DEAN'S LECTURE

A Community of Learning... In a Land of Cartesians?

David Levine, Dean
St. John's College
Santa Fe

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Great Hall

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David Lawrence Levine
St. John's College, Santa Fe

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"It is difficult—perhaps impossible—
for a city that is too populous
to be governed well."
Aristotle[2]

"I wish to expose to broad daylight the perils
that equality brings to human independence" (II 672).
Tocqueville[3]

"...It is harder and more problematic to lay the foundations
and to guarantee the continuity of freedom in democracies
than in the aristocracies of the past."
Letter to Gobineau[4]

I. A Rare Opportunity:

"In our [society], everything threatens
to become so alike that the particular shape of
each individual will soon be lost entirely
in the common physiognomy (II 671-2)."

To everyone: **Welcome**! To our new freshmen in particular: a special **Welcome**!

We have before us **a rare opportunity**...rarer and rarer in our modern world...an opportunity to become a member of a 'community.' Modern life is characterized by **mass...well, everything** (II 615, 641): **mass society, mass communication, mass transportation, mass** production, mass marketing, Massachusetts (no, not that). And by 'mass' what is intended is a quantity so great that any one thing is, in light of the larger whole, individually insignificant and hence, in mass society, where **we** are, in light of the whole, individually insignificant (I 301, II 409). Modern life is characterized by the mass phenomena consumerism, mass merchandizing, by the division of labor, by corporate systems-thought, guesstimating statistics, popular opinion polls, and by hyper-aggressive litigiousness (...and now a 'virtual' cyber-reality).

The most conspicuous mass phenomenon of western society is **consumerism**.[5] where we are thought of as 'customers,' that is defined by the mere fact that we might have change jingling in our pockets, but especially by the fact that we are subject to a seemingly unlimited number of artificially created desires. Daily we are 'given what we want,' or so it is said. Actually we are given far more than we could ever want: in the face of 50 plus salad dressings at the supermarket, whose judgment cannot at times be boggled? As consumers we are treated accordingly. We are '**marketed**,' that is appealed to on the basis of the commonest denominators—food, pleasure, and sex—where there is no higher expectation for us but that we be 'responsive to stimuli.'

So too, since the principle of the **division of labor** lies at the heart of mass production, we are asked to narrow our interests or 'specialize,' a process that increases production as it renders us smaller (see I 387, II 531, 641). What is also characteristic, indeed odd, is the ruling

influence of **popular opinions polls**. where the fact that an opinion is widely held is more important than the reasons one might hold such a view. And in order to get a better hold on these modern phenomena. economics has had recourse to **statistics** (see I 209. II 571). wherein we are hypothesized to be 'rational agents.' but where what is intended is merely that we 'choose our self-interest'—that we be smart animals perhaps. but hardly more.

Given this. no wonder. then. that we have become such a **litigious society**—'plaintiffs' and 'antagonists' all—out to assert these private rights and our self-interest narrowly conceived (II 515). The law. rather than being the one area that focuses on the common good.[6] is conscripted to further these private rights. the scales of justice pitting one self-interest against another. (Add to this. our newest form of abstract relatedness and impersonality. the 'virtual reality' of the cyber-world. where we are said to be 'connected.' but in real-reality only electronically. byte to byte. not face to face.)

'Consumers.' 'plaintiffs.' faceless 'economic entities.' electronic 'buddies:' is this what we human beings are? Given this impersonal and very abstract way in which we have been brought to think about ourselves and relate to one another. is there a wonder that people are so isolated and self-consumed. have such a narrow sense of themselves and their potential. have such a radically restricted sense of responsibility and so limited a sense of allegiance?

Plainly such ways of talking and thinking foster the opposite of commonality and thus do not provide a foundation for collegiality and community. As a result. we at the college seek to avoid such **abstract** ways of speaking (cp. II 457. 590). We speak of the college. for instance. as a 'community of learning.' not as an 'institution' (bad word). You will hear us speak of you as 'citizens' (and our expectations for you as 'citizenship'). not as customers. clients. or employees. And. at the end of this long and difficult process of transformation that we call **education**. we will speak of you not as 'workers' ready to become part of some 'work force.' but rather as... 'Johnnies.' What is meant thereby? Why do we speak this way? What are we seeking to achieve and preserve?

A college is supposed to be a community of learning. But what. to begin with. do we mean by 'community[8]?' Somewhere between 'family' and 'nation' is 'community.' It is not the result of mere **proximity**—that you are sitting beside someone this evening does not mean that you have anything more in common than place...and a shared source of oxygen. Nor does community come from **aggregation**—having people come together in the Great Hall at an appointed hour does not make a community. Nor does it come from **mere togetherness**—we all know that feeling of being 'alone' and 'in the wrong place' when we find ourselves amidst numbers of indifferent people that we call a 'crowd' (II 641).

What makes a community is a **shared and active sense of common purpose.** The more we have in common. the more that what we have in common is deeply cherished. the more we are with one another person to person. the greater likelihood there is for a living 'community' to take root. What **we** have in common is **the St. John's program**. Thus the question for this evening: in what ways it provides. not just a program of study. but a foundation for 'community' (cp. II 408).

So. in the glaring. strobe lights of mass phenomena. where there seems to be **no place** for human individuality (II 426). for responsible action (see note 8). for meaningful togetherness (see III). I turned to one of the authors on the program who. I thought. might be of help. one who still remembered the conditions of the possibility of community and who himself had a considered view of American community: **Alexis de Tocqueville**. I did so with optimism. only to discover

still **further systemic difficulties** that he saw standing in the way of any attempt to forge a 'community' in modern democracies. Even from his much earlier perspective [1830-45], such an aspiration is problematic.

Note: a good part of the text that follows is comprised of quotations. To make reading and listening easier. I will not bother you with saying 'quote-unquote' repeatedly.

II. We are a Paradoxical People:

"...The Americans have...reduced selfishness
to a social and philosophical theory (II 538)."

In one of the most memorable. if not the most flattering. opening lines. Tocqueville begins the second volume of his study of democracy in America thus: "**I think there is no country in the civilized world where they are less occupied with philosophy than the United States**" (II 403). No country in the civilized world less occupied with philosophy? Are we that unthoughtful as a people?

"It is easy to see." he continues. "that **almost all** inhabitants of the United States **direct their minds in the same manner and conduct them by the same rules;** that is to say. [the American people] possess a certain **philosophic method.** whose rules [however] they have **never** taken the trouble to define... [yet are] common to all of them." Though not explicit or reflective. we nevertheless have. it would seem. a collective habit of thought that is distinctive. shared and that can be called 'American.'

Tocqueville attempts to formulate this **American** outlook: "To escape from the spirit of system. from the yoke of habits. from family maxims. from class opinions. and. up to a certain point. [even] from national prejudice: to take tradition **only** as information. and current facts **only** as a useful study for doing otherwise and better: **to seek the reason for things by [our] themselves and in [our] themselves alone**...these." he says. "are the principal features that characterize...**the philosophic method of the Americans.**"

It would appear that **we are a very paradoxical people.** It is our custom to forsake custom. It is our habit to be unbound by habit. And it is our native character to eschew system. family. class and even national influence. Rather we seek escape from such limitations. We prefer to live amidst **the unaccustomed.** without the confining conditions that otherwise contextualize a people and give them a sense of place (I 300). We seek 'independence' (if a limited sort).

"America is therefore **the one country in the world,**" he says. "where the precepts of **Descartes** are **least** studied and **best** followed.[9]" [2x] There is a sense. a deep sense Tocqueville claims. that we are. unbeknownst to ourselves. Cartesians all. But our philosophy comes. if you will. by the back door. "Americans do not read Descartes' works—[not a good idea for sophomores and juniors]—because their social state turns them away from speculative studies. and [yet] they follow his maxims because the same social state naturally disposes their minds to adopt them." We Americans are **disinclined by custom** to philosophical study. yet we are also **inclined by custom** to unthinkingly adopt a philosophical predisposition. 'Inclined by custom.' 'disinclined by custom.' clearly we need to think more about how this is possible. to think about 'social state' and 'custom' (and what Tocqueville calls 'mores').

This philosophical attitude of ours. moreover. has far reaching social and political consequences. "Amidst the continual movement that reigns in the heart of democratic society."

Tocqueville observes. "the **bond that unites generations is relaxed or broken**; each man easily loses track of the ideas of his ancestors or scarcely worries about them" (II 403). Socially we think of ourselves as a generation without generation. having lost touch with what made us. We have become a people where 'the ties that bind' are everywhere broken. a generation without (a perpetual) tradition. without a (formative) past. (even to some extent) without a (governing) history.

But even more. "as for the action that the intellect of one man can have on another," he notes. "it is necessarily very restricted in citizens. [who] having become nearly the same ...and. not perceiving in anyone among themselves incontestable signs of greatness.... are constantly led back toward their **own** reason as the most visible and closest source of truth. Then not only is **trust** in such a man **destroyed** but the taste for believing in **any** man whomsoever [is destroyed]... (II 404: also II 484)." In Tocqueville's view Americans had become radically 'dis-associated' not only from the past but the present also. from one another. from 'fellow citizens.' untrusting. incredulous. disconnected. in some sense. then. even **a-social**.[10] Here is yet another way we have interpreted this word 'independence.'

The effect of such radical dis-association. he says. is that **"each [of us] ... withdraws narrowly into himself and claims to judge the world from there."** "Each undertakes to be self-sufficient and finds his glory in making for himself beliefs that are **his own** about all things. Men are no longer bound **except by interests. not ideas**: and one could say that human opinions form no more than **a sort of intellectual dust that is blown around on all sides and cannot gather and settle"** (cp. I 180). Hence what Descartes initially proposed (purportedly) as a hypothetical '(hyperbolic) method' for those **few** engaged in first philosophy had become. *mutatis mutandis*. after revision and application. a popular attitude and the unthinking method of a **whole people**.[11] Our Cartesian-American credo: ***I am my own judge!***[12]

III. A Word is Born:

"...Individualism at first dries up only the source of **public** virtue; but in the long term it attacks and destroys **all** the other [virtues] and will finally be absorbed in selfishness[13]."

Tocqueville therefore takes his 'analytic knife (Nietzsche)' to our Cartesian inheritance. What has it amounted to? As we saw. in his view. "...in centuries of [democratic] equality. each man seeks his beliefs **in** himself... [and] he turns all his sentiments **toward** himself alone (II 482)." With this. a word is born: **individualism**.

By contrast. "our [his] ancestors." Tocqueville says. "**lacked the word** individualism. which **we** have created...because in their era there were in fact **no** individuals...." that is "...no individuals who did not belong to [and identify with some] group and [as a result. none] who would consider themselves **absolutely alone**."[14] Individualism. in short. was "...of democratic origin." He continues: "**Individualism** is a reflective and **peaceable** sentiment that disposes each citizen to **isolate** himself from those like him [*semblables*. that is from his equals] and to withdraw to one side with his [nuclear] family and his friends. so that having thus created **a little society** for his own use. he willingly **abandons society at large** [that is. the city. the nation] to itself[15]." Herewith we ceased being 'political animals' *per se* and became 'social animals.' no longer seeing ourselves in terms of a larger worldly context. but restricting our lives to the 'little societies' of our immediate private relations alone.

Who is this new individual? When Tocqueville looks carefully, he finds anything but the 'rugged individualism' of our literary past, anything but the heroic ideal of cowboy movies—unfortunately, he never had the pleasure of seeing cowboy movies. What he sees, rather, is one who, to begin with, is uninvolved in the lives of others: they "...owe nothing to anyone," he says, "they expect nothing from anyone: they are in the habit of always considering themselves in isolation, and [thus] **they willingly fancy that their whole destiny is in their [own] hands**" (II 484). Nor does this individual reach out beyond him or herself: rather, equalitarian democracy "...makes each man forget his ancestors [the past] ...it hides its descendents from him [the future] and [as we've seen] separates him from his contemporaries [the present], [with the result, he says, that] it threatens finally to **confine him wholly in the solitude of his own heart**[16]" (also II 616-7). One comes to live, in short, a life of self-preoccupation with no extended time dimension. But more, faced with the anxious prospect of an indefinite 'independence,' we are only brought to grasp that much more firmly onto **material things** and we even "give[] [ourselves] over to **new masters**" (II 417: also 406), he says. In short, we over-compensate for our newly shrunken (if not seriously emasculated [I 387: no soul]) sense of our own human potential through intensified materialism and new forms of dependency.

But more, thus confined, we are brought to doubt ourselves and even to despair of our own resourcefulness. In the wake of the enlightenment critique of religion, custom, political authority, family tradition etc. "...doubt," he says, "takes hold of the highest portions of the intellect... [one becomes] accustomed to having only confusing and changing notions... [but above all] one **despairs** of being able to resolve by oneself **the greatest problems that human destiny presents**, and one is reduced, like a **coward**, to **not** thinking about them (II 410, also 417, 590, 665)." "Such a state **cannot fail to enervate souls**," he says, "it slackens the springs of the will and prepares citizens for **servitude**" [2x] (also I 82, II 615, 665, 676). Rather than giving us an identity amidst a greater whole, we end up being "...lost in the midst of the common obscurity (II 300). "...**lost in the crowd**" (II 641).

Tocqueville's profile of the new 'individual' thus stands in sharp contrast to our expectations, indeed our aspirations: weak, not strong; self-doubting, not courageous; isolated, not integrated; overly-deferential, not autonomous; self-confined, not worldly. Is this what was sought by 'individualism'? We are a paradoxical people.

By way of a summary, Tocqueville fills out the picture of what he then calls our "**narrow individualism**"[17]: "I see an innumerable **crowd** of like and equal men who revolve on themselves with repose, procuring small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a **stranger** [in his own land] **to the destiny of the others**: his [little society of] children and his particular friends form [for him] the whole human species...; as for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is [along side] beside them [perhaps], but he does **not** see them[18]; he touches them and does **not** feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone, and if a family still remains for him, one can at least say that he **no longer has a native country** (II 663)."

Tocqueville then draws one further, very ominous conclusion: "Above these [a centralized government] is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring [peoples'] enjoyments and of watching over their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and **mild**. It would resemble a paternal power **if**, like that, it had for its object to prepare [people for adulthood]; but on the contrary, it seeks only **to keep them fixed irrevocably in [perpetual] childhood**[19].... It willingly works for their happiness, but it wants to be the unique agent and sole arbiter of that [happiness];[20] it provides for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their

pleasures. conducts their industry. regulates their estates. divides their inheritance...." to such an extent that Tocqueville is brought to wonder: **will it "... not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living?"** (II 663) That is. will it not seek to live for them...**for us**[21]?

Most consequentially. as centralized governance increases. so it "...habituates men to make a complete and continual **abstraction from their own wills** (I 82)." We are thus brought to relinquish "...the habit of directing [ourselves]" (II 665) and the **state** "...overflow[ing] on every side and goes on to spread [itself] over the domain that individual independence had [once] reserved for itself ...(II 653).[22]" Paradox of modern paradoxes: the government. not oneself. becomes the agent of one's life. We become. he says. "...**a herd of timid and industrious animals** of which the government is the shepherd." No less than in the old regimes. we thus remain 'subjects.'

In Tocqueville's view. the new democracies. in their quest for individual independence. lost sight of one thing. one very important thing: that non-dependency (or 'individualism' as it was named) is **not** the same as genuine independence. "...People believe that they are following the doctrine of [self-] interest. but they have only a coarse idea of it. and to watch better over what they call their affairs. **they neglect[ed] the principal one, which is <u>to remain masters of themselves</u>** (II 515).[23]" Amidst the whirlwind of revolutionary change. we lost sight of "our principal affair:" we ceased to be masters of ourselves. How did we get to abdicate our autonomy[24]?

<u>IV. A New Face of Servitude:</u>

"One attributes too much importance to laws.
too little to mores (I 295)"

"One forgets that it is above all **in the details**
that it is dangerous to enslave men (II 664)."

Little by little. While the American and French revolutions are 'world historical events,' still any process of change and assimilation of beliefs (even of radical transformation) takes place **little by little.** the participants themselves oftentimes being incognizant of the fullest implications of their newly raised consciousness. Tocqueville (not unlike Plato) is thus at pains to direct our attention above all to the often imperceptible. because incremental. change in the beliefs and customs[25] that shape us.

"...Time. events. or [even] the individual and solitary efforts of intellect. in the end shakes or destroys a belief **little by little,"** he says. "without anything appearing from the outside" (II 615-6).[26] Unbeknownst to us. our most cherished beliefs and customs can **escape** us. Little did we realize that as we sought to level class rank. so did we lower and homogenize our conception of human potential (II 600). "Subjection in small affairs manifests itself every day and makes itself felt **without distinction** by all citizens. It does not make them desperate: but it constantly thwarts them and brings them to renounce their wills. Thus **little by little,** it extinguished their spirits and enervates their souls [there's that word again!].... [The] use of their free will...will **not** prevent them from losing **little by little** the faculty of thinking. feeling. and acting by themselves. and thus [as we saw] from **gradually falling below the level of humanity**[27]" (II 665: also 439. 602). Erosion too changes landscapes. no less than earthquakes. Out of the erosion of memory and custom. out of the forgetfulness and confusion of origins. the prospect for human being was narrowed and possibilities lost. Little by little.

This natural process of erosion of beliefs[28] is further exacerbated by a specifically democratic tendency to uncritically accept and subordinate ourselves to the opinion of others. in particular to 'public opinion.' "As citizens become more equal and alike," he says, "the penchant of each to believe blindly [in a single] man or class diminishes. [Rather] the disposition to believe the **mass** is augmented and **more and more it is [popular] opinion that leads the world**" (II 409. also 495). He continues: "Not only [does] common opinion [become] **the sole guide** that remains for individual reason among democratic peoples; but it has **infinitely greater power** [than among other nations]...." For. Tocqueville reasons. "...it does not seem plausible to [democratic peoples]. that when all have the same enlightenment. truth is not found on the side of the greatest number." Since in equalitarian regimes no one person's intellect merits special regard. numbers replace insight as the ground of authority: hence our "**almost unlimited trust in the judgment of the public**[29]." Paradoxically. "the [very] same equality that [we saw] makes [one] independent of...his fellow citizens [also] leaves him isolated and without defense against the action of the greatest number." In declaring ourselves 'independent,' we rendered ourselves "free **but exposed**" (II 545). vulnerable. he says. to an "...**immense pressure** of the minds of **all** on the intellect of **each**" (II 410).

But this very pressure—this new "religion" of common opinion. as he calls it—threatens our hoped for independence. so much so "...that it might in the end confine the action of individual reason **within narrower limits than befit the greatness and happiness of the human species.**" [2x] The result is perplexing.: "democracy would extinguish the [very] intellectual freedom that the democratic social state favors. so that the human spirit. having broken all the shackles that **classes** or men formerly imposed on it. would [now] be **tightly chained to the general will of the greatest number.**" (This. as many of you know. Tocqueville calls "the tyranny of the majority" [I 235-250].)

"Chained to the general will of the greatest number?" He concludes that the 'evil' besetting mankind hadn't really changed as a result of these 'revolutions,' except in 'character:' "Men would **not** [therefore] **have found the means of living independently** [they so ardently sought];" he says discouragingly. "[rather] they would only have discovered...**a new face of servitude.**" [2x] "I cannot repeat too often," he says, that this "is **something to cause profound reflection** by those who see in the [genuine] **freedom of the intellect** something holy and who hate not only the despot but despotism [in all its forms] (also OR 88)." Even if one doesn't feel the strap. despotism of opinion is still despotism. A cause for profound reflection indeed.

Despite his criticism of the newly emerging customs. Tocqueville. perhaps puzzlingly. himself yet makes an argument for **the necessity of custom.**[30] He observes: "dogmatic beliefs [*doxa. dogma*] are more or less numerous according to the times...but **one cannot make it so that there are no dogmatic beliefs** [2x]. that is opinions men receive on trust without discussing them[31]" (II 407). To be sure. he admits. "...every man who receives an opinion on the word of another puts his mind in slavery; but it is a **salutary slavery," "a salutary slavery** that permits him to make **good use of his freedom.**" "**Individual independence can** [thus] **be more or less great; but it cannot be boundless** (II 408).[32]" [2x] Above all. "...no society...can prosper without such beliefs...for without common ideas there is no common action. and without **common action**...a social body [community] does not [exist]."

Thus. however questionable opinions (*doxa*) and customs (*nomos*) on occasion may be. we cannot do wholly without them. Indeed. Tocqueville says. there is an "inflexible law" of the human condition that we must first build "the edifice of our thought" and "the first foundation" of common action and society thereon (II 408). If custom should not be king (Pindar). at least it

needs to be made our servant. The task for the legislator and for us. Tocqueville says. is therefore to encourage such salutary customs and. in his memorable phrase. "habits of the heart" (I 275) as can provide a proper foundation for the 'good use of our freedom' and a genuinely thoughtful independence. But the question is how this can be done. especially in "an age of the unaccustomed" such as ours (see I 300-1. II 403. 671-2).

V. Before His Eves and In His Hands:

"Genuine enlightenment arises
principally from **experience**..." (I 291).

"I cannot imagine anything more unproductive
for the human mind than an abstract idea" (II 590).

This proves to be very difficult. Indeed. he stresses. there is **nothing harder** (I 229. 301). "If citizens continue to confine themselves more and more narrowly in the circle of small domestic interests...." he fears. "one can apprehend that in the end they will become almost inaccessible to those great and powerful **public emotions** that trouble peoples. but **develop and renew** them[33]" (II 616-7).

Is there a remedy? Paradoxically. it is. if anything. the very same that gave rise to these worries: **freedom**. "Liberty **alone** can effectively combat the natural vices of these kinds of societies." he says. "**Only freedom** can bring citizens out of their isolation in which the very independence of their circumstances has led them to live. can daily force them to mingle. to join together through the need to communicate with one another...and satisfy each other in the conduct of their common affairs[34] (OR 88)." But how do we learn to use our freedom **well** such that. rather than detracting. we restore our fullness of possibilities? There is. to repeat. nothing harder in his view.

In this regard. America. Tocqueville thinks. actually has something to teach the world. While we tend in the directions he forecasted. the America of Tocqueville's time was not as radically de-politicized as his own country France. Indeed he says: "The Americans have combated the [narrow] individualism to which equality gives birth with freedom and they have defeated it" (II 486. also 500). America of the 1830s was still a new society. not yet oblivious of its origins. still aware of the political preconditions of life. not yet so fragmented into little worlds and atomized into solitary individuals that the necessity of public involvement and the rewards of community went unrecognized.[35] "I lived much with the people of the United States." he writes. "and I cannot say how much I admired their **experience and good sense**[36]" (I 291)

Whence this 'good sense?' Thanks to our other line of customary inheritance. from the British. a sense of public life had not yet been totally excised from our self-understanding. With admiration. Tocqueville observes: "...From the moment when an American was reduced to occupying himself only with his own affairs [***to ta eautou prattein***]. he would [think himself] **robbed** of **half of his existence** (I 238)." [2x] "The inhabitant of the United States." he says. "has not drawn his practical knowledge and positive notions from books [we are so un-bookish!].... It is from **participating** in the legislation that the American learns to know the laws.... The great work of society is accomplished **daily** and before his eyes and...in his hands.[37]"

On the basis of observations such as this. Tocqueville glimpses a possible remedy[38]: "...I say that **the most powerful means** and perhaps **the only one that remains to us** [of drawing us out of "a narrow and unenlightened selfishness" and] of interesting men in the fate of their native

country. is **to make them participate** in its government" (I 226. 301). The response to alienation and isolation. then—indeed. perhaps the **only** effective one—is active and daily involvement in the workings of one's community.

He offers us an account of such 'participation.' "When citizens are **forced** to be occupied with public affairs. they are necessarily drawn from the midst of their individual interests. and from time to time. torn away from the sight of themselves" (II 486). And "from [that] moment when common affairs are treated [as indeed] **in common.** each man perceives that he is **not** as independent of those like him [***semblables,*** that is his equals] as he first fancied. and that to obtain their support he must often lend them his cooperation." In this way we learn that it is in our self-interest to think of others.[39] or paradoxically put. that "...one's [true self-] interest is in a way found in **forgetting oneself.**"

"The free institutions that the inhabitants of the United States possess and the political rights of which they make so much use **recall** to each citizen **constantly** and in a thousand ways that he lives [not in a mass or crowd but] in a **society....**" he remarks with deep appreciation. "One is occupied with the **general interest** at first by necessity [perhaps] and then by choice: what was calculation becomes instinct [habit]: and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens. one finally picks up the habit and taste of serving them" (II 488: also I 225)). As a result of this objectifying public involvement. a salutary sublimation takes place: "Several of the [subjective] passions that chill and divide hearts are then obligated to withdraw to the bottom of the soul and hide there." he observes. "Haughtiness dissimulates: contempt does not dare to come to light: selfishness is afraid of itself (II 486)." We are transformed.[40] Our interests are generalized; our life more inclusive. We are no longer just individuals; we are citizens.

Yet this is possible **only** through each person's own efforts of full involvement: "Sentiments and ideas renew themselves. the heart is enlarged. and the human mind is developed **only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another**" (II 491: also I 227). [2x] This is something we can only do for ourselves: governments cannot do it for us: "A government can **no** more suffice on its own to maintain and renew the circulation of sentiments and ideas in a great people than to conduct all its industrial undertakings" (II 491-2). Governments (and colleges, for that matter [I 358]) are thus limited in what they can make possible. Above all. governments cannot perpetuate ideas. sentiments. habits. only people can. It is thus up **to us as individuals** to make the effort to perpetuate the values that make our community what it is. those values we do not want to become "intellectual dust" (II 403). lost for time. forgotten.

As such all a legislator (and college official) can do. according to Tocqueville. is "...to multiply the **occasions** for citizens to act together and to make them feel every day that they depend on one another." Citizens have to do the rest. We have to learn what governments can't teach us. We have to learn what we as individuals do not necessarily know. namely how to live and work together as a community. to fuse and adjust our interests. to formulate common purpose. and to become **effective agents** despite our being individually 'weak.' indeed insignificant. Effective independence thus requires mature interdependence. This process Tocqueville calls. in his famous phrase. "**the apprenticeship of freedom**" (I 229: also 278).

This can be learned. moreover. by our coming together in what he calls '**associations**' (I 182). "Americans of all ages. all conditions. all minds." Tocqueville was amazed to observe. "constantly unite (II 486)." And it is this that makes us surprisingly effective as a people. Americans united for every which possible reason. for political ends. to get roads built. to ban 'strong liquors.' and even garden clubs. And here there was a lesson to be learned. In the modern

world. "associations [have to] **take the place** of [those] powerful particular persons [of the past] whom equality of conditions has made disappear" (II 492: also 668). he says. The calculus of common action is at work enabling us to accomplish together what we cannot do alone. indeed enabling us to accomplish more than we could ever do by ourselves. "The more the number of **small** common affairs increases. the more do men. even without their knowing it. acquire the ability to pursue **great** ones in common" (II 496: also I 241. II 648).[41]" "...Associations can therefore be considered **great schools**. free of charge [tuition]. where all citizens come to learn the general theory of association[42]" (II 497).

For this reason Tocqueville. in contrast to many of his contemporaries. remained optimistic. if qualifiedly. He reflects: "I wished to expose to broad daylight **the perils that equality brings to human independence** because I firmly believe that those perils are the most formidable as well as the least foreseen of all those that the future holds. **But I do not believe them [to be] insurmountable**" (II 671-2). [2x]

VI. Making a College...(For Students):

"Sentiments and ideas renew themselves. the heart is enlarged. and the human mind is developed **only** by the **reciprocal action** of men upon one another" (II 491).

He further observes: "...The century of blind devotion and instinctive virtues is already fleeing from us. and I see the time approaching when freedom. public peace. and social order itself will not be able to do without **enlightenment**" (II 503: also I 225). Hence where our social state (laws and mores) cannot, it falls to **education** to provide (II 565).[43] And this, after a rather long journey through Tocqueville. brings us back to our lives at the college. In the light of these reflections on "the perils of equality." is a community of learning even possible nowadays?

Well...maybe. At the college. there is a measure of Tocquevillian effective action at work. We see it in the classroom[44] and we see its rewards. **Being here** requires that we be different than in the outside world. We are expressly asked to forsake our option to be anonymous, worldless, isolated, detached 'individuals' (not to mention 'subjects'). Here we are required to be active and involved us. Here, dedicated to a common purpose, shared activity and shared goals. we come to be at home in the company of familiars (those like us [*semblables*]).[45] Here we are **members** of a community.

Indeed we are divided up into small. working 'associations' called classes. asked each evening and each morning to create **a community of common discourse**. one in which we seek release from tired. borrowed. unexamined categories. from the press of ordinary opinion. from reckless inherited abstractions. and where we are **open to original learning**. that is open to fresh definition and the joy of genuine discovery. Each day we are asked to bring to life a **collective effort** that uncovers **the world of a text** by seeking to discover the terms of its most fruitful understanding. This **common activity** is the 'place' where we knit and are knitted together. where we become 'colleagues' and thence together become a 'college.' This activity is the place where we acquire new habits and think in new ways. where and in which we discover in ourselves potentialities and newly actualized abilities that bring us to... grow. The range of possible discovery in the classroom. in short. extends so far as to include ourselves.

This **question asking activity**. this active openness to learning is the beating heart of the college. For us to be **here**. we have to **participate** in it. The questions have to be **our** questions. lest the answers not be ours. Hence we all. each of us. have the **responsibility**: to wonder. with

Socrates. whether the only thing human beings really can know is that they don't know: to see and be in the world in as the many ways as the participle in Greek requires: to join the conference in Karlsruhe [in 1840] and decide with them whether there is indeed sufficient ground to entertain an atomic theory of matter: and. after having seen the truthfulness of the Ptolmaic account. we have to center and re-center ourselves off-center. locating ourselves back. now more reflectively. in our previously unexamined heliocentric orientation: we have to come to know what it means to live in a world that is the result of an extraordinary act of world making. a 'creation:' so too. we have to think through for ourselves and harness the unwieldiness of 'infinity:' and walk along with Leibniz and judge for ourselves whether there are indeed 'substantial forms' (not to say. with Kant. '*a priori* categories'): we have to judge whether Madison's practical judgment about the wisdom of offsetting factions does indeed provide for a small measure of justice: and to be sure. we have to take the voyage to Cithera... and find our way back: we have to weigh the modern claim that 'history shall judge' the rightness and worth of all human effort: and we have to determine for ourselves whether that mode of thinking that requires all things be thought of 'relationally' (relatively. we say) can indeed provide a footing. We have to ask these and many. many such questions. for it is this **shared activity of question-asking**—and the liberal **habits of inquiry** that follow upon it—that transforms us ... into 'Johnnies.'

So indeed there is a measure of Tocquevillian wisdom in the practice of our pedagogy. Here we even find our Cartesian roots serving liberal education and **us** well. requiring that we not allow others to judge for us but rather that we be our own judges. the fundamental prerequisite of liberal learning. Here too we see that our equalitarian tendency to avoid "the great problems that human destiny presents"[46] (II 410) is countered by the college's Great Books program.[47] where we are challenged daily with the greatest questions of the greatest books. (Indeed we actually get to read and think critically about our forefather. Descartes.) We are therewith given the opportunity. our contrary 'social state' notwithstanding. to become deeply thoughtful. that is philosophical. And again despite our 'social state' disinclining us thereto. we find in books. the Great Books. the source of invigorating and horizon opening inquiry. Indeed they provide where our mundane experience may no longer serve.[48] And lastly we find ourselves newly alive because newly habituated to those liberating practices and activities that enable us to encounter the great questions, from which, now empowered, we no longer shrink (I 410).

Our vision of individuality. shared by Tocqueville. is thus quite different from the one he saw emerging in America: original. broad-minded. thoughtful. empowered and mutually autonomous. Our life at the college thus may well provide a measure of antidote and remedy for the ills by which he feared equalitarian man would be engulfed. ...if. that is. we take advantage of the great opportunity before us.

Or at least this might be true in the classroom. But what about...outside the classroom? Here is where we may fall short of this ideal of a genuine community of learning. Here our Cartesianism. our inherited sense of narrow individuality. does not serve us as well. We are raised to new possibilities and are invigorated in the classroom. because we are together the locus of the activity of inquiry. Is there such an opportunity imbued with common purpose outside the classroom? Or have we only 'individual expression' to fall back on?

Pastimes. diversions. hanging around. killing time? But recreation needn't be purposeless. Here there are possibilities for community building too. indeed possibilities essential to the well-being of the program as a whole. We hear talk of a **split** between the nobler aspirations of the classroom and. sorry to say. the disillusioning reality of private life (in the dorms. off campus. and in the larger world). Indeed this can lead to a **cynicism** that discourages

us from making an effort. and indeed can provide an excuse for even greater uninvolvedness. But for it not to be "mere talk." as Aristotle would say. the question becomes what **we. all of us.** will do to make things different. indeed make our whole lives at the college commensurate with the higher ends of the program.

Here Tocqueville chimes in: we need to do our American thing. that is join together. and this in ways both big and small. For instance. we might participate in those **associations**—Undergraduate Student Polity. Graduate Student Council. Student Review Board. Student Committee on Instruction. etc. or those other **functions**—become a resident assistant. a student tutor. a mentor. participate in a club or intramural sports. join a study group. attend a lecture....—those activities (secondary powers). in short. that serve the greater end of knitting together and integrating campus life. of making this a "community" in more than name only.

Equally. and **no less important.** are the little things. For. as the great Spanish philosopher Sancho Panza said: "**a lot of littles make a much.**" Pick up a piece of trash. return a book somebody left behind. assist another with a mathematics proof. work with someone through a bout of depression. play a pick-up game with someone you don't know. cook a meal together. set an example in the dorms. play in a music group. get someone the help they need who is at risk with alcohol or illegal drugs. follow up on a conversation that left you thinking. question that self-destructive opinion someone might have about themselves. help someone move in. mentor a new student. introduce other constructive ways of being together... in short. we all need to do all **those many little things that matter much,** all those small acts of friendship. neighborliness. and collegiality that together define us as **one** community. Tocqueville encourages us to believe that. **if** we do our part. campus life will. little by little. come to reflect more generally the higher aspirations of each of us and of the program.[49] So. complementing our life of active questioning with deeds of integration. let us not accept the easy (Tocqueville would say 'cowardly.') separation of roles and responsibilities. The whole of campus life is our responsibility.

VII: So We Ask You Tonight...:

"With the past no longer shedding light on the future,
the mind advances in darkness." (II 673)

"...To strive to attain the kind of greatness
and happiness that is proper to us." (II 675)

Finally...the unprecedented emancipation of the modern world from the traditional and customary conditions of life has allowed us to become the 'individuals' we pride ourselves in being. Individuals. yes. but "free and exposed" (II 545). Tocqueville would add. fearing that we would be unprepared to walk the trackless paths of time. But by what shall we take our bearings as we proceed? What handrails (Arendt) shall steady our step? "Perhaps." he wrote in a moment of self-doubt. "it is our destiny to cruise for the rest of our lives the endless sea without reaching a...destination.[50]"

What. for reasons of personal independence. we could no longer learn from our past or from books. had now to be learned. Tocqueville argues. from direct experience. not remote. armchair generalship. but active involvement—'participation'—in the daily workings of our concrete lives. We Americans have a penchant. a knack for a kind of "practical wisdom" or "good sense." he thought. that served us well in times of change (I 219). Whether we can continue to count on that good sense being perpetuated in the face of the modern challenges—increasing centralization of governance. the growing dominance of popular opinion. the rise of the industrial

aristocracy. and generally. the increasing abstractness of modern life—was the question with which he left us. If he was not hopeful about his own country. he was yet about America.

His optimism was not unrealistic. but reflected the prudence of the ages (I 225): "...To seek at least to derive from [democracy] all the good that it can do: and knowing its good instincts as well as its evil penchants. to strive to restrict the effects of the latter and [to] develop the former" (II 235). Thus Tocqueville leaves his reader—and us—with a hopeful. if modest. agenda: "To fix extended. but visible and limited. limits for social power: to give to particular persons certain rights and to guarantee them the uncontested enjoyment of these rights: **to preserve for the individual the little independence, force, and originality that remain to him;** to **elevate** him beside society and to **sustain** him before it: this appears to me." he said. "to be the first object of the legislator in the age we are entering" (II 671-2).

So **we ask you tonight** to consider the possibility that you are more than an 'individual' narrowly conceived and not to succumb to the lower expectations of others. but to entertain for yourselves "vaster" possibilities (II 603-4).

We ask you tonight. also. to consider restoring "the other half of your existence" (I 238) and not to allow yourselves to be "fixed irrevocably in childhood" (II 663). We ask you to assume the difficult task of undertaking responsibility for more than just yourselves. In particular. we ask you to become full citizens of this "remarkable little college" (Darkey). to help establish and perpetuate the conditions necessary for this to be a community of genuine thoughtfulness.

We ask you tonight as well to allow. once more—our American disinclination notwithstanding—that books not become "intellectual dust" (II 404) but. in our case. that the Great Books. by placing before us "the greatest problems that human destiny presents" (II 410) may well have something to teach us **not** readily available from our daily experience or from our 'small societies' (I 245). Indeed these books may well be. in times of historical moment as now. all the more necessary. as the founders of the college thought.[51]

And lastly **we ask you tonight** "to use your freedom well." Perhaps events of the last year made you aware as never before of our very great good fortune to be free. With this. we have now learned. comes a responsibility not to waste the rare opportunity before us.

Let us end with a few words of private reflection that Tocqueville shared with a friend [?]: "We did not see the beginning of the revolution: we will not see its end." he wrote. "If I had children. I would frequently repeat to them that we live...in a world in which we must be **ready and prepared** for everything.... And I still would add that we should not count on any possessions of which we could be deprived. We should think [rather] to acquire [those] goods which we cannot lose but by death: **courage, will-power, wisdom, and poise.**"[52]

We know that we are asking a lot of you. but that is why you came to St. John's.

Thank you

Endnotes

[1] Given on August 30. 2002 as the annual Fright Night "Dean's Lecture" to open the 36th academic year at St. John's College. Santa Fe. My thanks to Jacqueline Levine. John Cornell and Charles Fasanaro for their thoughtful suggestions.

[2] Aristotle, ***Politics***, VII. iv. 1326 a 26-7.

[3] All references to Tocqueville's works are to ***Democracy in America***. translated. edited. and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. Chicago. 2000. [hereafter: (volume. page)] and to ***The Old Regime and the Revolution***. edited with an introduction by Francois Furet and Francoise Melenio. translated by Alan S. Kahan. Chicago. 1998 [hereafter: (OR. page)]. Tocqueville writes: "Men do not receive the truth from their enemies. and their friends scarcely offer it to them: that is why I have spoken" (II 400). Also. since "the majority...lives in perpetual adoration of itself: only foreigners or experience can make certain truths reach the ears of the Americans" (I 245). See also II 648-9: OR 86. Tocqueville is not engaged in any ordinary political analysis but in what John Stuart Mill rightly names "**questions of high politics**" (Letter. June 11. 1835).

[4] "I firmly believe that the worth of societies like that of individuals is determined by the **potential liberty** they are capable of developing. For many years I have insisted on the thesis that it is harder and more problematic to lay the foundations and to guarantee the continuity of freedom in democratic societies than in the aristocracies of the past. However. I was never so critical as to assume its impossibility in our society. I pray to God never to give me the idea that this noble enterprise will eventually fail. I definitely repudiate your idea that our race has become that degenerate herd which has to be delivered to a small number of shepherds who. after all. are not better than the beasts that we are. frequently worse. I hope you will not mind that I trust more the goodness and justice of God than your materialistic pessimism" (***Letter to Gobineau***. quoted in Albert Solomon. ***In Praise of Enlightenment. Essays in the History of Ideas***, New York. 1962. p. 290). This letter will be referred to several times.

[5] "What I reproach [democratic] equality for is not that it carries men away in the pursuit of forbidden enjoyments: it is for **absorbing them entirely in the search for permitted enjoyments**" (II 509). "If citizens continue to confine themselves more and more narrowly in **the circle of small domestic interests**. there to become agitated without rest. one can apprehend that in the end they will become almost **inaccessible to those great and powerful public emotions** that trouble peoples. but **develop and renew them.** When I see property become so mobile and the love of property so anxious and so ardent. I cannot prevent myself from fearing that men will arrive at a point of looking on every new theory as a peril. every innovation as a distressing trouble. every social progress as the first step toward a revolution. and that they will altogether refuse to move for fear that they will be carried away. **I tremble. I confess. that they will finally allow themselves to be so much possessed by a relaxed love of present enjoyment that interest in their own future and that of their descendents will disappear...**" (II 616-7: see also. OR 178. DA I 180. 235. II 419. 440. 509).

[6] See "On the Spirit of the Lawyer in the United States and How It Serves as a Counterweight to Democracy" (I 251-8).

[7] Tocqueville argues that a further consequence of this abstract. over-generalized and impersonal way in which democracies think about themselves are "cowardly" macro-views ('philosophies of history') that posit 'forces' and 'principles' in the world at work behind our backs (e.g. the 'cunning of history' [Hegel]) and that inevitably estrange us from one another. degrade our human relationships. and make us puppets in the larger marionette theater of life. our life no longer being our own. nor worth much (see II 471. 676: OR 93).

[8] As with all things. we are cursed and blessed by 'familiarity.' nowhere more apparent than with the words we use. where we find a mixture of clarity and opacity. transparency and turgidness. with the result that the very language we use is often over facile and disappointingly unpenetrating. This is no less so with 'community.' often over used. hollowed out by time. without much content. See note 28.

[9] Tocqueville provides us with a brief history of our Cartesianism (II 404-6). It has its antecedents in the 16th century 'reformers' who "...submit the dogmas of the ancient faith to individual reason." This then is extended by Bacon and Descartes to the natural sciences and philosophy. where 'received formulas' are abolished. the 'empire of tradition' is destroyed. and the 'authority of the master' overturned. But it is Descartes who generalizes and radicalizes

the critical principle "... to submit the objects of **all** beliefs to the individual examination of each man." "Who does not see that Luther. Descartes. and Voltaire made use of the same method and differ only in the greater or lesser use that they claimed one might make of it? (II 405). However this philosophical principle is not perfected as a political factor until America (France being the excess). "...Born in the 16th century and clarified and generalized in the 17th. [the method] could not be commonly adopted... [because] political laws [and] the social state...were opposed to it.... It could only be generally followed in centuries when conditions had finally become nearly the same and men almost alike."

[10] "There are no revolutions that do not disrupt ancient beliefs. weaken authority. and obscure common ideas. Therefore every revolution has the effect. more or less. of delivering men over to themselves and of opening a wide and almost limitless space before the mind of each. (II 406)" But the question for Tocqueville is the peculiar shape our revolution took. for it is both less revolutionary than France's. yet more successful and hence more far reaching. (Also see Editors Introduction. xlv.)

[11] See Descartes. ***Meditations on First Philosophy*** **I-II** and ***Discourse on Method*** **VI.**

[12] But in so saying we insist only on the right of judgment. not the rightness of our judgments (Hegel). Cp. T. S. Eliot's rendering of the Cartesian *ego cogito* as "I am myself alone." But see section IV below.

[13] OR 87: DA II 538.

[14] OR. 162-3. "The idea of the atomized individual is the conception of the abstract rationalism of the 18th century" (Solomon. ***In Praise of Enlightenment.*** p. 293: also p. 272).

[15] And therewith the momentous reduction and separation of the 'social' from the 'political.' the 'individual' from the 'citizen.' We become something less than our full potential. "...Individualism proceeds from **an erroneous judgment**.... It has its source in the defects of the mind as much as in the vices of the heart (II 482: also I 238)." The question is whether we can reclaim our full 'political.' that is human. being (see V).

[16] Cp. Descartes. ***Meditations*** II. III. V where the modern problem of inter-subjectivity is introduced. The newly reduced self. estranged from its world to the point of solipsism (the 'ego'). finds itself uncertain of its relationship to others. even to the point of being confused about the reality of anything but itself (cp. II 614)

[17] "People today. no longer attached to one another by any ties of caste. class. guild. or family. are all too inclined to be preoccupied with their own private interests. too given to looking out for themselves alone and withdrawing into a **narrow individualism** where all public virtues are smothered. Despotism. rather than struggling against this tendency. makes it irresistible. because it takes away from citizens all common feeling. all common needs. all need for communication. all occasion for common action. It walls them up inside their private lives. They already tend to keep themselves apart from one another: despotism isolates them: it chills their relations: it freezes them (OR 87)." Brrrrr. Tocqueville speaks here of 'despotism.' but. shocking though it might first appear. for him despotism and democracy are both egalitarian forms of governance and hence have many similar consequences.

[18] Cp. Goethe. ***Goetz von Berlichingen,*** in which "...the son. from pure learning. does not know the father.... Such people look at once within: they are so preoccupied with what is revolving in themselves that they are like a man in passion. who passes his closest friends in the street without looking at them."

[19] We are kept in perpetual adolescence. it would thus appear. (The comparison with the developmental stage of modern psychology is striking.)

[20] Or. alternatively. "the sole reliever of all miseries" (II 663).

[21] As we will see. Tocqueville does not draw the conclusion some do: "I definitely repudiate your idea that our race has become that degenerate herd which has to be delivered to a small number of shepherds who. after all. are not better than the beasts that we are. frequently even worse. I hope you will not mind that I trust more the goodness and justice of God than your materialistic pessimism." (Correspondence with Gobineau cited in Solomon. ***In Praise of Enlightenment,*** p. 290: also I 219. II 671-2)

[22] The outcome of such radical displacement of authority is that "...individuals...counted on the government **more than on themselves** for their own affairs" (OR. p. 237). Modern individualism in Tocqueville's eyes thus leads to dependency. if a 'mild despotism' and a 'peaceful servitude' (II 652).

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[23] Cp. "...It would have been more honest and more sure [for princes] to teach each of their subjects **the art of being self-sufficient**" (II 606): also: "...The evil would have done nothing but change its character. Men would **not** have found **the means of living independently**: they would have discovered—a difficult thing—[only] a new face of servitude" (II 410).

[24] Or another way to put it: this age of individualism thus gave rise to new forms of dependency. indeed one voluntarily 'chosen' (II 664) "in the name of the people" (I 212. 380).

[25] "I understand ...the expression ***moeurs*** in the sense that the ancients attached to the word ***mores***: not only do I apply it to mores properly so-called. which one could call **habits of the heart**. but to the different notions that men possess. to the various opinions that are current in their midst. and to the sum of ideas of which the habits of the mind are formed (I 275)." Opinion are rarely 'mere opinions' but inform deeds and lives.

[26] Or again. "If the lights that enlighten us ever can be extinguished. they would be obscured **little by little** and as if by themselves. By dint of being confined to application. one would lose sight of the principles. and when one had entirely forgotten the principles one would follow the methods derived from them badly: one would no longer be able to invent new ones. and one would employ without intelligence and without art the erudite procedures that one would not longer understand (II 438)." "...One subjects them to a multitude of little preliminary exercises in the midst of which their youth is lost and their imagination extinguished" (II 602). See also Levine. "***Four Sides of a Cube*:....**

[27] Cp. Plato. ***Republic***, II-IV and his doctrine of assimilation (III 401c and IV 424 c-d).

[28] "The origin of words. like that of men. has been lost..." (II 456). Political ideas. not less than others. lose their mooring over time. Hence. the sedimentation or degradation of political ideas becomes an historical element. "If the lights that enlighten us ever came to be extinguished. they would be **obscured little by little** and **as if by themselves.** By dint of being confined to application. one would lose sight of the principles. and when one had entirely forgotten the principles one would follow the methods derived from them badly: one would no longer be able to invent new ones. and one would employ without intelligence and without art the erudite procedures that one would no longer understand" (II 438). "These abstract words that fill democratic languages. and of which use is made at every turn without linking them to any particular face. enlarge and **veil** a thought: they render the expression more rapid and the idea **less clear.** An abstract word is like a box with a false bottom..." (II 457). See also II 600: OR 93: Solomon 271. and Levine. ***Hand-me-Downs***....

[29] "The moral empire of the majority is founded in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom **in many men united than in one alone.... It is the theory of equality applied to intellects**" **(I 236: 381).**

[30] It is puzzling too because it seems contrary to what one might take to be philosophy's accustomed critique of custom [***nomos***]. And there is yet another: "What force remains to **custom** in a people that has entirely changed its face and that changes it constantly. when all acts of tyranny already have a precedent. when all crimes can be supported by an example. when nothing can be encountered old enough so that one fears to destroy it. nor nothing be conceived so new that one cannot dare it (I 300)? A people 'unconstrained by the force of custom' finds nothing 'beyond custom,' nothing unprecedented. nothing unexceptionable. nothing unheard of. Nothing is thus unthinkable in the sense of 'never having been done' and therefore 'never done' (see I 280). Thus the puzzle: can one make an argument for the place of custom even in this 'age of the unaccustomed?' (And this apart from the fact that the 20th century did manage to show us that there were still things. horrific things. unprecedented things. that Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia [II 491-2] found ways to do.)

[31] "There is no philosopher in the world so great that he does not believe a million things on faith..." (I 408). "If a man forced to prove to himself all the truths he makes use of every day. he would never finish: he would exhaust himself in preliminary demonstrations without advancing: as he does not have the time because of the short span of life. nor the ability because of the limits of his mind. to act that way. he is reduced to accepting as given a host of facts and opinions that he has neither the leisure nor the power to examine and verify by himself. but that the more able have found or the crowd adopts. It is on this **first foundation** that he himself builds the edifice of his own thoughts...**the inflexible law of his condition** constrains him to do it." Clearly Tocqueville rejects certain modern philosopher's "exaggerated idea of human reason." specifically Descartes' attempt to establish all thought and life on a rational basis. Such a project is imaginary. indeed dangerous. (Even Descartes knew that we must remain dependent on opinion until such time as his project was finally completed. ***Discourse on Method***, I.)

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[32] Contrast Descartes. ***Meditations***, IV.

[33] Cp. II 620-1: "...War almost always enlarges the thought of a people and elevates the heart. There are cases where only it can arrest the excessive development of certain penchants that equality naturally gives rise to. and where. for certain deep-seated maladies to which democratic societies are subject. it must be considered as almost necessary." This is not to say that he promotes it indiscriminately. but that the effect has some salutary consequences. even if the cause might not. Despite rejecting Gobineau's pessimism (notes 4. 21 above). Tocqueville himself acknowledges society's limited capacity to heal itself from within. Indeed he despaired of France's more extreme equalitarianism (in this context. consider also his support of France's colonial aspirations in ***Writings on Empire and Slavery***, edited and translated by Jennifer Pitts. Baltimore. 2001). As we will see in what follows. he does not so despair of America's future.

[34] He continues: "**Only freedom** can tear people from the worship of Mammon and the petty daily concerns of their personal affairs and teach them to always see and feel the nation above and beside them: **only freedom** can substitute higher and stronger passions for the love of material well-being. give rise to greater ambitions than the acquisition of fortune. and create the atmosphere which allows one to [learn to] see and judge human vices and virtues."

[35] Contrast Lincoln's speech just a few years later: "*Speech to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield* [1838]. ***Abraham Lincoln, A Documentary Portrait***, edited by Fehrenbacher. Stanford. 1964. p. 245.

[36] Cp. "In a democracy. experience. mores. and instruction in the end almost always create the sort of **everyday practical wisdom** and science of small events in life that one names **good sense**. Good sense suffices in the ordinary course of society: and in a people whose education is completed. democratic freedom applied to internal affairs of state produces more good than the errors of the government of democracy can lead to evils" (I 219).

[37] "***Democracy in America*** shows the superiority of American practice to democratic theory. partly because some aspects of American practice had not yet been transformed by democratic theory. partly because **practice tends to correct theory**" (Ed. Into. lxxx-lxxxi).

[38] "The political world is changing: henceforth one must seek **new remedies for new ills**" (II 672).

[39] The "doctrine of self-interest well understood" was thought to be "...the most appropriate to the needs of men **in our time**" (II 503). The early American moralists. e.g. Franklin. "...perceived that **in their country and in their time**. man had been led **back** toward himself by an irresistible force. and losing hope of stopping him. they no longer dreamed of doing more than guiding him" (II 501). "Self-interest well understood is a doctrine **not very lofty, but clear** and sure. It does not seek to attain great objects: but it attains all those it aims for without too much effort. As it is within the reach of all intellects. each seizes it readily and retains it without trouble. Marvelously accommodating to the weaknesses of men. it obtains a great empire with ease. and preserves it without difficulty because it **turns personal interest against itself**. and to direct the passions. it makes use of the spur that excites them. The doctrine of self-interest does not produce great devotion: but it suggests little sacrifices each day: by itself it can make a man virtuous. but it form a multitude of citizens who are **regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted, masters of themselves**: and if it does not lead directly to virtue through the will. it brings them near to it insensibly through habits. If the doctrine of self-interest well understood came to dominate the moral world entirely. extraordinary virtue would without doubt be rarer. But I also think that gross depravity would then be less common. The doctrine of self-interest well understood prevents some men from mounting far above the ordinary level of humanity: but many others who were falling below do attain and are kept there. **Consider some individuals, they are lowered. View the species, it is elevated**" (II 502). Contrast Nietzsche.

[40] Though we cannot forget what remains at 'the bottom of the soul.'

[41] Such "secondary powers" may seem artificial—they are in part customary. after all—but they are nonetheless necessary. "Men who live in democratic centuries do not readily comprehend **the utility of forms**: they feel an instinctive disdain for them.... Forms are more necessary as the sovereign is more active and more powerful" (II 669).

[42] Our **civilization** depends on it: "In order for men to remain civilized or become so. the **art of association** must be developed and perfected among them in the same ratio as equality of conditions increases" (II492). Our **freedom** depends on it: "It is clear that if each citizen. as he becomes individually weaker and consequently more incapable in isolation of preserving his freedom. does not learn **the art of uniting** with those like him [*semblables*] to

defend it. tyranny will necessarily grow with equality" (I 489: also II 660-1). He calls the science of association "the mother science" (II 492).

43 Cp. Plato. ***The Republic.*** III 377 a-c. IV 425 b. and VI 491 d.

44 In this regard: "Everyone is agitated.... Where can one find the **calm** necessary to the profound combinations of the intellect? (II 434)" A college. "Only minds very free of the ordinary preoccupations of life. very penetrating. very agile. very practiced. can with the aid of much time and care. **break through** to the necessary truths" (II 417). And while he might have been able only to anticipate the future obsession with 'specialization' and 'majors' in modern universities. he did see first hand the debilitating effects of the division of labor on the mind of the worker: "[Multiple occupations] detract from the perfection of industry. but serves powerfully to develop the intellect of the worker. There is nothing that tends more than the great division of labor to materialize man and to deny even the trace of a soul in his works." "His capacity is more general. the sphere of intellect more extensive" (I 387: also II 541). Hence the argument for an education with soul. 'liberal education.'

45 Indeed. Tocqueville observes. "a community of study...binds the minds as [common] interest...unite[s] their wills" (I 252).

46 Liberal arts programs. in particular the Great Books Program at St. John's. sought to counter the disorienting and demoralizing effect of modern change. But they are no less a risk. The Great Books approach. courageously (cp II 656) insisting on introducing us to "the greatest problems that human destiny presents" give us an opportunity to confront these questions but they do not promise to answer them for us. What are we to do with all these problems and questions? Are we left helpless in the face of them or are we. thanks to the program. better able to handle them? Does such study. on the contrary. make us more vulnerable and prone to 'quick and easy solutions'? Philosophic vertigo remains a possibility. The burden of modern freedom is to find a way to live with such profound questions (and the uncertainty that may accompany their remaining questions) without having it undermine a responsible and fruitful life.

47 This was quite deliberate on the part of the college's founders. See Levine. ***Four Sides of a Cube....***

48 Democratic life. Tocqueville perceives. is "more complicated" than aristocratic life. being fragmented and overwhelming. hence less transparent and less available to reflection (II 584: also I 301).

49 Cp. "Mamun. son of Harun al Rashid." in William Earnest Hocking. ***The Self. Its Body and Freedom.*** New Haven. III.

50 Solomon. ***In Praise of Enlightenment.*** p. 324.

51 Levine. *Four Sides of a Cube....*

52 Solomon. ***In Praise of Enlightenment.*** p. 327: also OR 86.