THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-INTEREST RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD: DE TOCQUEVILLE REVISITED

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In Dartmouth, the Massachusetts town of my childhood, there ~~was~~ were a harbor, three villages and a town hall equidistant between them. Of twelve thousand citizens, one third were Portuguese farmers and tradesmen. My Uncle Bill was for years the selectman representing Padanaram while Manuel Medeiros was elected from Bliss Corner. He and Uncle Bill held each other in great affection and respect. They appointed my lawyer father to chair the finance committee. I remember attending town meeting in seventh grade in 1940 to see local government in action. My neighbors expended a great deal of energy arguing about which new road should have streetlights.

Alexis Charles Henri Clerel de Tocqueville would have approved. One hundred fifty years ago he wrote:

> ". . . provincial institutions are useful to all nations, but nowhere do they appear to me to be more necessary than among a democratic people. . . . an aristocracy protects the people from the excesses of despotism because it . . . possesses an organized power ready to resist a despot. But a democracy without provincial institutions has no security against these evils. How can a populace unaccustomed to freedom in small concerns learn to use it temperately in great affairs? What resistance can be offered to tyranny in a country where each individual is weak and where the citizens are not united by any common interest? Those who dread the license of the mob and those who fear absolute power ought alike to desire the gradual development of provincial liberties."

Uncle Bill never read de Tocqueville, and Manny Medeiros probably never heard of him, but he could have been writing about our town.

Instead, de Tocqueville was describing his one year visit to an America which had maintained confederate, Constitutional government for fifty years while bursting Westward in a frenzy of egalitarian self-interest. A nobleman, whose grandfather had been guillotined, and a magistrate, de Tocqueville learned liberalism from philosophy and careful study of the history and politics of France, Europe and the New World. He was twenty-six when he reached America in 1830 and barely 30 when Democracy in America, Volume One, was published. He sought in America's example guidance for republican currents in France where, in the generation following the Revolution, democracy had "been abandoned to its wild instincts, and /had/ grown up like those children who have no parental guidance, who receive their education in the public streets, and who are acquainted only with the vices and wretchedness of society." De Tocqueville was absorbed by the American experience because of the hope it held out to the battered monarchies and aristocracies of the Old World that popular government, properly educated and rehearsed, could work. He considered democracy risky but inevitable, and presumed to explore the conditions which make it possible. He was unAristotlian to the extent that he believed in theories of human behaviour, given conditions of equality, religious faith, education and experience in self-government, but his curious, youthful mind was astonishingly informed about economics and the still unnamed principles of psychology. He adored generalizations and wrote about the people of America, rather than about individual persons, but his analysis missed little:

> ". . . the manners of the people may be considered as one of the great general causes to which the maintenance of a democratic republic . . . is attributable. I here use the word . . . with the meaning which the ancients attached to the word mores; . . . not only . . . habits of the heart - but . . . the various notions and opinions current among men . . . I comprise under this term, therefore, the whole moral and intellectual condition of a people."

Harvard's James Q. Wilson in our time discovers the same principle: private character is the foundation of all public institutions. Alasdair MacIntyre does not disagree but finds multiple moralities among us and observes that "traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict." What then did de Tocqueville observe, and what has become of the traditions he so highly prized?

The shaping influences on America during its two centuries prior to 1830 can - all but one - be exemplified in the lives of its leaders: John Winthrop, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. But first, the exception - geography. De Tocqueville could not say enough about America's good fortune in being a rich land, empty save for powerless, nomadic Indian tribes and separated from the corrupting powers of the Eastern hemisphere by moats of ocean. In fact, he puzzled over the prospects of democracy in other countries lacking similar protection. An optimist, he turned to the analysis of human influences.

De Tocqueville saw "the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritans who landed on those shores" and particularly admired John Winthrop, the first and perennial governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Puritans were religious refugees, and Winthrop's sermons and personal example indicated their Christian concepts of community and commitment. Material success might be a sign of God's blessing, but the common goal must be to create a society in which an ethical and spiritual life can prosper. Liberty and freedom have meaning only when constrained by the teachings of Christian morality. Within these strictures, tolerance, forgiveness and sacrifice of personal gain to the public good flourish and become rewards to their practitioners. Withrop depleted his substantial estate for public purposes and took pride in curing an impoverished neighbor of stealing wood from his woodpile one severe winter by giving the man permission to take what he needed. On the other hand, authority which violates Christian liberties is to be resisted to the death. De Tocqueville's imagination was stimulated by this blend of faith, utopian expectations, pragmatism and defiance. He looked at religion in America two hundred years after the Pilgrims and found in it a powerful reinforcement for political democracy. De Tocqueville reasoned that "left to follow its own bent, the human mind . . . will regulate the temporal and spiritual institutions of society in a uniform manner" and that therefore the form of Christianity brought by the Puritans, which was itself democratic and republican, would lead to corresponding political forms and practices. "From the beginning politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved." The ways in which religion determines political practice are many, but they come down to an agreed upon morality, a responsible freedom based on tolerance of diversity within a common faith, and, interestingly, separation of church and state. Religion established by the state cannot remain uncorrupted by political forces and ends; the true service of disestablished religion to democratic politics consists of informing the hearts and mores of private citizens. De Tocqueville praised America's "great austerity of manners," "habits of restraint" and, especially its women, more deeply religious than the men and therefore the foremost protectors of morals.

George Washington in his farewell address provided explicit documentation for de Tocqueville's insights: ". . . religion and morality /are the/ indispensable supports of political prosperity", "the great pillars of public happiness", and the "firmest props of the duties of men and citizens." An Episcopalian and vestryman, Washington was never observed to receive communion, but when his country's call for arms came, he responded as John Winthrop would have expected him to, invoking religion as a unifying principle and a freedom to defend. He would also have agreedwith de Tocqueville's more individualistic perception that the "main business /of religion/ is to purify, control and restrain /men's/ excessive and exclusive taste for well-being," even unto Valley Forge!

Thomas Jefferson was also closely read by de Tocqueville for his insistence on the fundamental political equality of all men. A self-governing society of relative equals was possible in America, provided extremes of wealth and power could be avoided; and this could be accomplished through the procedural justice of an enlightened legal system, administered by men mindful that a higher justice sits in judgment over human justice. Jefferson heightened both de Tocqueville's belief that equality was the strong prerequisite for democracy and his fear that if the people forgot themselves in making money, their careless inattention would permit corruption of their leaders and ultimate tyranny.

De Tocqueville's analysis of equality was written with his contrasting experience of aristocracy in mind. If men are equal, no man is strong. If no man is strong, every man will seek strength in linking his fortunes to those of others. The controlling linkage will be that which comprises the majority, which can then dominate its elected leaders, discarding independent officials at will. The dangerous consequences of democratic equality, then, are a weak executive and oppression of minorities. Safeguards against tyranny of the majority are the Christian morality of Winthrop and Washington, local self-government and the existence of an independent judiciary. Neither de Tocqueville nor Jefferson, however, was convinced that all these safeguards were securely in place. While wholeheartedly admiring the social, economic and political equality he saw around him in 1830 America, de Tocqueville quoted with approval this prediction of Jefferson: "The tyranny of the legislature is really the danger most to be feared, and will continue to be so for many years to come. The tyranny of the executive power will come in its turn, but at a more distant period." Nevertheless, this was a fear and not a reality in 1830. Local and state governments were attracting able Christian gentlemen , at least in the older communities, and the common weal was well served in hundreds of towns not yet large and faceless. De Tocqueville eulogized New England: "The New Englander is attached to his township not so much because he was born into it, but because it is a free and strong community, of which he is a member, and which deserves the care spent in managing it. . . local administration . . . affords an unfailing source of profit and interest to a vast number of individuals." His footnote expressed concern for New York and Philadelphia, grown unmanageably large at about 200,000 citizens apiece.

Both Jefferson and de Tocqueville saw the irony of agonizing over the preservation of equal political rights while continuing the slavery of Southern blacks. Jefferson wrote: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever." De Tocqueville feared black rebellion, or abuse of emancipated status by incompetent ex-slaves, rather than civil war between the North and South, because he doubted that a state determined to withdraw from the union could be prevented from doing so.

Benjamin Franklin rounds out the prototypes of democratic man encountered by de Tocqueville in 1830. A tepid Christian who saw the social utility of religion, and a convinced egalitarian who toiled to conserve republican ideals for future generations, he was best known for the aphorisms in Poor Richard's Almanack: "God helps those that help themselves." "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." These are economic maxims, reflecting the self-made man Franklin was, and encouraging all Americans who would serve their own self-interest, first and always. De Tocqueville marvelled at the energies released in a society which admired self-reliance and encouraged economic adventure; where to join the land-owning class required less capital than willingness to move West; and where the sum of individual self-seeking was rapidly making America a world power in trade. He considered the pursuit of economic well-being compatible with a life of Christian faith and public service, and he did not think that the hard-working, frontier Americans of 1830 would ever resemble aristocrats with too much wealth and too few obligations. He observed that in America one generation's hard-won fortune seldom outlasted the next, and he approved of division of inheritance equally among all children. He thought that economic productivity required public order and both contributed to and benefitted from good morals. In America in 1830 the Puritan work ethic, lauded by unPuritanical Benjamin Franklin, was thriving. Nevertheless, de Tocqueville reproached equality of economic opportunity for fostering "a kind of virtuous materialism . . . which would not corrupt, but enervate, the soul and noiselessly unbend its springs of action." He, and Franklin, knew that the soul of democracy and the soul of man were inseparable, and changeable.

The founding principles of American democracy - the Christian religion, political equality coupled with participatory self-government, and utilitarian individualism in economic life - manifest themselves in every activity observed by de Tocqueville. (His entire second volume is a speculative inquiry into how democracy shapes family life, education, language, employee relations, art, literature, ambition, the use of the armed forces and much else. This inquiry purports to rely on observed behaviour, but de Tocqueville is often rationalizing conclusions based on his understanding of human nature and his zeal to show republican government as a model for the future. Still, his insights are penetrating.) Two areas especially intrigued him: America's fondness for voluntary associations, and the role of the judiciary.

De Tocqueville observed that citizens in America were taught self-reliance from the cradle and, with it, mistrust of formally constituted authority. Far from leading to rampant individualism, however, this teaching seemed to promote voluntary associations, some ad hoc and many for lasting purposes, formed to accomplish a social task or fill a community need without asking government to intervene. Examples noted by de Tocqueville are familiar: subscription charity balls, associations for public safety, temperance leagues, clubs for like-minded businessmen, etc. These civil associations trained their members in the political skills of participation, rational debate, organization and consensus building and became small bases of power for civic-minded leaders entering formal political life. De Tocqueville was particularly interested in the phenomenon of political parties. Writer though he was, he believed in the primacy of the spoken word, uttered in face-to-face debate before a critical audience. Political parties provided the forum for such debate, sharpening the issues and stating positions with "warmth and energy." In both these functions he considered them superior to the press, whose freedom he also greatly valued. Unlimited liberty of association for political purposes was to him "less necessary and more dangerous" than freedom of the press, because nations fearful of rebellion have often limited it without suppressing all publications, but he found compensating advantages in unrestrained association. First, open, lawful associations for political purposes make secret societies unnecessary. As he put it, "In America there are factions but no conspiracies." And, second, well-associated minorities are able, although out of political power, to oppose their whole moral authority to the dangerous omnipotence of the majority. De Tocqueville saw that local associations, including those of minorities, would combine and enlarge their influence through election of delegates to national assemblies, constituting a "government within the government" and protecting those out of office from political annihilation. "The right of association was imported from England and has always existed in America . . . incorporated with the manners and customs of the people . . . a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority."

The role of the judiciary in America struck de Tocqueville as highly original, compared to England and France, and far more politically powerful. Why? He pointed out the usual limits on the exercise of judicial authority: a case involving an actual dispute requiring resolution must arise before the judge can act; the case must be brought to the judge - the court does not go out on its own seeking criminals to try, wrongs to redress or statutes to interpret; and the decision reached under the judge's supervision must address the particular point at issue in the case and may not decide other general considerations unassociated with the facts and applicable law, tempting though that might be. These limitations also existed in most other countries and distinguished judges from legislators. However, in America judges could and did invalidate laws if they conflicted with the Constitution, whose principles could be changed by the people but whose application to specific statutes was the function of the judiciary. France's constitution, which de Tocqueville considered immutable, could not be interpreted by the judiciary because to interpret it would be to change it - a clumsy concept at best. England, having no written constitution, had, in effect, a parliament which developed both constitutional principles and statutory law; with both functions performed by the same body, all laws were presumed to be constitutional, and the courts had no need to apply constitutional interpretation to any statute. De Tocqueville concluded: "The political power which the Americans have entrusted to their courts of justice is therefore immense, but the evils of this power are considerably diminished by the impossibility of attacking the laws . . . on the ground of theoretical generalities. . . . by leaving it to private interest to censure the law, and by intimately uniting the trial of the law with the trial of an individual, legislation is protected from wanton assaults and from the daily aggressions of party spirit. The errors of the legislator are exposed only to meet a real want. . . . Within these limits the power vested in the American courts of justice of pronouncing a statute to be unconstitutional forms one of the most powerful barriers that have ever been devised against the tyranny of political assemblies."

What has changed since de Tocqueville wrote in the 1830s? Have our growth into fifty states, our hundreds of millions of citizens, our altered balance of power between central and local government and our no longer isolationist role in the community of nations undermined the foundationsof our democracy? Have we lost much of our common heritage, our common language, our common education (de Tocqueville found the bible and the plays of Shakespeare in frontier cabins, well thumbed), our respect for religious and moral teaching, our willingness to serve local government (or even to participate in voluntary associations), our self reliance, our generosity which places societal needs above our private accumulation of wealth, and our faith in the altruism and restraint of our legal system? As individuals have our mores, our habits of the heart, turned inward and away from commitment to community?

"I celebrate myself," the opening line of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself, stated an emphasis uncongenial to de Tocqueville's American heroes. Leaves of Grass, published one generation after Democracy in America, sounded a new rebellion, against rootedness and duty, and in the name of individual freedom. "Afoot and lighthearted, I take to the open road, . . . leading wherever I choose." Whitman defied social and sexual conventions and taught the ultimate value of self exploration and self expression. Sociologists have called this "expressive individualism" - and it is surely both - but the question then is, "Where does the individual find moral values?" Is being good no more than feeling good? How can an individual be sure of his true feelings? Or desires? Is subjectivity the final answer?

Gail Sheehy, one hundred years after Whitman, picks up his theme in Passages: "Whatever counterfeit safety we hold from overinvestments in people and institutions must be given up. The inner custodian must be unseated from the controls. No foreign power can direct our journey from now on. It is for each of us to find a course that is valid by our own reckoning." Sheehy was prescribing for midlife, when a correction in course may be considered, but it is no secret to Californians that youth has found her advice acceptable earlier.

Some of this same preoccupation with self may underly our society's remarkable enthusiasm for psychologic studies and psychotherapy in the past half century. We have told each other that none of us can help another until he understands his own psyche and repairs its defects. Therefore "know thyself" has become a directive capable of delaying the individual's participation in and commitment to any group or cause. As though self discovery could proceed without interaction with others, especially those with whom we disagree!

De Tocqueville ascribed political and economic causes as well to this kind of individualism. He imagined citizens who, satisfied with their own educational and economic achievements, and recognizing their own relative powerlessness in an egalitarian society, conclude that "they owe nothing to any man; they expect nothing from any man." "They acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands. Thus . . . does democracy make every man forget his ancestors . . . and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart." De Tocqueville pronounced this individualism erroneous, "originating as much in deficiencies of mind as in perversity of heart."

Volumes have been written addressing the individual in conflict with society. Most fiction concerns this, and critics now lament the fact that in a permissive, individualistic society, the novel suffers because the conflict lacks a meaningful social order against which the protagonist may rail and meet his fate. An excellent work of non-fiction, Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life, by Bellah and others, was the inspiration for this essay. This 1985 best seller for the University of California Press is to be the text for a 1986 seminar being planned by Dean Alan Jones of Grace Cathedral. Let us see how Bellah and his co-authors examine the question "What has happened in America since de Tocqueville?"

Religion has reflected the political spectrum, with even greater variety! De Tocqueville would not be surprised, were he alive today. We see the extremes of ways of believing in God: a wholly personal Deity, perhaps a mystical elaboration of self in a Far Eastern religious mode, at one end, and a literal or fundamental faith at the other, viewing God as external, a law giver, concerned with correcting and preventing the evil that men do. The first is individualistic in its emphasis on inner freedom. The second seeks authority and injunctions. The first presupposes a deeply benevolent best self, at harmony with the nature of God and of other men. The second is less trusting and more willing to sacrifice freedom for certain guides to conduct. Each seeks relief from the complexity of our modern world where black and white merge quickly into grey and choice of action is seldom clearly right or wrong. Neither is necessarily inhibiting or liberating. The liberal young mystic may be unable to function, and the regimented sectarian may be highly productive in his freedom from uncertainty. Each risks tyranny, as we learn repeatedly from such sects as those of Jonestown and Rajneeshpuram.

Pursuing de Tocqueville, however, we need to know whether religion still supports our democracy. The religious center has tried to maintain this role, as what Bellah calls "communities of memory", combining the transmission of tradition and biblical teaching with reexamination of the needs of modern men and women. The Reverend Spencer Rice of this Episcopal Diocese, prior to his call to the pulpit of Trinity Church, Boston, dealt with psychology by appropriating it for the church. Nothing important in Freud or Jung was not anticipated in the New Testament - an attractive tautology since many of the great psychiatrists' insights derived from myth, belief and literature through history. John Winthrop might have been appalled, but centrist churches may be restating his message. Individual morality can be passed from generation to generation through a church community, and this is essential for an ethical, democratic society. Martin Luther King Jr.'s contributions reassure us of the power of this influence, uniting the moral authority of Christianity with political action in the cause of a more just social order.

The importance of the religious center is in its corporate continuity and its refusal to oversimplify the commitment of the individual, not only to God or to the church, but also to the responsibilities of daily life in our republic. Extreme sects and mystics tend to fail their children. The success of the more centrist churches of America in accomplishing their traditional mission is, unfortunately, unclear. Comparable statistics over one hundred fifty years are not available. American churches are more pluralistic than ever. Fundamentalism is growing most rapidly. How many of our own children believe, attend church or conceive of their own morality in Christian terms? Perhaps when they cease to be children and become parents, they will commit to a religious association, which will be sufficiently flexible to welcome them. Without association, they may not go beyond a religious form of Whitman's expressive individualism, uncertain in moral content and of limited value to their fellow citizens.

The participation of modern Americans in self government is more complicated to analyze than their religious observance because government has changed far more since 1830 than have the churches. From being small and rural, our society has become vast and industrialized. Government has more than kept pace, and that mistrust of formal authority which de Tocqueville noted has increased and has made "politics" a frequent term of disparagement. Politics may mean at least three very different kinds of processes: first, small town, face-to-face consensus building among neighbors, as at the Dartmouth, Massachusetts, town meeting; second, negotiated accommodations of conflicting interests in the public sector, sometimes open - as in legislatures, often partly concealed - as in administrative hearings, where unlike groups of citizens struggle to use legalistic procedures in unequal conflict; and, third, statesmanlike development of national purpose, usually by a strong political executive, key advisors and an assortment of senior legislators.

The individual citizen may hope to play a role in local politics; he may despair of having any impact on state or federal government or their extensive bureaucracies unless he is a professional - a lawyer, lobbyist or consultant - whose job it is to do exactly that, or a close friend of a powerful legislator or official; and, in regard to statesmanship, he can usually only exercise his vote or write letters to the paper. But the individual too has changed. The costs of seeking elective office, both personal and financial, are more likely to overwhelm his resources and those of his family and friends. He may no longer be a true citizen, even of a local community. His residence may only be his bedroom community; he may work in the city. Or he may travel irregularly and often. Or his company may move him every few years. Or the nature of his work may either compel him to, or prohibit him from doing, pro bono work, always with his company's interests paramount, not his own. In any case his competitive, career-minded climb up the socioeconomic ladder often imposes its own restrictions, less applicable were he the individual tradesman or farmer of de Tocqueville's time. He is likely to feel out of touch with the large forces controlling his destiny and, if he is not wholly satisfied with individualism, he may yearn ineffectively for a satisfying role in local community affairs.

De Tocqueville saw the gulf between individuals and the government and wanted it filled with active citizen participation in anything which would elicit commitment, promote the public good and limit administrative and legislative despotism. There remain many such activities and opportunities. Our local communities still depend on volunteers, many of them able women, who are interested in leading and serving their fellow citizens. However, the larger the community, and the less rooted its residents, the harder it is to find citizens willing to step forward who have some chance of being effective and whose motives are in good part altruistic.

Government goes on. Politicians and volunteers are to be found. We are all responsible for their quality, but significant difficulties cause our indifference and inaction. Amazing things still happen - students and professors end a war in Asia; civil rights are reignited under eloquent leadership; a generation of young people turns away from Franklin's utilitarian individualism to found communes and attempt to share both economic gain and caring. But the danger, arising from citizen indifference, which de Tocqueville feared also haunts us: groups of citizens go to legislatures and to central authority, including our courts, for a lengthening list of economic wants, which they demand as rights and entitlements, because the local processes for discussion and solution are absent or unavailing, and their fellow citizens are unconcerned. A current case in point is the refusal of counties to support general taxes to provide medical care for the poor.

We can each add to the catalogue of changes in our society since 1830, and attempt to explain our losses. Has not man always been corruptible, torn between selfishness and commitment, callousness and caring, doing nothing and doing good? Isn't this what MacIntyre means when he says that vital traditions embody continuities of conflict? Do we not still fight the good fight? We have proved de Tocqueville wrong about secession from the Union, our ability to abolish slavery and even the importance of geographical isolation to the survival of our democracy. We have become gigantic beyond prediction, but communication nationwide is instant and travel between oceans swifter than the 1830s journey from Washington to Philadelphia. Democracy is still ours, and has spread abroad. True, but:

Look at television, instrument of our instant communication. Image becomes important beyond content or character. Senator Gary Hart has written a serious book, A New Democracy. The home video creator of the Jane Fonda Workout series, 33 year old Californian Stuart Karl, has plans for this volume: "How many housewives in Oshkosh really have time to sit down and read . . ? But they do have time to plug in a videocassette . . . that very graphically shows them. . . It is in a format that is more enjoyable to "read"." TV, the most prominent force in popular culture abbreviates, oversimplifies, discourages analysis, and, deliberately avoiding any coherent ideology or message, casts doubt on everything. It relishes news based on the failures of people and institutions. We fear the influence of the world it represents with so little moral comment. As Todd Gitlin has written: " . . . prime time gives us people preoccupied with personal ambition . . . The happiness they long for is private, not public. . . Commercials convey the idea that human aspirations for liberty, pleasure, accomplishment and status can be fulfilled in the realm of consumption." And this bland account does not do justice to TV heroes like J. R. Ewing of Dallas - "successful," power hungry, rich from deals of dubious legality, and dedicated to manipulating family and acquaintances rather than committing to them or to community.

Examine education. Public instruction has come a long way since McGuffey's readers, with diminishing results. Teachers strike regularly against impecunious school boards, leaving, for example, Oakland students to ask, "When will you go to work to raise our test scores as energetically as your incomes?" Which great work of literature have all students read? Not the Greeks. Not the bible. Shakespeare? No longer. Minorities demand separate teaching in languages which we will never have in common as a nation. Our needs to specialize have encouraged us to give up the effort to comprehend our natures, our universe and our place in history.

Observe our legal system. We sue each other more than any nation in the world, to establish fault retrospectively and make our society safe for the individual who suffers misfortune, which must never be his to bear alone. Or we see judges determined to block the will of the legislature by using, not the Constitution, but the technicalities of legal process to prevent an undesired outcome. Or jurists who assume authority for themselves when legislatures and civil authorities have failed to act. The limitation that a court can only proceed when a citizen brings a case before it, and can then only decide that case, is less of an impediment than de Tocqueville, himself a magistrate, foresaw. Lawyers are imaginative when courts are receptive.

Consider once more our legislatures, particularly Congress. Our national legislators appear so mired in a morass of special interests among their constituents that they have lost their ability to formulate national goals and assign priorities, especially in spending Federal taxes. Nor will they give the President the line item veto which state governors greatly value. The resulting muddle is an ironic far cry from de Tocqueville's feared tyranny of the majority. Paralysis has prevented tyranny, and the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law may be no more than an unconstitutional gesture to conceal irresponsibility.

And, finally, meet our young people. Many do not know about the 1930s, let alone the 1830s. The poor, black, teenage girls have babies and condemn themselves to a frustrated life on Aid for Dependent Children. Talented children of our prosperous middle class conclude that big business is evil and destructive to its workers, and that they do not have to find regular employment to plan for the future. They opt for food stamps, unemployment insurance and the "independence" of part time jobs or artistic hobbies. No room there for the baggage of responsibility to other individuals or to community. Far worse, individualism in some of the young has become sociopathic. Miami Vice, that TV favorite, records the life and death of an attractive waif, an orphan girl, devoid of all moral sense and given to murder and arson. She is an extreme. Subtract the murder and arson and there are too many others, across a spectrum from flower child to drug runner for the mafia. Where did they learn to be this way, or fail to learn not to be?

De Tocqueville examined virtue in the old world and in America and observed that Americans did not discuss self-sacrifice as noble in itself. Instead, they rediscovered the principle of self-interest rightly understood. De Tocqueville quotes Montaigne with approval: "Were I not to follow the straight road for its straightness, I should follow it for having found by experience that in the end it is commonly the happiest and most useful track." De Tocqueville found that Americans' "enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist one another and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state." He admired this utilitarian view as "not lofty . . . but clear and sure," and suggested that Americans did not give themselves enough credit for "those disinterested and spontaneous impulses that are natural to man." He noted several reasons for self-interest rightly understood: first, it is in accord with Christian belief in God, with the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and with ultimate individual salvation, to value one's neighbor as oneself; second, personal freedom to pursue self-interest depends upon public tranquility which in turn requires citizen participation in the governance of a just society, to avoid despotism and the overthrow of civil rights; and, third, it is the historical lesson, which educated men may learn, that personal interest will fail if it is too long pursued at the expense of the well being of too many others. De Tocqueville urged education for "freedom, public peace and social order" because he did not think that this American principle of self-interest was self evident. Yet he was not arguing for a status quo; he feared, rather, that an excess emphasis on order could result in any innovative social improvement being regarded as a stepping stone to revolution. His call was for the longer term, for a constant willingness to seek social change when necessary, in the interests of our future selves and of our descendants.

This is also the note on which Bellah's Habits of the Heart concludes, although he brings to self-interest rightly understood a deeper psychological analysis.

We cannot accept for our society the description which Livy wrote of ancient Rome: "We have reached the point where we cannot bear either our vices or their cure." We can change our social ecology through discussion and education. We can recognize that individuals "need the nurture of groups that carry a moral tradition reinforcing their own aspirations." We can make explicit our understanding of what we have and must retain in common. We can help young people to seek meaning at work through vocations which have a component of satisfying service to others. We can teach them that they need not choose in their college courses between tradition and technique; their personal development and happiness depend on their understanding of commitment to their larger society. We can break out of our "life style enclaves," with their encircling yellow brick walls, and bridge the gap between "a public world of competitive striving and a private world supposed to provide the meaning and love" that are lacking elsewhere. "Our problems today are not just political. They are moral and have to do with the meaning of life."

Bellah's peroration is moving: "Perhaps the truth lies in what most of the world outside the modern West has always believed, namely that there are practices of life, good in themselves, that are inherently fulfilling. Perhaps work that is intrinsically rewarding is better for human beings than work that is only extrinsically rewarded. Perhaps enduring commitment to those we love and civic friendship toward our fellow citizens are preferable to restless competition and anxious self defense. Perhaps common worship, in which we express our gratitude and wonder in the face of the mystery of being itself, is the most important thing of all."

In closing, we can note a local tradition supportive of de Tocqueville's ideals: our voluntary association, this Chit Chat Club. We are lawyers, judges, businessmen, scientists, clerics, educators, writers and physicians. We exist to teach one another in open discussion before our friendly but critical peers. We participate in our democracy, serve its courts, shape its legislation, seek its elective offices and explain its needs to others. Our communities have grown too large for town meetings, but, again, de Tocqueville would approve.

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