereign...it is full of the spirit of the age when the last additions were made to its compilation - the spirit of slavery.'[99] Tocqueville's summary of the process is given in a footnote to **Ancien Regime**. 'At the close of the Middle Ages the Roman law became the chief and almost the only study of the German lawyers, most of whom, at this time, were educated abroad at the Italian universities. These lawyers exercised no political power, but it devolved on them to expound and apply the laws. They were unable to abolish the Germanic law, but they did their best to distort it so as to fit the Roman mould. To every German institution that seemed to bear the most distant analogy to Justinian's legislation they applied Roman law. Hence a new spirit and new customs gradually invaded the national legislation, until its original shape was lost, and by the seventeenth century it was almost forgotten. Its place had been usurped by a medley that was Germanic in name, but Roman in fact.'[100]

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[95] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 18-9

[96] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 92

[97] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 105

[98] Tocqueville, 'Notes', 242

[99] Tocqueville, **Memoir**, I, 428

[100] Tocqueville, 'Notes', 240

The causes for the adoption of Roman Law all over Europe varied but the effects were similar. 'These causes do not suffice to explain the simultaneous introduction of Roman law into every Continental country. I think that the singular availability of the Roman law - which was a slave-law - for the purposes of monarchs, who were just then establishing their absolute power upon the ruins of the old liberties of Europe, was the true cause of the phenomenon. The Roman law carried civil society to perfection, but it invariably degraded political society, because it was the work of a highly civilized and thoroughly enslaved people. Kings naturally embraced it with enthusiasm, and established it wherever they could throughout Europe; its interpreters became their Ministers or their chief agents. Lawyers furnished them at need with legal warrant for violating the law. They have often done so since. Monarchs who have trampled the laws have almost always found a lawyer ready to prove the lawfulness of their acts - to establish learnedly that violence was just, and that the oppressed were in the wrong.'[101]

Something very different happened in England because Roman Law was never 'received' and Common Law underpinned both the older 'feudal' institutions and what emerged from them. In England, 'Shutting your eyes to the old names and forms, you will find from the seventeenth century the feudal system substantially abolished, classes which overlap, nobility of birth set on one side, aristocracy thrown open, wealth as the source of power, equality before the law, office open to all, liberty of the press, publicity of debate....Seventeenth-century England was already a quite modern nation, which has merely preserved in its heart, and as it were embalmed, some relics of the Middle Ages.'[102] In this way it diverged dramatically from what happened elsewhere in Europe. That divergence was the culmination of a much older process. 'It is very probable that at the time of the establishment of the feudal system in Europe what has since been called the "nobility" did not immediately form a caste, but was originally composed of all the chief men of the nation and was thus at first only an aristocracy.' Yet, by the Middle Ages, 'the nobility had become a caste, that is to say, its distinctive mark was birth.' This happened everywhere except England. 'Wherever the feudal system established itself on the continent of Europe it ended in caste; in England alone it returned to aristocracy.' This was the great difference, and one which the English seemed to have overlooked. 'I have always been astonished that a fact, which distinguishes England from all modern nations and which can alone explain the peculiarities of its laws, its spirit, and its history, has not attracted still more than it has done the attention of philosophers and statesmen, and that habit has finally made it as it were invisible to the English themselves. The truth has been often half perceived, half described; never, I think, has the vision of the truth been quite full or quite distinct.

What then is the great difference according to Tocqueville? 'It was far less its Parliament, its liberty, its publicity, its jury, which in fact rendered the England of that date so unlike the rest of Europe than a feature still more exclusive and more powerful. England was the only country in which the system of caste had been not changed but effectively destroyed. The nobles and the middle classes in England followed together the same courses of business, entered the same professions, and, what is much more significant, inter-married.'[103]

The contrast with France was immense. There the gap between the different orders grew until they

[101] Tocqueville, 'Notes', 241-2

[102] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 21.

[103] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 89.

were strangers to each other. The nobility were separated from all other orders: 'for the barrier which separated the nobility of France from the other classes, though very easily crossed, was always fixed and visible; striking and odious marks made it easily recognized by him who remained without. Once a man had crossed the barrier he was separated from all those, whom he had just left, by privileges which were to them burdensome and humiliating.'[104] The worst of these was financial. 'Let us take the most odious of all these privileges, that of exemption from taxation; it is easy to see that from the fifteenth century right down to the Revolution this privilege never ceased to grow.'[105] This could be contrasted with England. 'For centuries past no other inequalities of taxation have existed in England than those successively introduced in favour of the necessitous classes. Notice to what different ends different political principles can lead peoples so close. In the eighteenth century it was in England the poor man who enjoyed exemption from taxation.'[106]

The growing gap between the bourgeois and the gentry and the nobility in France was related furthermore to the collapse of local government. 'The fact is that, as the government of the lordship became disorganized, as the meetings of the States-General became rarer or ceased altogether, as the general liberties perished dragging with them in their ruin local liberties, the townsman and the gentleman ceased to have contact in public life. They no longer felt the need of approaching and understanding each other. Every day they became more independent and more unknown to each other. In the eighteenth century this revolution was complete; these two men never met except by mere chance in private life. The two classes were not only rivals, they were enemies.'[107] Furthermore this urban middle class was equally separated from the country dwellers and the poor in the towns. 'Now if...we consider this middle class, we see something very similar; the middle class was almost as much separated from the common people as the noble was from the middle class.'[108]

How and why had this happened? Others had suggested that 'the English nobility has been more prudent, more clever' than others, and hence survived. In fact, Tocqueville notes, 'The truth is that for a long time past properly speaking there has no longer existed a nobility in England, if the word is taken in its old and circumscribed sense that it has everywhere else retained.'[109] As to when the nobility disappeared, 'This singular revolution is lost in the darkness of past ages', but 'there remains still a living witness, namely, idiom. For several centuries past the word "gentleman" has entirely changed its meaning in England, and the word "roturier" no longer exists.' Thus one could follow the changing sense of the word 'gentleman' as an indication of the divergence of the two civilizations: '...you will see its meaning

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[104] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 95

[105] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 93

[106] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 105

[107] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 92

[108] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 96

[109] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 89-90

widen in England in proportion as classes draw nearer and mingle with each other. In each century it is applied to men placed ever a little lower in the social scale. With the English it passes finally to America. In America it is used to designate all citizens without distinction.' In fact, 'Its history is that of the democracy itself.' In France, however, 'the word "gentilhomme" has always been strictly confined to its original sense...The word has always been preserved intact to design the members of the caste, because the caste itself has always been preserved, as separate from all the other classes as it has ever been.'[110]

Thus while in England the barriers, as represented by the word gentleman, evaporated, in France 'this caste had become very much more separated than it was at the time when the word originated, and that a movement took place amongst us exactly the opposite of that which took place in England.'[111] On the other hand, in England, the middle classes and aristocracy were overlapping. It is not that the English aristocracy 'was open but rather due to the fact, as has been said, that its form was indistinct and its limit unknown - less because it was possible to enter than because you never knew when you had got there...'[112]

Tocqueville's solution contains a paradox. On the one hand, England could be seen to be the 'most feudal' of countries in that it had maintained the early spirit of the feudalism which had existed up to the twelfth century all over Europe. Thus Tocqueville could write of William the Conqueror, 'in spite of the revolutions which followed, his version of the feudal system is nevertheless by and large the one that caused the least harm and left the smallest legacy of hatred.'[113] On the other hand, it could equally be argued that, as Tocqueville put it, by the seventeenth century the feudal system was 'substantially abolished', and only a few 'relics of the Middle Ages' remained. Likewise, with France one could argue that it was very un-feudal by the seventeenth century, that is to say it had moved towards caste and absolutism, both of which were diametrically opposed to 'feudalism' of the early period. On the other hand, one could look on the whole **ancien regime** fabric as a distorted form of feudalism. Thus Tocqueville believed that the French revolution destroyed a whole pattern of feudalism: 'ancient institutions were still mixed up with it, and, as it were, interlaced with almost all the religions and political laws of Europe, they had further supplied a crowd of ideas, sentiments, habits, manners, which, so to speak, were adhesive to them...'[114]

This paradox was linked to another. When Tocqueville visited England in 1835 he found it overwhelmingly aristocratic. He was taken aback at the huge estates and country houses. When he returned for his last visit in 1857 'I found England more aristocratic in appearance, at least than I left it twenty years ago. The democratic ferment that then had risen to the surface has disappeared, and all the

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[110] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 89-90; in fact, the term 'roturier', meaning someone who held by an annual rent, had never existed in England.

[111] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 90.

[112] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 95.

[113] Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 5

[114] Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 23

superior classes seem to have reached a better understanding.'[115] He asked his readers to remember that France was now the 'democratic' nation - and indeed had never had an aristocracy of the English kind; 'in England you have an aristocracy and powerful local influences, while we in France have nothing of the sort.'[116]

He explained this further when he explored the difference between **de facto** and **de jure** equality. The fact that inequalities on the basis of birth had been abolished, or never properly arisen in England, did not mean that there was little inequality. Ironically, the aristocracy were flourishing in eighteenth century England while they were decaying all over Europe. 'This gradual impoverishment of the nobles was seen more or less not only in France but in all parts of the continent where the feudal system, as in France, disappeared without being replaced by a new form of aristocracy. Among the German peoples, who bordered the Rhine, this decay was everywhere visible and much noticed. The contrary was only met with in England. In England the old noble families which still existed had not only preserved, but also had largely increased their wealth...'[117] Thus one found in England, 'Apparent equality, real privileges of wealth, greater perhaps than in any country in the world.'[118] Of course they proclaimed the universal rights and equality of men. But what did these consist of? 'The English have left the poor but two rights: that of obeying the same laws as the rich, and that of standing on an equality with them if they can obtain equal wealth.'[119]

This clash between a **de jure** situation where everyone in theory was equal, but some definitely ended up 'more equal than others' to use Orwell's famous capturing of the paradox, was made worse by the loss of religious faith. In many societies, the poor could reconcile themselves to their status by realizing that there was no alternative: they were born into a fixed social position. This was determined by **karma**, by their activities in previous lives. It was not their fault, a result of their fecklessness or inability. Even Christianity had provided the solace that even if this life was one of poverty, there would be recompense in eternity. The rich would find it virtually impossible to get through the eye of the needle into heaven. The poor and meek would inherit the earth, and heaven too. Yet as faith evaporated, mankind was faced not only with physical misery, but no consolation prize in the after life. How were inequalities to be borne 'in an epoch when our view into another world has become dimmer, and the miseries of this world become more visible and seem more intolerable?'[120]

The solace of God-given inequality was no longer available. Indeed some of Tocqueville's most

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[115]Tocqueville, **Letters**, 355 (1851)

[116]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 226

[117]Tocqueville, **Ancien**, 86

[118]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 79

[119]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 78

[120]Tocqueville, **Recollections**, 84

perceptive observations concern the receding rainbow's end of the constant striving for an ephemeral equality. 'Among democratic peoples men easily obtain a certain equality, but they will never get the sort of equality they long for. That is a quality which ever retreats before them without getting quite out of sight, and as it retreats it beckons them on to pursue. Every instant they think they will catch it, and each time it slips through their fingers.'[121] There develops endless competition as people strive to reach beyond others, but only temporarily succeed. 'They have abolished the troublesome privileges of some of their fellows, but they come up against the competition of all. The barrier has changed shape rather than place. When men are more or less equal and are following the same path, it is very difficult for any of them to walk faster and get out beyond the uniform crowd surrounding and hemming them in.'[122]

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Tocqueville had thus followed a chain of argument. 'America' was the first truly 'modern' civilization. Much of its modernity had, however, been received from an England which was already very 'modern' by the seventeenth century. England's peculiarity in this respect, its divergence from the other Continental powers had occurred in the period between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. England had proceeded towards a balanced constitution and an open and competitive social structure while much of the Continent, including Tocqueville's France, had moved toward political centralization and an increasingly rigid stratification based on birth differences. He had thus put forward a thesis to explain how the modern world had emerged. Yet he still needed further answers as to why England was different.

In England the middling level institutions were retained. In France and most countries, the 'dissolution of the State' phase of early feudalism then coagulated into an absolutism where there were no powerful counter-powers to stop the monopoly power of the monarchy. He found it difficult to explain why the difference originally occurred, or how the English managed to preserve the balance between anarchy and absolutism. Sometimes he put it down to chance. 'Lucky difficulties which obstruct centralisation in England; laws, habits, manners, English spirit rebellious against general or uniform ideas, but fond of peculiarities. Stay-at-home tastes introduced into political life.'[123] At other times he explains it by peculiarly modest and good-natured ruling powers. 'I admit, however, that in order to enable a government in which the supreme power is divided to be permanent to last, as yours has done, for centuries, the ruling authorities must possess an amount of patience and forbearance which never has been granted to ours.'[124] Neither of these appear to be very convincing and probably his most convincing guess, again following Montesquieu, lay in the nature of the effects of islandhood on the nature of warfare and hence on the chances of liberty.

Tocqueville was not a pacifist. He wrote 'I do not wish to speak ill of war; war almost always widens

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[121]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 695; cf. also I, 243-4 on Pascal.

[122]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 694

[123]Tocqueville, **Journeys**, 84

[124]Tocqueville, **Memoir**, II, 160

a nation's mental horizons and raises its heart.'[125] On the other hand his visit to America made him convinced that the absence of powerful, war-like, neighbours was an important and necessary, if not sufficient, cause of liberty. He asked the question 'How, then, does it come about that the American Union, protected though it be by the comparative perfection of its laws, does not dissolve in the midst of a great war? The reason is that it has no great wars to fear.'[126] This was because 'The American Union has no enemies to fight. It is as solitary amid the wilderness as an island in the ocean.'[127] He noted that 'From Canada to the Gulf of Mexico there are only some half-destroyed savage tribes, which six thousand soldiers drive before them.'[128] The New World was 'Placed in the middle of a huge continent with limitless room for the expansion of human endeavour, the Union is almost as isolated from the world as if it were surrounded on all sides by the ocean.'[129] Thus 'The great good fortune of the United States is not to have found a federal Constitution enabling them to conduct great wars, but to be so situated that there is nothing for them to fear.'[130] He was enormously impressed. 'How wonderful is the position of the New World, where man has as yet no enemies but himself. To be happy and to be free, it is enough to will it to be so.'[131]

Tocqueville was not so naive as to think that absence of powerful enemies was a necessary and sufficient explanation for liberty. As he pointed out 'geography gave the Spaniards of South America equal isolation, and that isolation has not prevented them from maintaining great armies. They have made war on one another when there were no foreigners to fight. It is only the Anglo-American democracy which has so far been able to maintain itself in peace.'[132] Thus one needed a combination of a 'point of departure' of liberty and absence of standing armies, combined with no warlike neighbours. 'Their fathers gave them a love of equality and liberty, but it was God who, by handing a limitless continent over to them, gave them the means of long remaining equal and free.'[133]

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[125]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 841

[126]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 209

[127]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, 378

[128]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 209

[129]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 209

[130]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 209

[131]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 210

[132]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 378

[133]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 345

The situation in Continental Europe, as Tocqueville who was brought up in the later years of Napoleon knew only too well, was very different. 'Apart from our continental position, which has always made us feel more acutely the need for concentration of power, decentralisation has never appeared to us as anything but a breakup of the essential rights of sovereignty, that is to say, as the most oppressively active agent of anarchy.'[134] What tended to happen, as Montesquieu had pointed out, was that a powerful nation was sucked into military aggrandisement, or defensive measures, and this almost inevitably led to increased armies, taxation, bureaucracy and absolutism. 'For that reason all nations that have had to engage in great wars have been led, almost in spite of themselves, to increase the powers of the government. Those which have not succeeded in this have been conquered. A long war almost always faces nations with this sad choice: either defeat will lead them to destruction or victory will bring them to despotism.'[135] He noted that 'it is chiefly in time of war that people wish, and often need, to increase the prerogatives of the central government.'[136] Or again, 'All those who seek to destroy the freedom of the democratic nations must know that war is the surest and shortest means to accomplish this.'[137] It was a vicious circle, where success in war was as dangerous as defeat. 'All men of military genius are fond of centralisation, which increases their strength; and all men of centralising genius are fond of war...'[138] Thus, as Montesquieu had shown, 'Any long war always entails great hazards to liberty in a democracy. Not that one needs apprehend that after every victory the conquering generals will seize sovereign power by force after the manner of Sulla and Caesar.'[139]

There was another difficulty, also anticipated by Montesquieu. A small but successful nation or city state would in time be gobbled up by powerful neighbours. As Tocqueville puts it, 'If for a century a democratic country were to remain under a republican government, one can believe that at the end of that time it would be richer, more populated, and more prosperous than neighbouring despotic states; but during that century it would often have run the risk of being conquered by them.'[140] 'As a result of this, except in peculiar circumstances, small nations always end up by being forcibly united with great ones by combining among themselves.'[141] Yet it was these very smaller nations - Greece, the Italian city

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[134]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 1026

[135]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 207

[136]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 879

[137]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 842

[138]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 879; a slight exaggeration, as the long peace in China shows.

[139]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 842

[140]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 276

[141]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 198

states, Switzerland, Holland, which were the birth place of liberty. 'Hence at all times small nations have been the cradle of political liberty. It has happened that most of them have lost this liberty in growing larger, a fact which clearly shows that their freedom was more of a consequence of their small size than of the character of the people.'[142] If they decide to counteract the dangers by expanding, as did Rome, the burden of empire was likely to lead to the same dangers. As Montesquieu had argued in different words, 'All passions fatal to a republic grow with the increase of its territory, but the virtues which should support it do not grow at the same rate.'[143] Tocqueville could conclude that in general 'nothing is more inimical to human prosperity and freedom than great empires.'[144]

There seemed no way round the problem. 'War does not always give democratic societies over to military government, but it must invariably and immeasurably increase the powers of civil government; it must always automatically concentrate the direction of all men and the control of all things in the hands of government. If that does not lead to despotism by sudden violence, it leads men gently in that direction by their habits.'[145] In order to survive, a country was pushed towards disaster, '...the great ones prosper not because they are large but because they are strong. Therefore force is often for nations one of the primary conditions of happiness and even of existence.'[146] Unfortunately 'Reason suggests and experience proves that there is no lasting commercial greatness unless it can, at need, combine with military power.'[147]

It was with these difficulties in mind that Tocqueville was particularly impressed, in different ways, by England and the United States. England seemed to be free and to maintain a huge empire - but then she was an island. America was a vast nation, peaceable and free and, as Tocqueville put it, America was 'as solitary...as an island in the ocean'. How could other, continental, nations break out of the trap? Tocqueville's only solution seems to have been along the lines developed by Montesquieu and Smith, namely that growing trade would finally make international warfare a disaster. 'As the spread of equality, taking place in several countries at once, simultaneously draws the inhabitants into trade and industry, not only do their tastes come to be alike, but their interests become so mixed and entangled that no nation can inflict on others ills which will not fall back on its own head. So that in the end all come to think of war as a calamity almost as severe for the conqueror as for the conquered.'[148] This

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[142]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 196

[143]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 196

[144]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 197

[145]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 842

[146]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 198

[147]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, I, 505

[148]Tocqueville, **Democracy**, II, 856

was his hope, for every revolution and war tended to tip the balance against his precious liberty.