

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, JOHN STUART MILL AND THOMAS CARLYLE ON DEMOCRACY

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**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine and compare the thought of Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle on modern democracy. Throughout their works, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle showed a profound engagement with the phenomenon of democracy in their era. It was the crux around which their wider reflections on the period revolved. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle located democracy's causes deep in history. They defined its contours broadly and contextualized it within ancient and modern notions of democracy. Each approached democracy with a significant degree of scepticism and outlined its negative consequences for their contemporaries. But, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle also offered solutions to the problems they saw in the modern democratic world, many of which were novel. The present thesis suggests that in these areas there exists a profound similarity between the ideas of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. It has become commonplace to compare the thought of Tocqueville and Mill. Equally, it has become just as commonplace to draw a sharp division between the ideas of Tocqueville and Mill, on the one hand, and Carlyle, on the other. However, the similarities between their respective conceptions of democracy, its causes, problems and the solutions these men offered suggest that such a division could be arbitrary and, consequently, allow us to reassess the intellectual relationship of these three men.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations have been used in the footnotes of this thesis in order to make the source of citations clearer than it would otherwise be.

CW followed by the volume number in roman numerals refers to *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Those that have been cited are listed below.

Volume I - Autobiography and Literary Essays.

Volume II - The Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy (Books I-II).

Volume III - Principles of Political Economy Part II.

Volume IV - Essays on Economics and Society Part I.

Volume VIII - A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive Part II.

Volume X - Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society.

Volume XI - Essays on Philosophy and the Classics.

Volume XII - The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848 Part I.

Volume XIII - The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848 Part II.

Volume XIV - The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill 1849-1873 Part I.

Volume XV - The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill 1849-1873 Part II.

Volume XVIII - Essays on Politics and Society Part I.

Volume XIX - Essays on Politics and Society Part 2.

Volume XX - Essays on French History and Historians.

Volume XXII - Newspaper Writings December 1822 - July 1831 Part I.

Volume XXV - Newspaper Writings December 1847 - July 1873 Part IV.

CE followed by the volume number in roman numerals refers to The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes Centenary Edition. Those that have been cited are listed below.

Volume VI Cromwell's Letters and Speeches I.

Volume XX Latter-Day Pamphlets.

Volume XXVII Critical and Miscellaneous Essays II.

Volume XXVIII Critical and Miscellaneous Essays III.

Volume XXIX Critical and Miscellaneous Essays IV.

Carlyle Letters Online followed by a web address refers to letters from *The Carlyle Letters Online*, an online collection of the collected letters on Thomas Carlyle and his wife Jane Welsh Carlyle. The links cited were correct as of the 5th May 2015.

INTRODUCTION

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) lie at the root of modern British attempts to demarcate the contours of modern democracy. Numerous contemporary thinkers were grappling with the emergence of democracy in Western Europe and the United States. However, influential thinkers in the sphere of British political thought reflected far less deeply on the historical significance and ethical foundations of democracy prior to the intervention of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Formerly, the idea of democracy had been little more than a rallying cry – a banner behind which radicals of all shapes and sizes stood arrayed against a range of reactionary and conservative forces. Democracy was a little more than a rhetorical device that was poorly defined.

Traditionally, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle have been separated and understood through the prism of different political traditions. To a large extent, this division is just. On many political and social issues, they held opposing views. Even Tocqueville and Mill, two figures that it has become commonplace to compare and, almost, unite intellectually, disagreed on many areas of political and social practice. However, when considered in the light of the ideas each held about democracy this division seems, to a large extent, to be arbitrary. These men shared a singular and highly similar understanding of democracy, its meaning, history and problems. Moreover, although they did not suggest similar measures about how to solve the difficulties presented by the onset of democracy, their ideas on this subject were often grounded on similar principles. Fundamentally, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were united in their analysis of democracy and this marks them out and connects them together.

The novelty of these men was to place the idea of democracy in a richer ethical context. In its broadest terms, the present thesis is an account of the efforts these men made to comprehend the birth of the modern democracy, its meaning and its consequences. It is, therefore, an attempt to understand how they re-imagined democracy and gave it a fuller ethical identity, which incorporated diverse historical and contemporary strands of thought.

This was particularly significant in the British context, where ideas about democracy were much less sophisticated than those that were circulating in continental European spheres. This thesis demonstrates the extent to which British thinkers benefitted from engagement with continental European ideas about democracy. The impact of these ideas, as the choice of Mill and Carlyle shows, diffused throughout different British political traditions. This has not been sufficiently recognized in the existing literature. In comparing Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, we can start to see ideas about democracy emerge that are characteristically modern and, more significantly for the purposes of the present thesis, we can also understand how continental European notions of democracy exerted an influence over the development of British conceptions of this idea.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle each believed that the modern era was signally democratic. The choice between democracy and some alternative system of politics and society was denied to Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, not to mention their contemporaries. The modern age into which their generation had been born was not isolated from the stream of history. It was squarely placed, according to Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, in the midst of a protean historical sequence at the end of which lay democracy. In fact, these three men saw their era as the *dénouement* of this process. The French Revolution had announced the triumph of democracy, but it was merely the final blow to an antiquated system of politics and society.

The emphasis that their works place on democracy's advent is equalled only by their analysis of it as a phenomenon. Democracy connoted a number of distinct institutions, ideas and means of interaction in the eyes of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Principally, they divided it into two forms – the social and the political. It is through this division that the analysis of democracy in their works proceeds. Unsurprisingly, the separation of the political and social spheres of democracy that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle engineered was also reflected in the criticisms they levelled at it. For, democracy appeared to these men to be neither benign nor entirely desirable. Although the censures Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle aimed at democratic politics and society were made with differing force or intent, they were largely targeted at similar objects. Moreover, their respective criticisms of democracy expose just how ambivalent each was about its arrival.

It is a testament to the energetic intellectualism of the minds of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle that they did not stop there in their reflections on the modern democratic world. They historicized, qualified, and criticized democracy; finally, they philosophized on the solutions to the challenges presented by democracy. That is not to say that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle tried to found a systematic political philosophy. They did not. These men attempted to establish a *political culture* appropriate to the modern era. This separated them from their fellow philosophers in the contemporary period. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were not interested in separating and eulogizing man the individual, social, or transcendental creature. In order to solve the problems presented by the modern democratic world, it was necessary to leverage each of these ontological components. Only in so doing could a desirable political culture be created.

These are the themes that the present thesis addresses. They form the basis of the points of comparison between Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. The first two chapters of this thesis examine the historicism of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. They were all historicist thinkers. Indeed, their understanding of the constraints placed on politics by historical change framed their respective political approaches. It is this that lay at the foundation of their political thought. The first of these chapters assesses the impact of the French Revolution on each man's understanding of democracy: what did each think of it and what influence did it have in the contemporary world? The second chapter outlines the wider historical trajectory each saw as leading to the present. Together, these chapters will examine the course of the modern era and its historical relatives: the world was moving inexorably towards democracy. The conclusion of the second chapter also represents the end of the first section of this work, in which I have outlined how Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle accounted for the birth of the modern world.

The second part of this thesis, which investigates the critical commentary Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle aimed at democracy, commences with a discussion of how each conceived of democracy. This is the subject of the third chapter. What were democracy's contours? How was it related to, not to mention different from, previous notions of democracy? This is followed, in chapters four and five, by a discussion of the criticisms Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle levelled at democracy. These were many and varied, but connected and concrete. They were targeted at democracy's social, political, not to mention psychological, consequences.

The final section of this thesis – on the solutions Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle devised for the challenges posed by modern democracy – addresses the reforms that these men suggested

to the state and society, the importance of religion and, finally, the need for widespread education. It is to these that the three men under discussion here looked to resolve the problems contained within the democratic present. Such solutions were idiosyncratic: they did not place emphasis solely on the institutional structures that would be expected of conventional political theorists. This is interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, it marks them out and connects them together at once; secondly, it shows that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle recognized that institutional matrices were not enough to secure the modern world – a more comprehensive solution was required.

Through their engagement with the history of democracy, its problems and their solutions, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle developed a richer ethical understanding of democracy, which was characteristically different to the democratic ideas of other early nineteenth-century British political theorists. The novelty of their ideas relied heavily on a diverse range of personal intellectual influences. Chief amongst these were wider European currents of political thought, with which the three thinkers under consideration here were highly conversant.

UNDERSTANDING TOCQUEVILLE, MILL AND CARLYLE

In order to understand properly what Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle contributed to the democratic debate, it is important to have some understanding of the intellectual influences that weighed on them, because these necessarily affected their respective political outlooks. Evidently, this can only be a brief outline: it is a subject worthy of three or more independent treatises. However, without an understanding of the broad contours of their thought, the discussion that follows below will be unsatisfying in the extreme. What is more, their

respective backgrounds reveal striking similarities in terms of intellectual stimulation and life experience. This can be explored best chronologically.

Mill was 'raised and educated' in Iain Hampsher-Monk's words, 'to be the champion of the utilitarian philosophy worked out by his father and Jeremy Bentham.'¹ Mill gave a fulsome and, at times, painful account of this in his *Autobiography*. In large measure, his education was liberal enough. He started to learn Greek at the age of three and Latin at eight.² At the point where he began to study the latter, Mill had already read 'a number of Greek prose authors', among whom he recalled 'the whole of Herodotus, and of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Memorials of Socrates*; some of the lives of the philosophers by Diogenes Laertius; part of Lucian, and Isocrates' *Ad Demonicum* and *Ad Nicoclem*.' Mill added to this estimable list in 1813 'the first six dialogues...of Plato, from the *Euthyphron* to the *Theaetetus* inclusive'.³

This was quite a course. And yet, it was supplemented by the works of Enlightenment historians and accounts of heroic individuals.⁴ At twelve, Mill began his study of logic, which was to remain a lifelong pursuit, and only a year later his education turned toward political economy.⁵ Certainly, his youthful instruction was, as Mill attested, 'unusual and remarkable'.⁶ However, it was not in itself Utilitarian. The Ancients, the Moderns and the Enlightenment thinkers in between furnished the young Mill with a vast array of concepts, categories and arguments that remained an influence over him throughout his life.

¹ I. Hampsher-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought: Major Political Thinkers from Hobbes to Marx* (Oxford, 1995), p.339.

² J.S. Mill, *Autobiography* (London, 1989), pp.27-28.

³ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.28.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp.29-30.

⁵ R. Reeves, *John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand* (London, 2008), pp.23-24.

⁶ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.25.

Alongside such rich material, Mill was given a particular moral outlook. 'The Benthamic standard', he wrote in his *Autobiography*, 'of 'the greatest happiness' was that which I had always been taught to apply'.⁷ If eclecticism, perhaps comprehensiveness, was the benchmark against which Mill's intellectual development had been measured, the greatest happiness principle was the criterion that was intended to define his moral outlook. It was, Mill argued, 'the keystone which held together the detached and fragmentary component parts of my knowledge and beliefs.' But, it was more than a mere intellectual frame on which he could hang the diverse elements of his unique upbringing. 'I now had opinions', Mill told his readers, 'a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion'. The moral perspective inculcated by Bentham and his father gave Mill a purpose.⁸

Carlyle was born into a family of Burgher Seceders, a sect that had left the Scottish Free Kirk in 1740. This group was noted for its utter rejection of elite control of clerical appointments, the stress it placed on individual independence, and for the application of a stringent morality to everyday life.⁹ This was supplemented by the instruction he received in classical languages and literature from early life. Aged seven, Carlyle began to learn Latin in private classes with his Burgher Seceder minister.¹⁰ At eleven, Carlyle was sent to Annan Academy, where he continued to learn Latin – at which he was extremely gifted – and also to study 'French, Geography' and 'the Greek alphabet'.¹¹

Alongside these subjects, Carlyle dedicated himself to mathematics, for which he had shown a precocious ability.¹² The elements of Carlyle's education, then, were decidedly liberal in

⁷ Ibid, p.67.

⁸ Ibid, p.68.

⁹ J. Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*(London, 2006), p.3.

¹⁰ S. Heffer, *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1995), p.29.

¹¹ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.6.

¹² Ibid.

expanse and humanist in many of the specifics. Carlyle proceeded to gain a place at Edinburgh University aged fourteen, which was not unusual for Scottish children from backgrounds characterized by limited means.¹³ There, Carlyle ‘embarked upon the standard four-year arts course’, where he took his Greek further before diversifying into mathematics and logic.¹⁴ If his education was not as rigorous as Mill’s, it was almost as extensive.

Tocqueville’s upbringing was equally singular. His aristocratic heritage and the lost era, the *ancien régime*, in which his antecedents had lived was central to the cast of his mind. ‘Tocqueville’s families, paternal and maternal, nobles of the sword and the robe,’ Brogan highlighted, ‘were distinguished in that lost world, and he took a proper pride in their achievements.’¹⁵ Indeed, his aristocratic heritage extended deep into France’s (and Britain’s) history. One of Tocqueville’s earliest ancestors fought for William the Conqueror at the battle of Hastings and another, Malesherbes, famously, though unsuccessfully, defended Louis XVI at the latter’s trial before the revolutionary tribunal.¹⁶ Brogan argued that Tocqueville and his ideas simply ‘cannot be understood’ in the absence of his aristocratic descent.¹⁷ Certainly, Tocqueville was acutely aware of his heritage and felt uncomfortable amongst those who did not share it and its values.¹⁸

Central to those values was the Catholic faith and a commitment to the Bourbon throne. Tocqueville’s family was devout in the Jesuit tradition and Tocqueville imbibed it in his early years.¹⁹ It is all but clear now that his youthful tutor, the much beloved Abbé Le Sueur,

¹³ The Scottish educational system was dramatically different from its English counterpart in this period. Sons of peasants were commonplace at Edinburgh University, which offered an affordable, though still rigorous, educational programme. See Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, pp.31-32.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.32.

¹⁵ H. Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville: Prophet of Democracy in the Age of Revolution* (London, 2006), p.1.

¹⁶ A. Kahan, *Alexis de Tocqueville* (London, 2010), p.4.

¹⁷ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.4.

¹⁸ Kahan, *Tocqueville*, p.3.

¹⁹ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, pp.4-6.

complemented the family's Jesuitism with the Jansenism André Jardin claimed the prelate preferred.²⁰

These early influences on the minds of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle expose the stark differences that existed between them from an early age. However, they also highlight the broad similarities in outlook. Each was raised in an environment that cultivated clear and precise moral standards. Pre-eminent amongst these was independence. The morality to which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were subjected was inculcated religiously and it indefinitely framed their perceptions of politics.

A further similarity between Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle – as we move from childhood to adolescence – was their rejection of the incipient creeds of their youth. Mill's early utilitarianism did not survive. It came under pressure during the now famous years in which he experienced what would today be referred to as a mental breakdown. In the autumn of 1826, Mill found himself in a state of *ennui*. He asked himself a simple, yet pressing, question. Mill recorded this in his *Autobiography*. 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realised', he thought, 'that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' The answer that rushed in on him from all sides was an emphatic 'No!'²¹ This realization spurred Mill to break with the narrow creed of utility and seek out new opinions from diverse sources.

²⁰ A. Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography* (London, 1988), pp.40-42. Brogan challenged the significance Jardin attributed to this. The former argued that it is unclear whether seventeenth-century Jansenist debates would have meant much to the young Tocqueville. See Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.51.

²¹ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.112.

Carlyle devoured the works of Enlightenment thinkers and these destroyed his youthful Christianity. As with so many of Carlyle's contemporaries, it was Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – which he read in twelve days, a volume a day – that was most damaging.²² Fifty years after having read Gibbon's great work, Carlyle told correspondent William Allingham that he had 'studied the Evidences of Christianity for several years, with the greatest desire to be convinced, but in vain. I read Gibbon, and then first clearly saw that Christianity was not true.'²³ This could only have been compounded by his engagement with the works of David Hume and the French classics, which followed his reading of Gibbon.²⁴

Tocqueville's commitment to throne and altar did not survive intact. His Catholicism was the first to fall by the wayside. Tocqueville's education had been carried out at first by the Abbé. When Le Sueur's protégé outgrew his capacity, Tocqueville was transferred to a school in Metz close to his father. In the library of his father's prefectural residence Tocqueville encountered the works of eighteenth-century *philosophes* for the first time. It was a happenstance that changed his life and ideas forever.

Voltaire, Montesquieu, Buffon, Rousseau, Mably and Raynal poured into his mind and destroyed the metaphysical certainties of his youth.²⁵ The crisis that this provoked was long and unparalleled in Tocqueville's life; its remnants were documented in painful letters he wrote in the years immediately prior to his death. Henceforth, he became a Deist; Catholicism was no longer a possibility for him.²⁶

²² Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p.41.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jardin, *Tocqueville*, pp.62-63.

²⁶ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.52.

If Enlightenment ideas were responsible for Tocqueville's alienation from the Catholic Church, contemporary events ruined his attachment to the Bourbon throne. Scholarship has tended to locate Tocqueville's estrangement from monarchism in the events of 1830.²⁷ Certainly, this event was important as a symbol of Tocqueville's disillusionment with the Bourbons, but it was the *dénouement* rather than the *début* of a process that had been progressing in that direction for some time.

The crises experienced by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were deeply painful and remained with them throughout their lives. But, at the same time, these experiences were fundamentally liberating. In search of certainty, each expanded his field of vision and took in the widest possible array of influences.

Hampsher-Monk saw in Lord Macaulay's 'devastating review' of James Mill's *Essay on Government* the primary driver of Mill's reworking of his early creed.²⁸ But, there were other sources of greater significance. First among these were those that can be termed Romantic.²⁹ Mill incorporated poetry into his intellectual diet. He read Wordsworth and Coleridge, among others, and the poetic standpoint evinced by such writers gave Mill a profound interest in individual character. 'The character of individuals', Reeves maintained, 'became as important to Mill as the design of institutions or legislation.' He developed a strong interest in 'internal

²⁷ See Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.127; Jardin, *Tocqueville*, pp.86-87.

²⁸ Hampsher-Monk, *Modern Political Thought*, pp.343-346.

²⁹ Capaldi is the most prominent advocate of this line of thought. In his biography of Mill he claimed that, although the influence of Romanticism over Mill has been acknowledged, 'What is not generally recognized is how pervasive that influence was.' See N. Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge, 2004), p.89. Capaldi proceeded to trace two currents of Romanticism through Mill's thought, both of which were highly influential: 'literary' and 'philosophical'. See Capaldi, *Mill*, pp.89-93. Robert Devigne also emphasized the impact on Romanticism on Mill. Devigne's argument is long and complicated, but the essential point is that Mill embraced Romantic ideas as a counterpart and corrective to the excesses of the empirical outlook he had acquired in his youth from Bentham and his father. This enable Mill to arrive a new conception of liberty that incorporated elements of both. See R. Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism: J.S. Mill's Use of Ancient, Religious, Liberal, and Romantic Dialects* (New Haven, 2006), pp.62-72.

culture'; in other words, he came to consider emotional states and individual feelings important.³⁰

Goethe and other German Romantic thinkers introduced Mill to the notion of *Bildung* or self-creation, which showed Mill the significance of individual autonomy.³¹ From the Saint-Simonians and Auguste Comte, Mill derived a new perspective on the philosophy of history and its importance, which resulted in his rejection of the naïve universalism of utilitarian philosophy.³² Skorupski saw in Mill's interaction with such Romantic theorists the foundation of his concern with human development. These thinkers 'affirmed the teleological criterion of human flourishing' that Mill adopted. This novel *telos* resulted from 'a romantic hellenism which owed most to German romantic philosophy.'³³ The Romantic outlook emphasized 'the historicity of human nature and morality', Skorupski continued, and it focused on 'developing and empowering human beings.'³⁴

Alongside other voices, the Romantic characters that populated Mill's turn away from Benthamism introduced conservative reflections on contemporary issues, such as democracy, into his thinking. Reeves demonstrated the extent to which Carlyle, Coleridge and Tocqueville alienated Mill from his early Benthamism and led him to reflect on many of the goals derived

³⁰ Reeves, *Mill*, p.65.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.70.

³² *Ibid*, pp.75-76. Reeves failed to mention the impact of François Guizot on Mill's thoughts on the philosophy of history. Georgios Varouxakis demonstrated how important Guizot's reflections were for Mill. See G. Varouxakis, 'Guizot's Historical Works and J.S. Mill's Reception of Tocqueville', in *History of Political Thought*, Vol.XX, No.2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 292-312. Ceri Crossley showed how Guizot was intimately related to the Romantic tradition and, thus, his influence is yet another Romantic current that flowed through Mill's most dramatically revisionist period. See C. Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet* (London, 1993), pp.71-104.

³³ J. Skorupski, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (Cambridge, 1998) p.23.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.23-24. Skorupski argued that it is this perspective that lay at the root of Mill's anxiety about modern democracy. According to the Romantic Hellenic ideal 'the cultivation of moral freedom requires civil and political liberty, and the cultivation of spontaneity requires tolerance of diversity...If democracy provides these conditions and gives rise to a society of developed human beings, it is good.' See Skorupski, 'Introduction', p.24. As I will show below, Mill was seriously concerned about democracy's potential to provide such an atmosphere.

from it, particularly his commitment to democracy.³⁵ Nicholas Capaldi made a similar argument in his biography of Mill, but limited the so-called conservative voices that were important in this regard to Carlyle and Coleridge (Capaldi identified others, but they did not exert the impact of the two he emphasized).³⁶

However, Capaldi was eager to stress his view that 'Mill never was or became a conservative, but he was influenced by conservative thinkers.'³⁷ From Carlyle, Capaldi contended, Mill learned 'that real change comes through changes in human self-consciousness and not by engineering new types of government.'³⁸ From Coleridge, Capaldi argued that 'Mill accepted the Romantic critique of the Enlightenment Project, especially the critique of the latter's reductive and atomistic conception of human nature.' Individuals had to be viewed in their cultural and historical context and not conceived of abstractly.³⁹

Carlyle developed a fascination with continental European thought. He was impressed by contemporary French scholarship on mathematics and natural philosophy.⁴⁰ He developed an interest in the Saint-Simonians and carried out an effulgent correspondence with some of Saint-Simon's disciples. Carlyle's interaction with Saint-Simonian ideas reinforced the

³⁵ Reeves, *Mill*, pp.106-128. According to Reeves, Carlyle was also important in convincing Mill 'of the importance of robust, moral individuals in the shaping of society.' See Reeves, *Mill*, p.121. For, despite Reeves' utter misreading of Carlyle and his outlook, he was correct to claim that Carlyle was principally interested in 'improving the inner lives and strength of character of individuals.' See Reeves, *Mill*, p.123.

³⁶ Capaldi, *Mill*, pp.93-101.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.117.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.94.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.100. In regard to human nature, Mill addressed a further problem that he felt could be resolved through a synergy between Romantic and Enlightenment currents of thought. Devigne wrote powerfully about this and showed its modern relevance. 'Mill', Devigne argued, 'is challenging a dichotomy, present to this day in contemporary political theory, between Hobbes, Locke, and empiricism's "interests" and Kant's moral idealism's "autonomy." To the former, freedom is self-interested activities and has neither a higher or lower content nor a direct relation to the public good, but to the latter, autonomy is a higher form of freedom and it centers on what we do for the universal good and not for ourselves.' See Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism*, p.72.

⁴⁰ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.9.

historical notions he had imbibed from another source, German Romanticism, and furthered his sense of the necessity of some sort of sustainable religious belief in the modern world.⁴¹

But, it was German Romanticism that really caught his attention. Like many of his generation, this was kindled by his reading of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*.⁴² A great deal of work has been done on Carlyle's relationship with German Romantic thinkers.⁴³ Their influence over him was deep and multifaceted. Broadly, its influence has been characterized well by Elizabeth Vida and Simon Heffer. For Carlyle, Vida claimed, 'German Romanticism issued forth from Goethe's and Schiller's efforts to challenge rationalistic tendencies of the Enlightenment'.⁴⁴

Heffer's account accords with and extends this judgment. 'The German's he [Carlyle] read', Heffer argued, 'confirmed for him the concepts of work and duty, familiar from his Calvinist upbringing, as man's chief aim.'⁴⁵ Carlyle could no longer accept these lessons from Calvinism, because his youthful religiosity had been challenged by the expansiveness of his learning. Much like Mill and Tocqueville, Carlyle's crisis destroyed his childhood creed.⁴⁶ The Germans were useful to Carlyle's intellectual development in another sense: 'They repudiated

⁴¹ For more information on this see H. Shine, *Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians: The Concept of Historical Periodicity* (Baltimore, 1941).

⁴² Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p.48.

⁴³ See C.F. Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven, 1934) and E.M. Vida, *Romantic Affinities: German Authors and Carlyle: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Toronto, 1993).

⁴⁴ Vida, *Romantic Affinities*, p.3.

⁴⁵ Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p.53.

⁴⁶ Carlyle described his feelings at this moment in his semi-autobiographical work *Sartor Resartus*. 'To me', Carlyle agonized, 'the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.' T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford, 2008), p.127. Heffer described Carlyle's religious beliefs in the immediate aftermath of his reading of Gibbon thus: 'He simply could not believe what he read in the Bible. God was plausible; the Resurrection, miracles, and other myths and legends were not...He retained the simple Calvinist view of God as a force commanding duty, with man bound to perform duty according to his station'. See Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p.43.

the shallow values of sensualism and self-indulgence of the eighteenth century that had so disgusted Carlyle.⁴⁷

In the 1820s, Tocqueville studied the law and started to read more widely than he had done previously. He read Adolphe Thiers' history of the Revolution, which he detested.⁴⁸ Next, Tocqueville discovered François Guizot. Guizot was particularly important for the perspective on history Tocqueville derived from the former's *Leçons* – lectures given over the course of a number of years on French and European history. Guizot's perspective on history and his historical method owed much to Romanticism and Tocqueville acquired both to a very large degree.⁴⁹

Equally significantly, Tocqueville's discovery of Guizot inducted him into what Larry Siedentop labelled the 'Great Debate' that was taking place in liberal circles throughout the 1820s.⁵⁰ Roger Soltau unpacked its contents for his readers. Scholars like Guizot were concerned with the nature of sovereignty and the imposition of equality before the law. They were suspicious of universal suffrage, yet eager to ensure that barriers existed to the exercise of executive power. Their legalism was pronounced and the emphasis they placed on well-structured

⁴⁷ Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p.53.

⁴⁸ Kahan, *Tocqueville*, pp.6-7.

⁴⁹ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, pp.90-94. A further influence of Romantic origin that was important to Tocqueville was that of his cousin François-René de Chateaubriand. Brogan asserted that Chateaubriand exerted 'a decisive influence' on Tocqueville. See Brogan, p.11. Brogan suggested that Chateaubriand's influence was decisive in two senses: it defined Tocqueville's writing style and, by his cousin's example, suggested the idea of an American voyage to him. See Brogan, pp.138-140. These are rather imprecise and whimsical suggestions. Jaume has given more concrete examples of how Chateaubriand influenced Tocqueville. Jaume claimed that Chateaubriand's impact on Tocqueville was threefold: he showed his cousin how despotic the French monarchy had been and what administrative power could accomplish through a rationalized despotism; he alerted Tocqueville to the idea that such a despotism could reoccur in the modern world; and he presented Tocqueville with the idea that institutions able to moderate democracy could be adopted, in a modified form, from the aristocratic past. See Jaume, *Tocqueville*, pp.291-292.

⁵⁰ See L. Siedentop, *Tocqueville* (Oxford, 1994), pp.20-40.

institutions prominent.⁵¹ These features of Tocqueville's learning could not abide the sort of monarchy that Charles X attempted to create from the beginning of his reign.

Operating alongside these diverse influences on the ideas of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle was a humanist current. Alan Ryan contended recently that the analysis of humanism and its impact on politics is fraught with difficulty and this is certainly true.⁵² Today, Tzvetan Todorov noted, humanism bears a merely affective connotation. Humanists are simply those who behave humanely toward their fellow creatures or who preach the gospel of individual human dignity.⁵³ Of course, this was also an important feature of early-nineteenth century humanism. But, Kahan provided scholars with a clearer picture of modern humanist values. It is these, Kahan claimed, that underlay Mill's and Tocqueville's political pronouncements.

Mill and Tocqueville, like other contemporary humanists, maintained an interest in the classical heritage, which retained an important place in European thought in general throughout the nineteenth-century. Knowledge of classical languages was the hallmark of an educated individual and an essential feature of a humanist.⁵⁴ An understanding of the events, personages and their thoughts, not to mention the languages of antiquity served as a common European cultural inheritance, which united learned persons from disparate countries.⁵⁵

⁵¹ R. Soltau, *French political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1931), pp.32-50.

⁵² A. Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought From Herodotus to the Present* (London, 2012), p.291.

⁵³ T. Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism* (Oxford, 2002), pp.29-30.

⁵⁴ A. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford, 1992), p.82.

⁵⁵ Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*, p.82.

Mill, as I showed above, certainly possessed this knowledge.⁵⁶ Tocqueville was no different. At the *collège royal* in Metz, Tocqueville studied rhetoric, philosophy, oratory, Latin and Greek. He was introduced to a range of classical authors, such as Horace, Cicero, Demosthenes and Quintilian.⁵⁷ Tocqueville even wrote a prize-winning essay on the progress of the Arts in ancient Greece.⁵⁸ It was an education suffused, Jardin argued, with ‘Ciceronian themes’.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Schleifer found that classical influence remained important for Tocqueville. He consulted Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch, among others, in the interim between the first and second volumes of his work on *Démocratie*.⁶⁰

Carlyle’s outlook was similarly influenced by classical humanist sources, though this remains poorly understood in modern scholarship. He was profoundly influenced by the classical era from his youth onwards. Claims about Carlyle’s humanism have a long provenance. John Robertson labelled Carlyle a modern humanist as long ago as 1908. Here, he was placed alongside the likes of Mill, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Arnold, John Ruskin and Herbert Spencer.⁶¹ Tamara Gosta highlighted the impact of humanism on Carlyle’s political thought recently.⁶² Morrow has also drawn attention to Carlyle’s ‘humanistic’ perspective, particularly in regard to his views on education.⁶³

⁵⁶ A number of works by modern scholars have drawn attention to this feature of Mill’s thought. See Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism*, pp.74-99; Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, pp.18-22; K.N. Demetriou and A. Loizides eds., *John Stuart Mill: A British Socrates* (Basingstoke, 2013).

⁵⁷ Jardin, *Tocqueville*, pp.59-60.

⁵⁸ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.48.

⁵⁹ Jardin, *Tocqueville*, p.60.

⁶⁰ J.T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America Second Edition* (Indianapolis, 2000), p.33.

⁶¹ J.M. Robertson, *Modern Humanists: Sociological Studies of Carlyle, Mill, Emerson, Arnold, Ruskin, and Spencer* (London, 1908).

⁶² See T. Gosta, ‘Thomas Carlyle’s “Real-Phantasmagory”: The Historical Sublime and Humanist Politics in *Past and Present*’, in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 45.1 (Spring, 2012), pp.89-111.

⁶³ Morrow, *Carlyle*, p.100.

Humanism in the contemporary period was more than a shared inheritance of common classical metaphors. It reached far wider than the rationality of the syllogism or the comprehensibility, or otherwise, of the declension. It was neither a simple dialectical device nor a mere mode of inflection. Modern humanists, according to Kahan, recognized that humans had a certain number of inherent, immovable needs, which required fulfilment in order for them to reach their 'highest and fullest expression'.⁶⁴ Humanists in this era bore a perception of human nature that was concerned with enabling advanced individual development. Like humanists of all ages, according to Todorov, those who occupied this era displayed an eminent interest in education.⁶⁵ Anything that threatened individual development was liable to incur the criticism of those situated under the humanist banner. As Kahan pointed out, this was a modification of the Aristotelian humanist tradition, which emphasized the threat posed by corruption to virtue.⁶⁶

The influences outlined above weighed heavily on the conceptions of democracy, its history and its problems that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle generated. They were also important to the solutions to these problems that each man held forth. It is this fascinating mixture that makes both their political thought in general and their views on democracy specifically so powerful. But, these men were not operating in a vacuum; notions about democracy already existed and were being discussed in contemporary Britain. In order to understand just how important these thinkers' ideas were to British notions about democracy, it is necessary to understand the state of contemporary British democratic discourse. Specifically, it is

⁶⁴ Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberals*, p.83.

⁶⁵ Todorov, *Imperfect Garden*, p.38.

⁶⁶ Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberals*, p.84.

necessary to understand what democracy meant to other British political thinkers prior to the interventions of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle.

BRITISH DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE AND TOCQUEVILLE, MILL AND CARLYLE

Perceptions of democracy and what it meant to be democratic shifted markedly throughout the nineteenth century, but the crucial developments in the understanding of this concept took place in the early to middle years of this period. Contemporary notions of what it meant to be *democratic* or what a *democracy* consisted in had been at once both fixed and fluid in eighteenth political thought: fixed in the sense that these words signified a discussion about the ancient world primarily – the Greek city states and the Roman Republic – and fluid to the extent that the recourse to Greek and Roman exemplars did not indicate particular institutions or conventions that were intrinsically democratic.⁶⁷

The inherited associations that the idea of democracy laboured under began to fragment significantly in the opening years of the American Revolution and the intellectual torpor under which democracy had lain was blown away finally with the triumph of revolutionary ideas in France. Though the Greco-Roman heritage was not entirely eclipsed by these events, the ancients' importance as a source of democratic experience declined considerably. Indeed, Innes and Philp argue that 'Once democracy began to be re-imagined in the age of revolutions – in political argument and through political experiment – that heritage [Greco-Roman] fractured, splintering into very different forms'.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ J. Innes & M. Philp, 'Introduction', in *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2013), p.1.

⁶⁸ Innes & Philp, 'Introduction', *Re-imagining Democracy*, p.7.

These three distinct contexts – the ancient, the American revolutionary and the French revolutionary – remained important to the reflections of nineteenth century democratic and anti-democratic thinkers. Significantly, they remained important settings against which new ideas of democracy were defined. In Europe, for example, democracy suffered from the depredations and acts of terror that had been committed by the most zealous French revolutionaries. As a result, for many it connoted little more than ‘insurrectionary movements, mass petitioning and crowd phenomena, as much as it did any particular institutional set-up.’⁶⁹ In turn, this coloured Europeans’ perception of the nascent American democracy. ‘One of the great ironies of transatlantic affairs’, Frank Prochaska maintains, ‘was that the French Revolution, heralded as another republican dawn, tended to discredit America’s political experiment, even among some who had been sympathetic to it.’⁷⁰

However these events impacted on one another, they were, separately and in combination, very important to the process of re-imagining that took place in democratic discourse in the first half of the nineteenth century. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle took part in this debate and interacted with each of the three distinct contexts outlined above. By the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of democracy had crystallized around a broadly shared set of institutional forms and a widely understood mechanism for selecting legislators and governments – universal male suffrage.⁷¹ That is not to say that these positions benefitted from a broad based network of proponents, simply that both democrats and anti-democrats – not to mention all those in between – agreed that these elements were components of a democratic settlement.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.3-4.

⁷⁰ F. Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians on American Democracy: The View From Albion* (Oxford, 2012), p.13

⁷¹ Innes & Philp, ‘Introduction’, *Re-imagining Democracy*, pp.3-4.

Nevertheless, despite thinkers' coagulation around a shared group of basic ideas about what democracy signified, much remained contentious and innovators diverged greatly in their notions about the meaning, importance, longevity and, crucially, desirability or otherwise of democracy. Innes and Philp claim that such differences can be accounted for through reference to 'local circumstances'. Local conditions – 'disputes and power struggles' – lie at the root of the basic differences that appeared between the democratic ideas of particular individuals.⁷² Clearly, local conditions were significant in this process. However, the argument made by Innes and Philp is too parochial; it over-emphasises local circumstances at the expense of transnational conversation and cross-fertilization. The principal events that influenced the development of democratic discourse were not national, but international, events or, in the case of the ancient world, part of a shared European culture. They were discussed widely across Europe and were the subject of cross-border conversations.

The networks of influence and exchange in Europe were well-developed and the conversations and intellectual transfers that took place within them significantly influenced conceptions of democracy, particularly in Britain. This thesis is intended to illustrate such a transfer through reference to a particular network – that of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Mill and Carlyle were signally European in perspective, if British by nationality, and the impact of European events and culture shaped their ideas on a whole range of subjects, including democracy. The comparison of these two British thinkers with Tocqueville, which is the object of this thesis, demonstrates the importance of European currents of thought in the chain of causality that resulted in the transformation of British conceptions of democracy in the period

⁷² Ibid, p.7.

under consideration. For, this thesis will show that the ideas of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle on the subject of democracy were quite different from their British contemporaries.

For example, Jeremy Bentham's conception of democracy was grounded on his view of the moral imperative of a polity: to work towards the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This became the Utilitarian *cri de coeur*. In Bentham's view, only democracy could realise this goal, because it relied on 'a coincidence between the interests of the governors and the interests of all'.⁷³ Bentham's view was supported by his most ardent disciple, James Mill. Both Bentham and Mill regarded the community as a single group, out of which issues a clear and singular will for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This is not the result of 'a dynamically obtained compromise', but of a single, continuing will.⁷⁴

A democracy based on this rationale must continually guard against the rise of *sinister interests*, according to Bentham and Mill, which are sectional interests that are not aligned to the community's will. Given this requirement, Bentham and Mill proposed a democratic system of government that was characterised by annual or triannual elections, publicity of parliamentary activity, parliamentary recall, the refusal of parliamentary seats to place men and the secret ballot.⁷⁵ These measures were intended to prevent the appearance of sinister interests antagonistic to the community as a whole.

James Mill developed the institutional basis of the Utilitarian democratic agenda in his well-known *Essay on Government*. Mill's *Essay* is deeply flawed – a fact that Lord Macaulay took great pleasure in pointing out in an *Edinburgh Review* article.⁷⁶ However, Mill took pains to

⁷³ R.C. Pratt, 'The Benthamite Theory of Democracy, in *Jeremy Bentham: Critical Assessments Volume 3 Law and Politics* (London, 1993), p.562.

⁷⁴ Pratt, pp.562-563.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.563.

⁷⁶ T.B. Macaulay, 'Utilitarian Theory of Government', in *Miscellaneous Writings Volume 1* (Indianapolis, 2011), pp.360-395.

establish the necessity of universal suffrage to the effective promotion of the public interest – though, on the basis of economy, he subsequently curtailed the extent of the suffrage by excluding women, children, working men and all those under the age of forty.⁷⁷ Their interests, he argued, were bound up with those of their husbands, fathers and brothers and, therefore, did not require independent expression.

The measures proposed by Bentham and Mill constituted the Utilitarian understanding of democracy and, by extension, the position that their disciples, the *Philosophic Radicals*, advocated. John Arthur Roebuck, for example, a member of the Philosophic Radical clique, declared in his *Pamphlets for the People* (1835) that ‘if good government is to be hoped for on earth, it must be the off-spring of democracy’.⁷⁸ Roebuck’s assessment of democracy highlights a final point about the Utilitarian notion of democracy that it is important to note. Utilitarians tended to judge democracy unreflectively. Though not entirely unaware of the problems of democracy, they consistently ignored or underplayed them. Utilitarians made no extensive effort to explore such problems.

Utilitarians, or Philosophic Radicals, were by no means the only commentators on democracy in the contemporary period. Britain was changing rapidly as a result of industrial expansion and urbanisation. The movement from a rural-agrarian population to an urban-industrial labour force underpinned the shift in working people’s expectations of their polity. The struggle for the Reform Bill in the early 1830s took place in this context. Much of the debate about the Bill was constitutional and, therefore, as much legal as strictly political. It took place within the discourse of the *mixed constitution*, with its complementary (or competing,

⁷⁷ Ryan, *On Politics*, pp.697-698.

⁷⁸ J. Roebuck, *Pamphlets for the People* (London, 1835), 1: 6-7.

depending on one's perspective) elements of king, lords and commons – the one, the few and the many.⁷⁹ The root of this discourse lay in the events of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and its aftermath.

In this context, democracy was understood to be the popular or elective branch of this constitutional mixture. For those engaged in this debate, democracy encompassed little more than the broad elements of election and a qualified suffrage. The problems identified by commentators on the Reform Bill were expressed in the language of the mixed constitution. These were a world away from the sort of difficulties Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle expected democracy to produce for one simple reason: their understanding of democracy was very different. Proponents of the mixed constitution were concerned about the possibility that an extension of the democratic element in Parliament would disturb the balance between the one, the few and the many. Many placed this in the context of the French Revolution and predicted the destruction of the monarchy and the church as well as widespread confiscation of property.⁸⁰

A further strand of radical thought emerged in the wake of the Reform Act. Many labouring people felt underwhelmed by the scale of enfranchisement granted by this measure and determined to campaign for a set of political rights equivalent to the ones that had been given to those who had been enfranchised. This campaign was formalized into a charter of demands: the *People's Charter*. 'The language of democracy', Innes and Philp claim, 'was central to the utterances of Chartists.'⁸¹ Indeed, their reform programme included measures

⁷⁹ J. Innes, M. Philp & R. Saunders, 'The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s', in *Re-Imagining Democracy*, pp.114-115.

⁸⁰ Innes, Philp, Saunders, 'Democratic Discourse', pp.117-118.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.121.

that were considered to be unquestionably democratic by their contemporaries, such as universal male suffrage, the secret ballot and equal electoral districts.⁸²

The democratic language of Utilitarianism, the mixed constitution and Chartism shares at least one point in common: the notions of democracy specific to each were overwhelmingly institutional. They regarded things like the mechanism of voting, the extent of the electoral franchise and the publicity of political activity as central to the idea of democracy. The primarily procedural understanding of democracy that thinkers in these movements proffered is, of course, perfectly valid. However, it is limited when compared to the notions of democracy found in the works of Mill and Carlyle, which had benefited from exposure to European currents of thought, like those found in the work of Tocqueville. What is also clear is that the contemporaries of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were limited in their understanding of the problems of democracy. Some failed to engage properly with the potential drawbacks of a democratic state, others relied dogmatically on assumptions drawn from outmoded categories of analysis, whilst still others perceived democracy as a universal panacea to the shifting contours of contemporary Britain. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, on the other hand, engaged in a sophisticated, philosophical analysis of the difficulties that a democratic state was likely to encounter. This was grounded on a profound enquiry into the concept of democracy itself.

Within the pantheon of thinkers about democracy, therefore, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle sit at a crossroads in the understanding of what it meant to be a democrat, democratic or to be part of a democracy. Their contribution to political thought was to enrich these ideas through a deeper and more philosophical understanding of their origins and implications. Their ability

⁸² Ibid.

to do so relied on their understanding of European events from the ancient and modern worlds, as well as local movements and ideas. In the case of Mill and Carlyle, the impact of European ideas was crucial to their ability to reconceptualise democracy and apply it to a British context. The comparison with Tocqueville in this thesis illustrates this. This thesis shows, in particular, how the influence of continental European thinking about democracy affected British notions of democracy, through the comparison of Mill and Carlyle with Tocqueville. In so doing, it explores how European democratic currents influenced the development of liberal and conservative strands of democratic thought in Britain.

CHAPTER 1:

REVOLUTION PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

'It is no paradox', Hugh Brogan claimed, 'to say that the greatest event of Tocqueville's life occurred before he was born: the French Revolution'. The actions of the French revolutionaries, Brogan continued, 'decisively influenced almost everything' that Tocqueville achieved.⁸³ Tocqueville was supportive of the goals the men and women of 1789 had pursued. 'He described the old regime as detestable', Kahan argued, 'even though in doing so he risked condemnation from many of his own class and family.'⁸⁴ The Revolution's personal significance to him, a man who had lost a number of family members to the guillotine, was as important to his thought as the national consequences for a France still to recover fully from the wars this event had provoked or the political ramifications it entailed for the European continent as a whole. This Revolution was the first cause around which Tocqueville's entire intellectual life revolved.

For Mill, the Revolution bore a significance mid-way between the personal and the political. He admitted in his *Autobiography* that he had once wanted to transpose 1789 onto an English backdrop. Reading about the events of 1789 and beyond in the early-1820s (he admitted to being unsure when he first did this) offered the young Mill what seemed to be a precedent for the enactment of his political beliefs, which were also his personal creed. He recounted how 'the subject took an immense hold of my feelings' from that moment.⁸⁵ It mixed with his 'juvenile aspirations to the character of a democratic champion.' The 'most transcendent glory' he found himself capable of conceiving at that time was that he might be 'a Girondist

⁸³ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.1.

⁸⁴ Kahan, *Tocqueville*, p.73.

⁸⁵ Mill, *Autobiography*, pp.65-66.

in an English Convention.⁸⁶ The Revolution validated his incipient political ideas and, given his famously partisan upbringing, his childhood.

Carlyle had no desire to play the part of a Scottish Girondin.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the Revolution provided an important means of understanding the present. In fact, it offered the only means of doing so. Carlyle's feelings towards this event were presented much more cogently in a review essay he released in the same year on the subject of his great work, 'Parliamentary History of the French Revolution', than they are in *The French Revolution: A History* itself. Here, he declared that the 'French Revolution' was 'the event of these modern ages'.⁸⁸ It had been a singularly cataclysmic event, the likes of which were rare in history. 'A huge explosion, bursting through all formulas and customs; confounding into wreck and chaos the ordered arrangements of earthly life; blotting-out, one may say, the very firmament and skyey loadstars, - though only for a season. Once in the fifteen-hundred years such a thing was ordained to come.'⁸⁹ In the final essay of his work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle maintained that 'Truly, without the French Revolution, one would not know what to make of an age like this at all.'⁹⁰

Given the importance Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle attributed to the Revolution, it is necessary to know what they understood it to have meant. What had it signified and what relation did bear to the contemporary world? This chapter will explore these questions and show how

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.66.

⁸⁷ Writing to Mill on 9 October 1836, Carlyle told him that 'On the whole I am sick of the *Girondins*. To confess a truth, I find them extremely like our present set of respectable Radical members. There is the same cold clean-washed patronising talk about "the masses" (a word, expressive of a thing, which I greatly hate); the same Formalism, hidebound Pedantry, superficiality, narrowness, barrenness. I find that the Mountain was perfectly under the necessity of flinging such a set of men to the Devil; whither also I doubt not *our* set will go, tho' I hope in a milder manner, our motion not being of that so extremely *rapid* kind.' See <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/9/1/lt-18361009-TC-JSM-01>

⁸⁸ CE XXIX, p.1.

⁸⁹ CE XXIX, p.1.

⁹⁰ T. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley, 1993), p.173.

this event related to the political thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. These men saw in the Revolution an historical caesura. It had changed the face of modern Europe and those who tried to reawaken the political and social structures of the past were misguided. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle demonstrated this through their critique of Edmund Burke's reactionary writings. The Revolution had been a sign that had announced the political and social direction of the modern world. Just what that route looked like will be discussed in the final section of the present chapter.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Tocqueville wrote two tracts on the French Revolution, both histories. The first was an essay for the *London and Westminster Review*, written in 1836 at the request of Mill. The second was the first instalment of what was conceived of as an extensive study of the event, its causes and, undoubtedly, its consequences. Tocqueville never finished this proposed epic; all that remains is the first volume, *L'Ancien régime et la révolution*, and a few chapters, notes and other research materials for a second volume. There are clear differences between the two historical accounts Tocqueville offered his contemporaries. François Furet has examined these in some detail.⁹¹ Nonetheless, Furet was right to contend that his illustrious

⁹¹ F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.140-156. Furet claimed that they were the result of almost twenty years of extensive thought on the French Revolution and Tocqueville's experiences as a politician, which gave him new insights into the events of the previous century. Richard Swedberg has also addressed this, if only briefly, in his 'Introduction to Tocqueville's 'France Before the Revolution', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 2009, Vol. 9 (1), pp.7-9. Crucially, Tocqueville had also discovered Edmund Burke's writings on the events of 1789. For more information on the impact of Burke on Tocqueville's thought see R.T. Gannett, Jr., *Tocqueville Unveiled: The Historian and His Sources for The Old Regime and the Revolution* (Chicago, 2003), p.60.

compatriot's 'general interpretation of the French Revolution' can be glimpsed in the *London and Westminster* piece.⁹²

Tocqueville used the first book of *Ancien Régime* to demonstrate both his novelty and his opinion of the Revolution.⁹³ Contrary to popular opinion the revolutionaries had not aimed at destroying religion, nor had they desired 'to make anarchy into a method' in order to abolish political authority.⁹⁴ Put simply, all they had wanted was to 'abolish the political institutions which for several centuries had reigned unopposed among the majority of European peoples, and which we call feudal institutions.'⁹⁵ Their purpose in this endeavour was to replace these institutions with 'a more uniform and simple social and political order', which was grounded on 'social equality.'⁹⁶

Thus far, the French Revolution fitted neatly into the historical typology that Tocqueville had identified in his work on American democracy.⁹⁷ The men that had made the Revolution wanted to substitute a democratic social state for one that was decidedly aristocratic.

Tocqueville gave this added emphasis:

The Revolution finished off quickly, by a feverish and convulsive effort, without transition, without precautions, without regard for anything, what would have been done anyway, little by little, in the long run. This was its effect.⁹⁸

⁹² Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, p.133.

⁹³ A. de Tocqueville, trans. by A. Kahan, *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume I* (Chicago, 1998), pp.93-107.

⁹⁴ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, p.105.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.106.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

⁹⁷ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.3-32.

⁹⁸ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, p.106.

It signified the sudden end of a social state that was destined to disappear and the precipitous birth of another that could not help but be born.⁹⁹ It announced the coming of democracy in loud, bloody and acrimonious terms, but democracy would have emerged as if by somnambulism had this event not chanced upon the world.

Tocqueville claimed that though the revolutionaries certainly wanted to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the former regime, they 'innovated much less than is generally supposed'.¹⁰⁰ This has come to be known as the 'continuity thesis' in Tocqueville scholarship.¹⁰¹ In Dominic LaCapra's view, Tocqueville argued that 'the Revolution did relatively little of a positive nature in changing basic structures and institutions'.¹⁰² The profound continuity between the modern world and the *ancien régime* accounted for the prolongation of revolution across the rupture of 1789.¹⁰³

Carlyle treated this theme at length in his full scale work on the Revolution. 1789 had been significant of much and he was determined to make his readers understand just what it had truly meant. Towards the end of the first volume Carlyle's account turns toward the philosophical. He asked his readers 'what these two words, *French Revolution*, shall mean'.¹⁰⁴ They still seemed to require final definition, Carlyle thought, because there were 'as many meanings as there are speakers' of those words. Doubtless, revolution implied '*speedier change*' than that which would take place in the absence of such, but this did not in itself

⁹⁹ In this sense Tocqueville's account bears the hallmarks of his reading of Guizot, which also mark the pages of the former's *Démocratie*. For more on this, see A. Craiutu, *Liberalism Under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires* (Oxford, 2003), pp.94-98.

¹⁰⁰ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, p.106.

¹⁰¹ Kahan, *Tocqueville*, p.63.

¹⁰² D. LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (London, 2000), p.84.

¹⁰³ Linda Orr saw in this duality the characteristic features of republican and Restoration historiography. That is to say that here Tocqueville combines the themes of rupture *and* continuity almost seamlessly. But it is the elements of the old regime that caused revolution that remained contiguous with the present. See L. Orr, *Headless History: Nineteenth-Century French Historiography of the Revolution* (New York, 1990), p.100.

¹⁰⁴ T. Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (New York, 2002), p.178.

suggest that it was the arbiter of change. Change, according to Carlyle, was natural to mankind and was unavoidable.¹⁰⁵ What was particular about this rapid change in French – and European – affairs?

‘For ourselves,’ Carlyle argued, ‘we answer that French Revolution means here the open violent Rebellion, and Victory, of disimprisoned Anarchy against corrupt worn-out Authority’.¹⁰⁶ It was ‘a great Phenomenon’, ‘a *transcendental* one’, ‘the crowning Phenomenon of our Modern Time.’ It was a reminder at a time when ‘it seemed as if no Reality any longer existed, but only Phantasms of realities,’ that ‘Man and his Life rest no more on hollowness and a Lie, but on solidity and some kind of Truth.’¹⁰⁷

What truth had it revealed to France and Europe? Which corrupt, distended, dilapidated authority had it rebelled against? Feudalism and aristocracy. The French Revolution represented nothing less than ‘The extreme-unction day of Feudalism!’¹⁰⁸

A superannuated System of Society, decrepit with toils...and with thefts and brawls, named glorious-victories; and with profligacies, sensualities, and on the whole with dotage and senility, - is now to die: and so, with death-throes and birth-throes a new one is to be born!¹⁰⁹

Carlyle’s *French Revolution* was not merely, as Brian Young claimed, the ‘most damningly influential account of the eighteenth century to appear in Victorian Britain’.¹¹⁰ It was an endorsement of the revolutionaries’ attempts to re-centre government and society: to found

¹⁰⁵ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.178.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.179.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.113.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ B. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2007), p.3.

it anew on stable, genuine foundations free from hypocrisy. To quote Vanden Bossche, Carlyle 'believed that the revolutionary overturning of authority had become necessary'.¹¹¹ But, he did not think, like a number of his contemporaries, that it was part 'of a sequence that was independent of human agency'; it attested to the ability of human beings to contribute 'to processes of reformation'.¹¹² The Revolution, then, represented something in particular to the Scotsman: an attempt at individual and collective reform. However, this took a particular direction, which John Burrow highlighted: for Carlyle, 1789 signified 'the advent of Democracy...in the modern world.'¹¹³

There is a very limited literature on Mill's perception of the French Revolution.¹¹⁴ In large part this is the result of the fact that he wrote no extensive treatise on the event itself. Mill's thoughts on the Revolution were expressed in the public domain in reviews of works by other authors on the subject. Mill considered writing a history of the Revolution, though he gave the idea up entirely in the early-1830s. In 1833 he told Carlyle, with regard to the possibility of writing such a history, that 'it is highly probable I shall do it sometime if you do not'.¹¹⁵ But, the difficulties attached to such an endeavour were clear to Mill and these dissuaded him. Mill was put off by the event's continuing political sensitivity. Unless one could speak of

¹¹¹ Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p.1.

¹¹² Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.55.

¹¹³ J. Burrow, *A History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century* (London, 2007), p.377. William Thackeray was convinced of the political nature of Carlyle's *French Revolution*. In his view, Carlyle's work was relevant to Britain's political situation. 'The hottest Radical in England', he maintained, 'may learn by it that there is something more necessary for him even than his mad liberty – the authority, namely, by which he retains his head on his shoulders and his money in his pocket...It teaches (by as strong examples as ever taught anything) to rulers and to ruled alike moderation, and yet there are many who would react the same dire tragedy, and repeat the experiment tried in France so fatally.' See W.M. Thackeray, 'an unsigned review, *The Times*', in Seigel eds., *Carlyle*, p.74.

¹¹⁴ The only real treatment of this event as it applied to Mill's thought is in Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*, pp.20-31.

¹¹⁵ *CW XII*, p.181

Christianity as it was then spoken of in France, the true history of the Revolution would be lost.¹¹⁶

One could not, now, say this openly in England, and be read – at least by the many; yet it is perhaps worth trying. Without saying out one’s whole belief on that point, it is impossible to write about the French Revolution in any way professing to tell the *whole* truth.¹¹⁷

Mill praised Carlyle’s treatise on the event for treating it with exactly the sort of candour he felt it required. As to the question of whether Carlyle was:

Tory, Whig, or Democrat; is he for things as they are, or for things *nearly* as they are; or is he one who thinks that subverting things as they are, and setting up Democracy is the main thing needful? we answer, he is none of all these. We should say that he has appropriated and made part of his own frame of thought, nearly all that is good in all these several modes of thinking.¹¹⁸

This was important, because Mill was disgusted with the inadequacy of contemporary British accounts of the Revolution. Mill vented his frustration in a review of ‘Mignet’s French Revolution’.

There is nothing more disgraceful to Englishmen than their utter ignorance, not only of the causes and effects, but of the very events, the story, of the French revolution. With the majority of them, even of those among them who read and

¹¹⁶ *CW XII*, p.182.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *CW XX* p.157. Mill was not alone in thinking Carlyle’s *French Revolution* a work of genuine impartiality. Thackeray made precisely the same point in his review of Carlyle’s work. ‘He is not a party historian like Scott,’ Thackeray opined, ‘he is as impartial as Thiers, but with a far loftier and nobler impartiality.’ See Thackeray, ‘an unsigned review’, p.70.

think, the conception they have of that great event is all comprehended in a dim but horrible vision of mobs, and massacres, and revolutionary tribunals, and guillotines, and fishwomen, and heads carried on pikes, and *noyades*, and *fusillades*, and one Robespierre, a most sanguinary monster.¹¹⁹

To be understood properly, Mill thought, the Revolution needed to be considered without prejudice. In his major contribution on the events of France's revolutionary epoch – a review of Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon* – the Revolution signified the emergence of democratic nationalism. Despite the difficulties of charting anything clearly amid 'this vast convulsion, the springs by which so much complex machinery was now set in motion, now stopt, now swept away,' this much was clear to his mind. 'Heretofore, when a change of government had been effected by force in an extensive and populous country, the revolution had been made always by, and commonly for, a few'.¹²⁰ But, 1789 had interrupted the typical trajectory of revolutionary movements. It had been 'emphatically the work of the people.'¹²¹

Commenced by the people, carried on by the people, defended by the people with a heroism and self-devotion unexampled in any other period of modern history, at length terminated by the people when they awoke from the frenzy into which the dogged resistance of the privileged classes against the introduction of any form whatever of representative government, had driven them...¹²²

This was the major significance Mill saw in France's break with the *ancien régime*, though this was not all. It had displayed a singular and 'mighty power' that was able to unite the nation

¹¹⁹ CW XX, p.4-5.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.58.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

as a whole under one banner. Its 'force' had converted 'a whole people into heroes,' which had bound the 'entire nation together as one man...not merely to overpower all other forces, but to draw them into its own line, and convert them into auxiliaries to itself.'¹²³ The Revolution had turned the French into a single people. Mill recounted the significance of this event once more in his *Autobiography*.

I learnt with astonishment, that the principles of democracy, then apparently in so insignificant and hopeless a minority everywhere in Europe, had borne all before them in France thirty years earlier, and had been the creed of the nation.¹²⁴

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle saw in the French Revolution the advent of democracy. But each felt it necessary to demonstrate that aristocratic society, as it had been constituted prior to the Revolution, was dead – not to mention how that had happened. Each, in their turn, did just this.

THE CAUSES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Mark Cumming argued that a sense of 'moral inevitability' underscored Carlyle's conception of the Revolution.¹²⁵ Aristocratic corruption had led the nobility away from its duty towards the people and in failing to fulfil its obligations it had become a sham. Whilst this mock aristocracy indulged in Epicurean delights, the people *en masse* suffered countless hardships.

¹²³ Ibid, pp.58-59.

¹²⁴ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.65.

¹²⁵ M. Cumming, "'Such a Figure Drew Priam's Curtains!': Carlyle's Epic History of the Revolution', in J.A.W. Heffernon eds., *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art* (New Haven, 1992), p.68.

Fancy, then, some Five full-grown Millions of such gaunt figures, with their haggard faces (*figures hâves*); in woollen jupes, ask, as in forest-roarings, their washed Upper-Classes, after long unreviewed centuries, virtually this question: how have ye treated us; how have ye taught us, fed us and led us, while we toiled for you? The answer can be read in flames, over the nightly summer sky. *This* is the feeding and leading we have had of you: EMPTINESS, - of pocket, of stomach, of head and of heart.¹²⁶

Revolutionary Sansculottism had grown out of 'Hunger' as much as anything else. Hunger itself was symbolic of 'agitation, contention, disarrangement' – precisely the things that had resulted from the aristocracy's ineptitude and moral decline.¹²⁷ The Revolution 'was a demonstration of divine justice,' Burrow claimed Carlyle thought, 'passed on a corrupt aristocracy which believed in nothing.'¹²⁸ It signified a moment of rebirth, through which a corrupt past could be interred and a brighter future inaugurated. Indeed, the sense of rebirth is never far away in Carlyle's account. He expressed it best through his use of the phoenix metaphor.

Behold the World-Phoenix, in fire-consummation and fire-creation: wide are her fanning wings; loud is her death melody, of battle-thunders and falling towns; skyward lashes the funeral flame, enveloping all things: it is the Death-Birth of a World!¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.191.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.260.

¹²⁸ Burrow, *History of Histories*, p.377.

¹²⁹ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.179.

Carlyle's account is thus riddled with hope. He saw in the Revolution the emergence of a new world free from the trammels of hypocrisy. The Revolution had been *just* in as much as it had cleared away the rotting carcass of an unworkable political and social structure. In this, Burrow maintained, there is something of the 'Old Testament-nurtured Puritan' in Carlyle's epic.¹³⁰

Broadly construed, Mill agreed with Carlyle's analysis of the Revolution's causes. He said as much in the review he wrote on the latter's *French Revolution*. 'Differing partially from some of Mr. Carlyle's detached views,' Mill wrote, 'we hold his theory, or theorem, of the Revolution, to be the true theory; true as far as it goes, and wanting little of being as complete as any theory of so vast and complicated a phenomena can be.'¹³¹

But what did Mill hold Carlyle's theory of the Revolution to be? 'That it was the breaking down of a great Imposture: which had not always been an Imposture, but had been becoming such for several centuries.'¹³² The two great authorities of the *ancien régime* – the nobility and the clergy – had 'held their exalted stations' on the condition that they afforded '*guidance*' to the masses. The first of these maintained order in society, among other duties, and the second ministered 'to their spiritual teaching and culture.'¹³³ 'But for centuries before the French Revolution,' Mill thought, 'the sincerity which once was in this scheme of society was gradually dying out.'¹³⁴ The nobility no longer performed its duty toward the people and the clergy had abandoned its position as spiritual guardian.

¹³⁰ Burrow, *History of Histories*, p.388.

¹³¹ *CWXX*, p.158.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp.158-159.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.159.

In his review of Scott's *Life of Napoleon*, Mill saw this borne out in the geography of the Revolution. Only where temporal and spiritual duties had not been neglected, in La Vendée, had the people risen up against the revolutionaries and fought for their king.¹³⁵ In his review of Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Mill noted that pre-revolutionary society rested on nothing other than tyranny and 'the obedience of twenty-five millions to a few hundred thousand never yet was yielded to avowed tyranny.'¹³⁶

Mill had emphasized the role that tyrannical rule had played in the coming of Revolution almost a decade earlier. The revolutionaries themselves had been 'patriots striving to free their country from a yoke which weighed it down to the earth.' In this lost France, 'every man's liberty was at the mercy of every minister or clerk of a minister, or lacquey of a minister, or mistress of a lacquey of a minister'. The situation had been unbearable. Every man's 'property was at the mercy of *intendants* and *subdélégués*' and this was in perhaps the most 'odious system of fiscal tyranny ever known'.¹³⁷ On top of this, and a hundred other ills, was mounted the ineligibility of the *tiers-état* to hold any governmental office.¹³⁸ It had not been an imaginary tyranny. It was not an image that had been fostered in the people's minds by mischievous *philosophes*.

The feelings of the people are not wont to be excited by an abstract principle. It is not a distant or a contingent evil which works upon *them*. The tyranny which excites *them* to resistance must be felt, not conceived; they must discover it by their sensations, not by their reason.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.65.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.159.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.64. Mill returned to the subject of economic tyranny during the *ancien régime* in his *Principles of Political Economy*. See *CW II*, pp.113 and *CW III*, p.945-946.

¹³⁸ *CW XX*, p.64.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.65.

Mill cited the famous agriculturalist-travel writer, Arthur Young, in conclusion. Despite his conservative sensibilities, even Young had recognized the scale of the problem. Mill approved of his sentiments. There could be 'no man of common sense and feeling', according to Young, who could 'lament the fall of such a government, or look with any but a mitigated severity upon the terrible retribution which an oppressed people exacted from their tyrants the moment they were free.'¹⁴⁰

Both Carlyle and Mill saw the causes of France's revolutionary moment in the *longue durée*. Carlyle expressed this in as novel a fashion as ever. The Revolution was as much in the revolutionaries' minds as it was in their outward actions. Carlyle presented his readers with a suggestive question. He wanted to understand 'Where the French Revolution specially *is*?' Had it been located within 'the King's Palace', in the 'National Assembly', or in 'the Reporter's Chair'?¹⁴¹ Of course, Carlyle has his own opinion of its whereabouts: 'In general, may we not say that the French Revolution lies in the heart and head of every violent-speaking, of every violent-thinking French Man?'¹⁴² The events of 1789 had been prefaced by a psychological break in the first place. The *ancien régime* was dead in the majority of people's minds long before they took up arms against it.¹⁴³

From the outset of Carlyle's celebrated work on the subject he made it clear that the Revolution could not be understood in terms of its novelty alone. Certainly, both the scale of the event and its ferocity were unusual, but it had deep roots in the past. The opening pages of Carlyle's *French Revolution* made this abundantly clear. Carlyle plunged straight into a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.66.

¹⁴¹ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.180.

¹⁴² Ibid, p.181.

¹⁴³ This is indicative of what some have perceived as Carlyle's Freudian turn. Certainly, B.R. Friedman sees in Carlyle's focus a forerunner of Freudian psychological analysis. See B.R. Friedman, *Fabricating History: English Writers on the French Revolution* (New Jersey, 1988), p.139.

scene, which was vividly evoked. 'PRESIDENT HÉNAULT, remarking on royal Surnames of Honour how difficult it often is to ascertain not only why, but even when, they were conferred, takes occasion, in his sleek official way, to make a philosophical reflection.'¹⁴⁴

Charles-Jean-François Hénault, seen here reflecting on royal nicknames, was a member of the *Parlement de Paris* from 1705 and President of the Parliament's *Première Chambre des Enquêtes* from 1710. He came to prominence under Louis XIV and died 19 years before the Revolution began. And yet, Carlyle judged it appropriate to begin his narrative of the Revolution with this apparently innocuous anecdote. Set in 1744, this suggests that he thought that the events of 1789 and beyond had been prepared mid-way through Louis XV's reign and, perhaps, given his citation of President Hénault, in that of his predecessor, the revered Louis XIV. At the very least, the better part of the eighteenth-century had contributed to the coming of Revolution. In Carlyle's account, it is not until the fifth book of the first volume (almost 160 pages) that the storming of the Bastille is recounted. In earlier essays on *The Diamond Necklace* and *Count Cagliostro* portents of the Revolution are seen in events long predating the advent of the sorts of popular disturbances it heralded.¹⁴⁵

Mill agreed that the degradation of aristocratic and ecclesiastical authority had taken place gradually, over a prolonged period. The Revolution's causes lay deep in the past and could not be explained without a proper appreciation of that complex historical tapestry. Mill criticized Sir Walter Scott for his treatment of 'the remote causes of that catastrophe', which made them seem almost trivial. These were 'the quintessence of the internal history of France during more than a century.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.3.

¹⁴⁵ See *CE XXVIII*, pp.249-318 for 'Count Cagliostro and *CE XXVIII*, pp.324-402 for 'The Diamond Necklace'.

¹⁴⁶ *CW XX*, p.63.

Most significant of all these long term changes, Mill asserted in a review essay entitled *Alison's History of the French Revolution*, was the modification in the mind of man himself. This was what really lay at the bottom of the individual's rebellion. 'All political revolutions,' Mill believed, 'originate in moral revolutions.'¹⁴⁷ Overturning established institutions was only one result of a more general subversion of conventional opinions.

The hundred political revolutions of the last three centuries were but a few outward manifestations of a moral revolution, which dates from the great breaking loose of the human faculties commonly described as the "revival of letters," and of which the main instrument and agent was the invention of printing.¹⁴⁸

The progressive enlightenment of the human mind lay at the remotest edge of the Revolution's causes and who knew where or when this would end.

Tocqueville's account of the causes of France's Revolution is hyperextended in a way that the accounts of Mill and Carlyle simply are not. Tocqueville charted the growth of social equality through the decline of the French aristocracy. He addressed this issue first in his 1836 essay. He recounted how, like all aristocratic bodies, the French *noblesse* had originated 'in conquest' and 'monopolised almost all the intelligence and wealth of society. It had possessed all the land, and been master of the inhabitants.'¹⁴⁹ But, in the concluding years of the eighteenth-century the French aristocracy resembled its forebear only in name.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.118.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Tocqueville, 'France Before the Revolution', p.208.

It had lost its influence over both the prince and the people. The king still chose from its ranks the principal officers of Government, but in this he rather followed instinctively an ancient custom, than recognised an acquired right.¹⁵⁰

In order to justify its existence a nobility must either remain masters of the people or place itself at their head in order to lead them. But the French aristocracy of the eighteenth-century did neither the one nor the other, according to Tocqueville.¹⁵¹

Despite this, they maintained a host of privileges that separated them from the populace as a whole. Nobles 'enjoyed the exclusive right of furnishing officers to the army.'¹⁵² They did not have to pay 'some of the taxes, and they levied from the inhabitants of their domains, under diverse names, a great number of annual contributions.' Such rights and pecuniary privileges did little to augment the wealth of the nobility, 'but they erected the order of nobility into an object of general hatred and envy.'¹⁵³ Tocqueville was clear about the danger that this posed to the order's existence.

When once the reality of power has been abandoned, to wish to retain its semblance is to play a dangerous game. The outward aspect of vigour may sometimes sustain an enfeebled body, but more frequently serves to complete its downfall. Those who possess the appearance of power, without its substance, seem, to the general eye, of sufficient consequence to be hated, while they are no longer capable of protecting themselves against the hatred they excite.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Tocqueville, 'France Before the Revolution', p.208.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.209.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.211.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.212.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.213.

Tocqueville extended this line of argument in book one of the *Ancien Régime*. It was well-known, he claimed, that although the aristocracy may have retreated from playing a role in national government, it retained its importance as the agent of local government until the Revolution. But, Tocqueville stated, 'This seems to be a mistake.'¹⁵⁵ Far from governing the peasants, as other historians claimed, the lord had become 'but an inhabitant whose immunities and privileges separate and isolate him from everyone else; his rank is different, his power is not.' In all that related to local government, 'parish officials were under the administration or control of the central authority.'¹⁵⁶

Amid the decline of aristocratic power, the French peasant had become a landowner. The feudal dues levied by the *noblesse* attacked the peasant directly; they were levied on his land.¹⁵⁷ 'Imagine the situation,' Tocqueville directed his readers, 'the needs, the character, the passions of this man and calculate, if you can, the amount of hatred and envy stored within his heart.'¹⁵⁸ Whilst remaining an institution of civil society, feudalism had ceased to be one of political consequence. Centralization had taken the aristocrat's power, but left him his privileges as a means of comfort for the loss that he had suffered. In the context of the rise of peasant proprietorship such privileges, pecuniary or otherwise, provoked the most ardent scorn. These social and political changes were the medium-term causes of the Revolution. To conclude his discussion of the causes of France's Revolution, Tocqueville turned from the *longue durée* to its proximate causes in the final book of his *Ancien Régime*.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, p.114.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, pp.116-117.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.117.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.195-247.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle understood the Revolution in similar terms. Of course, there are significant differences in their respective accounts, but the broad strokes are very much alike. Each understood the Revolution in primarily political terms. An aristocracy that had once governed had lost its place at the head of the political body; it had reneged on its duties to the populace whilst maintaining its privileges; and it had become, as a result, nothing other than a tyrannical body bereft of its *raison d'être*. The purpose of the Revolution had been to remove it from society and inaugurate the reign of democracy.

CROSSING THE RUBICON: THE AGE OF TRANSITION

Despite the enormity of the French Revolution, the contemporary world was by no means politically settled. In fact, the Revolution had started a process that was continuing apace. 'The first of the leading peculiarities of the present age is,' Mill wrote in 1831, 'that it is an age of transition.' Mankind had outgrown 'old institutions and old doctrines' without having 'yet acquired new ones.'¹⁶⁰ The same was true of political and cultural conventions. The 'old order of things has become unsuited to the state of society and the human mind'. Accordingly, 'almost every nation on the continent of Europe has achieved, or is in the course of rapidly achieving, a change in its form of government'. Even the British, 'the most attached in Europe to its old institutions,' had proclaimed 'with one voice' that they 'are vicious both in the outline and in the details, and that they *shall* be renovated'.¹⁶¹

The same movement was apparent to Carlyle. Vanden Bossche argued that Carlyle's works 'represent and attempt to resolve dilemmas raised by what he and his contemporaries

¹⁶⁰ *CW XXII*, p.230.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

perceived as a revolutionary shift of authority in virtually all realms of discourse and institutions in western Europe.¹⁶² Carlyle entered this debate with his essay on the *Signs of the Times*. He perceived 'a deep-lying struggle in the whole fabric of society'; 'a boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old'.¹⁶³ Profound changes were occurring at the very base of society and it was a myopic and obdurate man who would try to reverse them. This 'age also is advancing', Carlyle thought, and he was not one who would struggle against its progress, for life consists 'not in turning back, not in resisting, but only in resolutely struggling forward'.¹⁶⁴ He addressed this movement again through his avatar, Teufelsdröckh, in *Sartor Resartus*. 'The World...as it needs must, is under a process of devastation and waste, which, whether by silent assiduous corrosion, or open quicker combustion, as the case chances, will effectually enough annihilate the past Forms of Society; replace them with what it may.'¹⁶⁵

Tocqueville's account of American democracy, according to Jeremy Jennings, as well as the travel diaries he compiled in England during his visits in the early- and mid-1830s, 'were full of fascinating detail and revealed someone intent on trying to understand a society in the process of transition.'¹⁶⁶ Tocqueville matched Carlyle in his realism, but his comments displayed greater finesse. He told his readers that 'A new political science is needed' because

¹⁶² Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p.1.

¹⁶³ *CE XXVII*, p.82.

¹⁶⁴ *CE XXVII*, p.80.

¹⁶⁵ Carlyle, *Sartor*, p.178. What is more, Herman Merivale saw in Carlyle's *French Revolution* a transitional philosophy. 'His is the philosophy of transition, of doubt, and of sanguine expectation', Merivale contended, 'it rejects old 'formulas' as barren; but instead of resting content in scepticism, it endeavours to lead the mind back to certain elementary principles, and to direct it in anticipation to future discoveries, as yet barely described or dimly imagined'. See H. Merivale, 'an unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*', in Seigel eds., *Carlyle: Critical Heritage*, p.79.

¹⁶⁶ J. Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France Since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2011), p.182.

they inhabited 'a world entirely anew'. Tocqueville thought that his contemporaries found themselves in 'a unique situation' and, as a result, 'laws without precedent are needed'.¹⁶⁷

The singularity of the contemporary era rested on its transitional status. The French, according to Tocqueville, had already 'abandoned what the old state could present of the good', but they had yet to acquire 'what the current state would be able to offer of the useful'.¹⁶⁸ Tocqueville realized that aristocratic society had been destroyed and that the benefits of 'a moral and tranquil democracy' remained elusive. Amid the 'debris' of the decaying edifice the French, 'out of complacency', seemed 'to want to settle...forever.'¹⁶⁹ Tocqueville emphasized this again in 1840.

The world that is rising is still half caught in the ruins of the world that is falling, and amid the immense confusion presented by human affairs, no one can say which old institutions and ancient mores will remain standing and which will finally disappear.¹⁷⁰

It was a belief that Tocqueville maintained for his entire life. In his *Souvenirs*¹⁷¹, written in 1850, he drew attention once more to 'the uncertain physiognomy of my time'¹⁷² and followed this statement with a declaration on the novelty of the era: 'our age is not like any other.'¹⁷³

Equally, Mill and Carlyle continued to believe, throughout their literary careers, that their era was one of transition. The former prefaced an 1861 work outlining his *Considerations on*

¹⁶⁷ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.16.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp.22-23.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.1280.

¹⁷¹ *Souvenirs* was retitled when it was translated into English. It is the English edition that is cited in this thesis.

¹⁷² A. de Tocqueville, trans. by G. Lawrence, *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848* (London, 2002), p.3.

¹⁷³ Tocqueville, *Recollections*, p.12.

Representative Government with similar statements of uncertainty. Both ‘Conservatives and Liberals’, he thought, ‘have lost confidence in the political creeds which they nominally profess, while neither side appears to have made any progress in providing itself with a better.’¹⁷⁴ Mill took this opportunity to make his own plea for a new political science.

Yet such a better doctrine must be possible; not a mere compromise, by splitting the difference between the two, but something wider than either, which, in virtue of its superior comprehensiveness, might be adopted by either Liberal or Conservative without renouncing any thing which he really feels to be valuable in his own creed.¹⁷⁵

Once more, in 1869, at the beginning of his tract on *The Subjection of Women* Mill alluded to ‘the progress of the great modern spiritual and social transition’ taking place all around.¹⁷⁶

If Carlyle did not exactly proclaim the need for a new political science, he certainly did make a vehement case for a new world. In the first of his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, ‘The Present Time’, he made just this sort of proclamation: ‘There must be a new world, if there is to be any world at all!’¹⁷⁷ That this statement was the conclusion towards which the very first page of this essay progressed demonstrated its importance to Carlyle. But he went further:

That human things in our Europe can ever return to the old sorry routine, and proceed with any steadiness or continuance there; this small hope is not now a

¹⁷⁴ *CW XIX*, p.73.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ J.S. Mill, ‘The Subjection of Women’, S. Collini eds., *On Liberty and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 1989), p.120.

¹⁷⁷ *CE XX*, p.1.

tenable one. These days of universal death must be days of universal newbirth, if the ruin is not to be total and final!¹⁷⁸

The period in which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle lived was, by their own admission, unusual. Certainly, it was a period of change in which the political and social forms of old were no longer relevant or appropriate. Numerous commentators on both sides of the Channel alluded to this peculiarity. The *spirit of the age* captivated the attention of commentators. Indeed, this phrase gained widespread currency in this period. Whether it entered the English lexicon via German sources as the frequency of its contemporary usage suggests or through French as its English syntax implies is unclear.¹⁷⁹

Whatever its origin, at the beginning of the nineteenth century this phrase was a unit of common European currency. The notion that there was something unique about this era persisted into mid-century and beyond. For Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle the French Revolution itself lay at the root of the contemporary world's oddity. It was *the* great chasm that divided the modern from the pre-modern world. 'The study of the French Revolution', Alan Kahan noted, 'was important not simply because France was typical of Europe but because the French Revolution was the beginning of the present'. Moreover, it gained added significance because for many of the nineteenth-century's most prominent thinkers 'the Revolution that began in 1789 did not end in 1815, 1830, or even 1848.'¹⁸⁰ It was a living, vibrant force in the world.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle subscribed to this theory. It was this incomplete revolution that was driving the transition taking place in the contemporary world. Mill was the first to voice

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pp.1-2.

¹⁷⁹ A.D. Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (New York, 1985), p.40.

¹⁸⁰ Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*, p.21.

this notion. In prophetic words, written as part of his demolition of *Alison's History of the French Revolution*, he wondered about the extent of the Revolution's influence. 'How much of the course of that moral revolution yet remains to be run,' he asked, 'or how many political revolutions it will yet generate before it be exhausted, no one can foretell.'¹⁸¹ This had real consequences for England as much as for France.

But it must be the shallowest view of the French Revolution, which can now consider it as any thing but a mere incident in a great change in man himself, in his belief, in his principles of conduct, and therefore in the outward arrangements of society; a change which is but half completed, and which is now in a state of more rapid progress here in England, than any where else.¹⁸²

Tocqueville lagged a little behind Mill in concluding something similar about the continuing presence of the Revolution in the modern world. The French, he wrote in 1836, 'for the last fifty years, have been in an almost continual state of revolution.'¹⁸³ Writing to Edward Everett, an American correspondent, in 1850, Tocqueville drew attention to the persistence of this phenomenon once more, but expanded its contours. 'With the exception of Russia, in the whole of continental Europe one can see society undergoing a profound transformation and the old world that has crumbled into pieces.' Its 'drama' was 'the complete destruction of the old society and the building in its stead of I do not know what kind of human edifice'.¹⁸⁴ Writing to another correspondent in America, Francis Lieber, later in the decade, Tocqueville placed Louis Napoleon's seizure of power in this context. He implored Lieber not to 'deceive'

¹⁸¹ CW XX, p.118.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Tocqueville, 'France Before the Revolution', p.18.

¹⁸⁴ A. de Tocqueville, J. Jennings & A. Craiutu eds., *Tocqueville on America After 1840: Letters and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 2009), p.116.

himself: 'this is not the end of the French Revolution, it is only a manifestation of it.'¹⁸⁵

Tocqueville stated this idea most explicitly – and with evident causticity – in his *Souvenirs*, written in 1850. His comments deserve to be quoted at length.

Seen as a whole from a distance, our history from 1789 to 1830 appears to be forty-one years of deadly struggle between the Ancien Régime with its traditions, memories, hopes and men (i.e. the aristocrats), and the new France led by the middle class. 1830 would seem to have ended the first period of our revolutions, or rather, of our revolution, for it was always one and the same, through its various fortunes and passions, whose beginning our fathers saw and whose end we shall in all probability not see.¹⁸⁶

'To Carlyle,' Hugh Trevor-Roper noted, 'the French Revolution had not been destroyed with Napoleon'. He saw that 'its roots were still living and would sprout anew; and these roots would never be destroyed by mere political treatment.'¹⁸⁷ Carlyle made his sense of the continuing interaction of the Revolution with the contemporary world explicit in 1839. In *Chartism*, a celebrated essay on the woes of the English working classes and the seeming inability of its governors to solve them, he asked: 'Has not broad Europe heard the question put, and answered, on the great scale: has not a FRENCH REVOLUTION been?' 'Since the year 1789,' Carlyle continued, 'there is now half a century complete; and a French Revolution not yet complete!'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Jennings & Craiutu, *Tocqueville on America*, p.132.

¹⁸⁶ Tocqueville, *Recollections*, pp.4-5.

¹⁸⁷ Trevor-Roper, 'Thomas Carlyle's Historical Philosophy', p.226. Carlyle's indifference to the political remedies suggested by his contemporaries, Trevor-Roper continued on the same page, was the result of his rejection of the Whigs and Radicals notion 'that society could be inoculated against revolution by political liberalism and democratic institutions.'

¹⁸⁸ *CE XXIX*, p.149.

In order to understand the parlous state of modern Europe, it was necessary to grasp the nature of this persistent force. 'He who would understand the struggling convulsive unrest of European society,' Carlyle proffered, 'in any and every country, at this day, may read it in broad glaring lines there, in that most convulsive phenomenon of the last thousand years.'¹⁸⁹ B.E. Lippincott argued that 'Carlyle's *French Revolution* was not only a prose epic but a tract for the times; it was a profound warning to England to avoid the catastrophe that he feared all his life long was imminent.'¹⁹⁰ This was a theme he retained in writing his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*.¹⁹¹

According to Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, then, the French Revolution remained an unspent force in the world. Understanding its contours was key to defining the course of the modern era.

REFUTING THE OLD POLITICAL SCIENCE: A BURKEAN ENCOUNTER

Given their mutual recognition of the significance of the French Revolution and their united perspective regarding the age of transition it had opened, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle felt it necessary to demolish the claims of those who stood for the politics of the *ancien régime*. They were eager to emphasize the finality of 1789 as it applied to aristocratic rule. This forced Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle to refute Edmund Burke's reactionary writings on the subject. Burke offered a view of politics that jarred sharply with the goals of the Revolution. In his

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.150.

¹⁹⁰ B.E. Lippincott, *Victorian Critics of Democracy: Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Stephen, Maines, Lecky* (Minneapolis, 1938), p.24.

¹⁹¹ *CE XX*, pp.8-9.

works, no political science could be found that was appropriate to the demands of the post-revolutionary age.

In 1826, Mill thought that all English readers understood of the Revolution was what 'Tory prints choose to tell them of this most interesting period of modern history'.¹⁹² Mill's irritation at Tory prejudice on the subject of the Revolution would surface again later in the decade.¹⁹³ At the centre of this mistreatment of 1789 was Burke and his account of the Revolution. Mill alluded to this in his review of 'Scott's Life of Napoleon' before attacking Burke directly. The public imagination had been influenced 'by the torrents of unmeasured and indiscriminating invective which have been poured forth against the Revolution'.¹⁹⁴

Though Mill did not mention him by name, it is clear that Burke was at the root of this perspective. What was its consequence? Put simply, 'a feeling has been generated, which predisposes men to credit upon any evidence or no evidence, any assertion with respect to the French Revolution or revolutionists, provided only it be sufficiently unfavourable'.¹⁹⁵ Mill attacked Burke by name, later in this essay, on his understanding of the trajectory of the Revolution.¹⁹⁶ However, he was less interested in dismantling the particulars of Burke's account so much as the general atmosphere it had created.

With regard to Carlyle's criticism of Burke and his rendering of the Revolution, his *French Revolution* has spawned a number of interpretations of the relationship between the two men. Louise Young read Carlyle as an inheritor, through Coleridge, of Burkean ideas and H.

¹⁹² CW XX, p.5.

¹⁹³ Ibid, pp.62-63 and pp.114-115.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p.63.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.63.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.86.

Ben-Israel saw significant points of overlap between the two of them.¹⁹⁷ Philip Rosenberg perceived important differences between the two in their views on the Revolution as did Vanden Bossche.¹⁹⁸ Brian Young claimed that the relationship between Burke and Carlyle was ‘complicated, but essentially, and interpretatively, it was a close, but deeply critical one’.¹⁹⁹ Lowell Frye drew attention to this. Carlyle dealt with Burke’s account with great delicacy. Frye showed how Carlyle invoked Burke’s name rarely and when he did it was in a spirit of approval.²⁰⁰ This was part of a rhetorical strategy, according to Frye, which signalled his approval of Burke’s interpretation whilst subtly and steadily undermining it. He did this through a reorientation of many of the scenes that characterized Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which would have been well known to contemporary readers.²⁰¹

Carlyle’s understanding of the French Revolution had much more in common with radicals, like John Stuart Mill, than with conservatives.²⁰² His break with the past and his radicalism was underscored by his rejection of Burke, which he stressed in his assessment of the man himself. Comparing Burke with Samuel Johnson in an 1832 essay, Carlyle concluded that the former had been ‘essentially a Whig, and only, in reaching the verge of the chasm towards which Whiggism from the first was inevitably leading, recoiled’.²⁰³ Carlyle despised the Whigs. In making this comparison he signalled his dissent from Burke and his major doctrines.

¹⁹⁷ L.M. Young, *Thomas Carlyle and the Art of History* (Philadelphia, 1939), pp.43-46 & 69-88; H. Ben-Israel, *English Historians and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1968), pp.144-146.

¹⁹⁸ P. Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp.123-127; Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, pp.8-13.

¹⁹⁹ Young, *Victorian Eighteenth Century*, p.34.

²⁰⁰ L. Frye, ‘“Great Burke,” Thomas Carlyle, and the French Revolution’, in L. Plummer Crafton, *The French Revolution Debate in English Literature and Culture* (London, 1997), p.86.

²⁰¹ Frye, ‘“Great Burke”’, pp.93-101.

²⁰² Young, *Victorian Eighteenth Century*, p.29.

²⁰³ *CE XXVIII*, p.121.

Lord Acton's assessment of Carlyle's *French Revolution* is thus insightful. Carlyle's volumes on the subject, Acton claimed, with their 'vivid gleam' and their 'mixture of the sublime with the grotesque,' had truly 'delivered our fathers from thralldom to Burke.'²⁰⁴ Consequently, Carlyle's *French Revolution* amounted, in Acton's opinion, to 'the most remarkable piece of historical thinking in the language.'²⁰⁵ But, as we have seen and as Acton well knew, it was a majestic *rethinking*.

Tocqueville was well aware of the numerous works by contemporary French historians on the Revolution and their various interpretations of 1789. He was familiar, for example, with Louis Blanc's claim that it represented 'a revolt of the individual against authority' and with Michelet's definition of it 'as the advent of a new world based on justice' in contrast to the old, which had been grounded on 'arbitrary divine will.'²⁰⁶ Tocqueville denied – in the opening pages of his *Ancien Régime* – both of these interpretations, though he addressed them covertly.²⁰⁷ At no point did he mention his compatriots by name.

In fact, the only commentator on the events of the Revolution that he challenged openly was Burke. Why was this the case? Various commentators have addressed the place of Burke in Tocqueville's account of the Revolution, though none have justified his prominence vis-à-vis French historians. Robert Gannett Jr. argued that Tocqueville's *Ancien Régime* has 'a Burkean frame'.²⁰⁸ Gannett's work demonstrated the many similarities between Tocqueville's and Burke's understanding of the Revolution, but suggested no overall reason for this.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ J.E.E. Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution* (London, 1910), ppp.358-359.

²⁰⁵ Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures*, p.358.

²⁰⁶ Jardin, *Tocqueville*, p.498.

²⁰⁷ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, pp.93-95.

²⁰⁸ Gannett, *Tocqueville Unveiled*, p.71.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, pp.61-65.

Linda Orr claimed that Tocqueville placed Burke in his account in order to illustrate an alternative socio-political organisation to the one inaugurated by the Revolution and formalized under Napoleon's Empire. He reminded readers of the benefits of an organic state with a decentralized institutional apparatus, which was epitomized by the prevalence of common law.²¹⁰ Ralph Lerner, in his somewhat colloquial account of Tocqueville's relationship with Burke, asserted that the Frenchman misrepresented his English forebear intentionally in order to satisfy his primary political concern: convincing the French of their agency so as to persuade them that they were not condemned to live either in a state of revolution or under the hand of a despot.²¹¹

There may be an altogether more simple reason for the prominence of Burke in Tocqueville's history. In his *Démocratie*, Tocqueville had been eager to emphasize at the outset that he was allied to no camp or faction in particular.²¹² Given the political significance of the heritage of the Revolution and the divisive nature of contemporary French politics, Tocqueville's choice of a foreigner – an Englishman no less – against whom he could pose his argument enabled him to assert his independence from the vying factions of the French political arena. Tocqueville could assert his claim to the sort of political authority control of the Revolution's history conferred without alienating any of the camps around him.

Despite the 'sympathetic and respectful' verdict Tocqueville accorded to Burke's account of the Revolution, what is certainly clear is that he rejected the latter's conclusions entirely.²¹³

²¹⁰ Orr, *Headless History*, pp.104-108.

²¹¹ R. Lerner, 'Tocqueville's Burke, or Story as History', in E. Atanassow and R. Boyd eds., *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy* (Cambridge, 2013), p.82.

²¹² In concluding his introduction Tocqueville noted that: 'This book follows in no one's train exactly; by writing it I did not mean either to serve or to combat any party; I set about to see, not differently, but farther than parties; and while they are concerned with the next day, I wanted to think about the future.' Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.32.

²¹³ Gannett, *Tocqueville Unveiled*, pp.64-65.

'Burke', Tocqueville wrote, had simply not realized 'that what stands before his eyes is the revolution which will abolish the common law of Europe; he does not understand that this is its sole purpose.'²¹⁴ The old world, which Burke had tried to defend so valiantly, was dead and there was to be no turning back.

CHARTING THE COURSE OF THE MODERN WORLD

Thus far, this chapter has outlined the meaning Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle found in the French Revolution, the causes and continuing importance of this event in the contemporary world, and the manner in which each of these men refuted the Burkean account of it. The Revolution had attempted to destroy the *ancien régime* and its modern children were actively pursuing this project. Burke's understanding of the Revolution, its causes and consequences was incorrect. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle accepted the outcome of the Revolution and categorically rejected Burke's prescription, which recommended a return to the *ancien régime*.

Where did this leave the modern world? To what was it in transit? Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle answered these questions unambiguously. In the first review Mill authored on Tocqueville's *Démocratie* he told his readers that 'M. de Tocqueville's is, in our eyes, the true view of the position in which mankind now stand'.²¹⁵ What was the view of Tocqueville's to which Mill assigned his consent? 'It is indifferent to him what value we set upon the good or evil of aristocracy, since that in his view is past and gone.'²¹⁶ What Tocqueville meant by democracy will be discussed in what follows, but, for the purpose of continuity, it may be said

²¹⁴ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, p.107.

²¹⁵ *CW XVIII* p.109.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.110.

that Tocqueville's definition signified the absence of all entrenched social divisions and, therefore, the rise of civil equality. Democracy was the future.

Mill signalled his acceptance of this future a year later in an essay on *Civilization*.²¹⁷ Indeed, in his essay on *The Subjection of Women*, published near the end of his life, Mill reinforced his agreement with Tocqueville. Here, he maintained that 'the course of history, and the tendencies of progressive human society, afford not only no presumption in favour of this system of inequality of rights, but a strong one against it'.²¹⁸ And why was this the case? Because the world had changed irrevocably.

For, what is the peculiar character of the modern world – the difference which chiefly distinguishes modern institutions, modern social ideas, modern life itself, from those times long past? It is, that human beings are no longer born to their place in life, and chained down by an inexorable bond to the place they are born to, but are free to employ their faculties, and such favourable chances as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable.²¹⁹

That this was Tocqueville's opinion is beyond doubt. It is inscribed on every page of the 'Introduction' to his first instalment of the *Démocratie*. Turning his gaze from the American continent to his own Tocqueville recognized that 'equality of conditions, without having reached its extreme limits as in the United States, approached those limits more and more each day; and this same democracy that reigned in American societies, appeared to me to

²¹⁷ Ibid, pp.126-127.

²¹⁸ Mill, *Subjection*, p.133.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p.134.

advance rapidly toward power in Europe.'²²⁰ Tocqueville's rhetorical brilliance is at its very best throughout this extended announcement of the course of the modern era.

A great democratic revolution is taking place among us; everyone sees it, but not everyone judges it in the same way. Some consider it as something new and, taking it for an accident, they hope still to be able to stop it; while others judge it irresistible, because it seems to them the most continuous, oldest and most permanent fact known in history.²²¹

Carlyle also looked on the advent of democracy as an inescapable reality. During one of his lectures *On Heroes* in 1840 he declared as much with typical force. This 'new enormous Democracy' was 'an insuppressible Fact, which the whole world, with its old forces and institutions, cannot put down'.²²² He stated this again, three years later, in *Past and Present*. 'To what extent Democracy has now reached, how it advances irresistible with ominous, ever-increasing speed, he that will open his eyes on any province of human affairs may discern. Democracy is everywhere the inexorable demand of these ages, swiftly fulfilling itself.'²²³ In the first of his *Latter-Day Pamphlets* Carlyle returned to the same thought.

For universal *Democracy*, whatever we may think of it, has declared itself as an inevitable fact of the days in which we live; and he who has any chance to instruct, or lead, in his days, must begin by admitting that: new street-barricades, and new anarchies, still more scandalous if still less sanguinary, must return and again

²²⁰ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.4-5.

²²¹ Ibid, p.6.

²²² T. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.205.

²²³ T. Carlyle, *Past and Present* (New York, 1927), p.223.

return, till governing persons everywhere know and admit that. Democracy, it may be said everywhere, is here...²²⁴

The age of transition that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle had each identified was moving inexorably toward democracy. The French Revolution was the defining event in this process. It was a fissure in western European chronology, which had finally broken the power and prestige of hereditary aristocracy. One historical period had ended; another was just beginning. But the transition from aristocracy to democracy had deeper, more profound roots in European history than those that had been laid in 1789. It is to these that the next chapter is dedicated.

²²⁴ *CE XX*, pp.8-9.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMING OF DEMOCRACY

The urge to understand democracy led Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle to explore its history. Each saw in the past an historical trajectory that could explain the advent of democracy in the modern world. Its roots lay deeper than the French Revolution. Though the Revolution, as the previous chapter demonstrates, was central to the conception Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle had of the birth of democracy, its causes were more diverse than a single event.²²⁵ The present chapter will explore the roots of democracy, which each of these men perceived in European history. Prior to exploring the arguments Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle made in respect of the foundations of democracy, it is important to understand the influences that weighed on their notions of history and the importance of historical discourse in the contemporary era.

Recently, Eduardo Nolla highlighted the prominence of history in the early-nineteenth century. 'It is undoubtedly difficult', Nolla claimed, 'to find a period when the question of

²²⁵ A great deal of work has already taken place in regard to Tocqueville's notion of democracy's historical roots. However, almost nothing has been written on this subject in regard to Mill and Carlyle. Tocqueville scholars have tended to emphasize his apparently determinist perspective, which appears to have been religiously induced. Harvey Mitchell, for example, argued that Tocqueville 'seemed to subordinate the actions of people to some higher cosmic and historical laws, explicitly declaring that these have operated more or less regularly in their lives.' This law was the divinely ordained mission of equality. See H. Mitchell, *Individual Choice and the Structures of History: Alexis de Tocqueville as Historian Reappraised* (Cambridge, 1996), p.68. Brogan asserted that Tocqueville believed the Christian world was 'condemned to democracy' because God willed it. See Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.275.

Matthew Maguire argued instead that 'Tocqueville holds that equality was implicit in all political life before the Gospels, but the explicit understanding of this truth depends on them.' See M. W. Maguire, *The Conversion of Imagination: From Pascal through Rousseau to Tocqueville* (London, 2006), p.198. Antoine's view is more akin to Maguire's than it is to that of Brogan: 'democracy has a profound affinity with Christianity, as its principal founding concepts find their origin there.' See A. Antoine, *L'Impensé de la démocratie: Tocqueville, la citoyenneté et la religion* (Paris, 2003), p.177.

David Selby contradicted these distinguished voices. He contended that Tocqueville used secular history to delineate the progress of equality; only after he had outlined its secular heritage did he turn to God in order to confirm its justice. 'Put differently, the progress of equality is fact first, Providence second.' See D.A. Selby, 'Tocqueville's Politics of Providence: Pascal, Jansenism and the Author's Introduction to *Democracy in America*', in *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, Vol.XXIII, No.2 – 2012, p.167. The line of inquiry I pursue in this chapter is more akin to Selby's than to those who would locate Tocqueville's understanding of the rise of democracy in the realm of the supernatural or religious.

history attracted more attention than in the first half of the nineteenth century.²²⁶ Rosemary Jann showed the reach of the historical idiom: 'The historical was indeed the common coin of the nineteenth century, the currency of its most characteristic art, the security for its most significant intellectual transactions.'²²⁷ But, history was not merely a banal record of events; in this period it was worked into a tapestry that illuminated the course of development across the ages. In other words, there was a novel interest in the philosophy of history.

Any attempt to understand the political and social contours of the present had to begin with a profound knowledge of the past. Only in understanding the direction of historical travel could the modern world be comprehended. This was the overall position adopted by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. The historicism it implied formed the basis of their political thought.

What is more, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were not alone in their historicism. From the middle of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, there appeared in Europe a sudden and widespread interest in philosophical history. The century situated between these two poles generated enormous varieties of *metahistory* in such a voluminous fashion that Frank E. Manuel labelled it 'the classical age of modern essays in philosophical history'.²²⁸ The search for laws underlying historical movement pervaded the era. It was a singularly powerful intellectual movement, Jann argued, 'given the force with which the rapid current of change was undermining traditional assumptions and authorities.'²²⁹

²²⁶ E. Nolla, 'Editor's Introduction', in Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.cxvi.

²²⁷ R. Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus, 1985), p.xi.

²²⁸ F.E. Manuel, 'Two Styles of Philosophical History', *Daedalus*, Vol.91, No.2, Science and Technology in Contemporary Society (Spring, 1962), p.400.

²²⁹ Jann, *Art and Science of History*, p.xii.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were part of this movement. But, their interest lay principally in the rise of democracy. Investigation into how it had triumphed filled great passages of their works. This chapter will analyse their understandings of the rise of democracy throughout history. Democracy was the result of two related, though distinct, historical causes: the rise of the psychology of democracy and its sociological precursors. Underlying these specific causes lay a more clandestine moral motor. Each of these will be explored in the present chapter.

However, before starting on this path we must briefly trail another. Given the prevalence of *metahistorical* explanations of the past in the contemporary world, it is necessary to ask what, if anything, these figures imbibed from the prevailing intellectual atmosphere. Tocqueville was a product of the scholarly proclivities of the 1820s. He read history for the most part, but the history he read was laden with political consequence. It drew heavily on 'liberal argument', according to Larry Siedentop, and, consequently, 'a great deal of social and political theory.'²³⁰ Tocqueville became particularly attached to the work of François Guizot, one of a small cadre of so-called *doctrinaire* thinkers, and attended his lectures on history before devouring his writings on the history of European civilization.²³¹ Guizot, along with his *doctrinaire* companions, developed a theory of history that posited the existence of an irresistible process that forced European societies away from aristocratic social arrangements towards those that were democratic.²³²

The influences that fostered Mill's historical approach were considerably more complex than those of his French counterpart. His youthful Benthamism decried the claims of history.

²³⁰ Siedentop, *Tocqueville*, p.20.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p.21.

²³² *Ibid*, p.25.

However, Mill came to embrace a favourable perspective through his interaction with the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Carlyle, the Saint-Simonians, Tocqueville, Guizot, and Auguste Comte, not to mention Goethe and other German sources.

Indeed, the 'Germano-Coleridgean school', as Mill called it, was the first to 'inquire with any comprehensiveness or depth into the inductive laws of the existence and growth of human society.'²³³ The interplay between the methods of Bentham and Coleridge – of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – in Mill's mind has been described by Frederick Rosen.²³⁴ By the time Mill wrote these words on the Germano-Coleridgean school he had already encountered counter-currents that challenged his Benthamite upbringing. He corresponded with the Saint-Simonians from 1828 and in their writings he encountered – for the first time – the idea of historical periodicity. From them and through their estranged disciple, Comte, Mill accepted, 'unequivocally', in I.W. Mueller's view, the idea that there were 'successive stages in history' and that these 'were marked by alternating attitudes and states'.²³⁵

Mueller made great claims for Tocqueville's influence over Mill's historical vision. According to her, Mill accepted the historical trajectory towards ever-increasing equality of conditions that Tocqueville set out.²³⁶ Georgios Varouxakis challenged this interpretation; he argued that Mill mediated Tocqueville's claims through the lens provided by his interaction with the works of Guizot, which antedated his reading of Tocqueville's work.²³⁷ In many respects, Tocqueville confirmed in Mill the profundity of Guizot's view of history.²³⁸

²³³ *CW X*, pp.138-139.

²³⁴ See, Rosen, *Mill*, pp.58-62.

²³⁵ Mueller, *Mill and French Thought*, p.60.

²³⁶ Mueller, *Mill and French Thought*, p.139.

²³⁷ Varouxakis, 'Guizot's Historical Works and J.S. Mill's Reception of Tocqueville', pp. 292-312.

²³⁸ Guizot's perception of history was typically Romantic. He held, according to Crossley, 'that each period in history possessed an intellectual cohesion. Each epoch had its dominant idea which it held to be true and which provided the ground of governmental action.' See Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism*, p.81.

‘The nineteenth century’s rejection of an allegedly ahistorical Enlightenment’, M.S. Phillips maintained, ‘has often been taken as a founding moment of a modern historical understanding – indeed of modernity itself.’²³⁹ Carlyle was at the forefront of reaction against the eighteenth-century and his view of history was congruent with this critical perspective. This implied a necessary historicism. Peter Allan Dale claimed that ‘one of Carlyle’s major contributions’ was ‘to bring serious historicist concerns to nineteenth-century English criticism.’²⁴⁰ There are numerous quotations that could be cited to illustrate this. In *Sartor*, for example, Carlyle emphasized that ‘the new man’ is always ‘in a new time, under new conditions; his course can be the *facsimile* of no prior one, but is by its nature original.’²⁴¹ It is the constantly changing nature of life that caused Carlyle to conclude that ‘Day after day, I must thatch myself anew’.²⁴²

Within his historicism, Carlyle incorporated the notion of alternating epochs. Just where he had discovered this means of analysing history is debatable. In 1833, concluding his essay on *Diderot*, Carlyle argued, as Goethe had previously, that history oscillated between epochs of ‘UNBELIEF and BELIEF.’ ‘All epochs wherein Belief prevails,’ he noted, ‘under what form it may, are splendid, heart-elevating, fruitful for contemporaries and posterity.’ On the other hand, ages ‘wherein Unbelief, under what form soever, maintains its sorry victory...vanish from the eyes of posterity’.²⁴³ In *Sartor* there are references to Saint-Simonian ideas of

²³⁹ M.S. Phillips, ‘Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography’, in *PMLA*, Vol.118, No.3, Special Topic: Imagining History (May, 2003), p.437.

²⁴⁰ P. Allan Dale, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History: Carlyle, Arnold, Pater* (London, 1977), p.16.

²⁴¹ Carlyle, *Sartor*, p.93.

²⁴² *Ibid*, p.45.

²⁴³ *CE XXVIII*, p.248.

historical change. 'L'age d'or', Carlyle quoted Saint-Simon directly, 'qu'une aveugle tradition a placé jusqu'ici dans le passé est devant nous'.²⁴⁴

Was Carlyle's historicism primarily German-influenced or Saint-Simonian-oriented? E.M. Vida argued for the former and saw in the notion of rebirth, following a period of unbelief, the influence of the German Romantic writer John Paul.²⁴⁵ Schelling and Goethe also offered Carlyle the notion of a *zeitgeist* that underpinned his vision of history, according to Vida.²⁴⁶ Allan Dale stated that Carlyle was firmly in the Liberal Anglican camp of historical philosophy, which was indebted to Coleridge and by extension German philosophy.²⁴⁷ What is certain, though, is that Carlyle's historicism was possessed of a *telos*. 'Like most of his contemporaries', Allan Dale argued, 'Carlyle accepted the prevailing myth of progress. Mankind does not simply move in endless cycles of belief and unbelief but moves *forward*.'²⁴⁸ What mankind had been moving towards and, crucially, how it had done so occupies the remainder of this chapter.

THE REFORMATION AND THE PRESENT

A number of contemporary thinkers saw in the Reformation an antecedent of the events of 1789. In fact, a direct line of descent was drawn by philosophical historians from the crisis of religion to modern democracy. In this trajectory, once the temporal and spiritual authority of the papacy had been challenged by an ascending Protestantism, it was inevitable that the revolutionary events of 1789 would come to pass and democracy replace the society of the

²⁴⁴ Carlyle, *Sartor*, p.180.

²⁴⁵ Vida, *Romantic Affinities*, p.138.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.145.

²⁴⁷ Allan Dale, *Victorian Critic*, p.54.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.53.

ancien régime. Joseph de Maistre advanced this teleological framework in the most acerbic terms – the Reformation was necessarily responsible for the twin evils of Jansenism and Jacobinism in his view – though he was not alone.²⁴⁹

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle adopted a teleological framework that was similar. But, their accounts did not imitate Maistre’s loathing of Protestantism. ‘For many centuries,’ Mill wrote in the penultimate instalment of his *Spirit of the Age*, ‘undivided moral influence over the nations of Europe, the unquestioned privilege of forming the opinions and feelings of the Christian world, was enjoyed, and most efficiently exercised by the Catholic clergy.’ The ‘word’ of this body ‘inspired in the rest of mankind the most fervent faith.’²⁵⁰ Mill did not doubt the sincerity or practicality of this arrangement. The clergy was almost exclusive in its love of learning and this made it, as a body, intellectually superior to the populace. ‘But the age of transition arrived’, Mill noted. The Catholic Church ‘became itself incompatible with improvement.’ ‘Mankind’, Mill claimed, simply ‘outgrew their religion, and that, too, at a period when they had not yet outgrown their government’.²⁵¹

The more advanced communities of Europe succeeded, after a terrific struggle, in effecting their total or partial emancipation: in some, the Reformation achieved a victory—in others, a toleration; while, by a fate unhappily too common, the flame which had been kindled where the pile awaited the spark, spread into countries where the materials were not yet sufficiently prepared; and instead of burning

²⁴⁹ Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic*, p.332.

²⁵⁰ *CW XXII*, p.305.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

down the hateful edifice, it consumed all that existed capable of nourishing itself, and was extinguished.²⁵²

This had laid the seeds of the modern world. Those countries in which the Reformation succeeded became increasingly secular. The 'moral influence', that is to say the 'the unquestioned heritage of the Catholic clergy, passed into the hands of the power over the minds of mankind, which had been for so many ages wealthy classes, and became united with worldly power.'²⁵³

Freed from the shackles of clerical authority, this rising wealthy class developed the 'doctrines of the British constitution', which contained 'the opinions, respecting the proper limits of the powers of government, and the proper mode of constituting and administering it, which were long characteristic of Englishmen.' New notions regarding the Constitution and the limits of political power were complimented by new ideas 'respecting morality, education, and the structure of society.' These novel impressions 'spread far,' Mill maintained, 'and took a deep root in the English mind.'²⁵⁴ The 'comparative freedom' offered by 'our Constitution' had 'enabled the people to train themselves in every habit necessary for self-government'. It helped them prepare 'for the rational management of their own affairs' through 'the extensive latitude of action which it allowed to the energies of individuals'.²⁵⁵

When the people were thus trained to self-government, and had learned by experience that they were fit for it, they could not continue to suppose that none but persons of rank and fortune were entitled to have a voice in the government,

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid, p.313.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, pp.314.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

or were competent to criticise its proceedings. The superior capacity of the higher ranks for the exercise of worldly power is now a broken spell.²⁵⁶

The Reformation had thus led directly to the rise of democracy through Protestantism's insistence on secular government, which had resulted in the cultivation of the people *en masse* due to the newfound political liberties it made possible. This was supplemented by its emphasis on education and morality, which improved individual culture. The stress it laid on the individual's relationship with God encouraged ideas of equality, which supplanted those of hierarchy that the Catholic clerical establishment had embodied.

Carlyle picked up the trail of this line of reasoning in his essay on 'The Hero as King', which gave his thoughts on, among other things, the phenomenon of 'Modern Revolutionism'. He emphasised once more that his contemporaries were living in 'times of revolution, and have long been.'²⁵⁷ Never shy of addressing the issues of his era in flamboyant terms, Carlyle took this opportunity to indulge in a literary flourish.

The bricklayer with his bricks, no longer heedful of plummet or the law of gravitation, have toppled, tumbled, and it all welters as we see!²⁵⁸

Revolution abounded because those in charge of building the structural edifice of society had failed to take account of the most basic laws of nature.²⁵⁹ 'But the beginning of it', he was eager to emphasize, 'was not the French Revolution; that is rather the *end* we can hope.'²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.172.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ In the nineteenth-century, Carlyle was one of the few British proponents of natural law theory. Statements such as the ones cited here attest to this tendency in his thought. For more information on Carlyle's relation to natural law theory, see D. J. Simpson, 'Carlyle as a Political Theorist: Natural Law', in *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Aug., 1959), pp. 263-276.

²⁶⁰ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.172.

As the previous chapter demonstrates, Carlyle thought that the French Revolution had inaugurated the reign of democracy. But what lay at the root of the French Revolution? To ask this question is merely an extended means of asking what the foundation of democracy in the modern world was. Carlyle was startlingly clear: 'It were truer to say, the *beginning* was three centuries further back: in the Reformation of Luther.'²⁶¹ Carlyle revered Luther. He had anointed the Saxon theologian as one of his heroes in an earlier essay.²⁶² Luther's part in the coming of the modern world was obvious to any Calvinist intellectual. The problems of the Catholic Church had forced Luther to act.

That the thing which still called itself Christian Church had become a Falsehood, and brazenly went about pretending to pardon men's sins for metallic coin money, and to do much else which in the everlasting truth of Nature it did *not* now do: here lay the vital malady. The inward being wrong, all outward went ever more and more wrong. Belief died away; all was Doubt, Disbelief.²⁶³

Christian institutions had become a chimera; a veil for personal enrichment. The Pope himself embodied the evils of a decrepit Catholicism. Luther had seen into the heart of this and had been disgusted by what he had found. What is more, there was a clear line of descent from the efforts of Luther to those of France's revolutionaries.

From that first necessary assertion of Luther's, 'You, self-styled *Papa*, you are no Father in God at all; you are – a Chimera, whom I know not how to name in polite language!' – from that onwards to the shout which rose round Camille Desmoulins

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid, pp.99-131.

²⁶³ Ibid, p.172.

in the Palais-Royal, '*Aux armes!*' when the people had burst-up against *all* manner of Chimeras, - I find a natural historical sequence.²⁶⁴

The Reformation, much like the French Revolution, had put an end to insincerity and falseness – two of Carlyle's *bêtes noires*. 'Hollowness, insincerity *has* to cease; sincerity of some sort has to begin.' Of this, if at times little else, Carlyle was abundantly clear. 'Cost what it may, reigns of terror, horrors of French Revolution or what else, we have to return to truth.'²⁶⁵ In asserting truth against Papal falsity in the sacerdotal sphere, Luther had set the scene for temporal revolt against insincerity. In tracing a line of trajectory from the Reformation to the French Revolution, Carlyle drew unmistakable links between it and the onset of modern democracy.

As in so many instances, Tocqueville outlined his understanding of this process circuitously. It is in discussing the philosophical method of the Americans that he delineates his stance on the relationship of the modern era to that of the Reformation. This attests to Tocqueville's skill as a writer, to his ability to disguise his true meaning with a distinct mixture of subtlety and seeming candour. In addressing the origins of the philosophical method of the Americans he is, in fact, defining his perception of the foundations of the modern world's psychological disposition.

Much like Mill and Carlyle, Tocqueville began with the Reformation. 'In the XVIth century, the men of the Reformation subject some of the dogmas of the ancient faith to individual reason; but they continue to exclude all the others from discussion.' In his notes to this section Tocqueville developed this point further. In the books of the sixteenth century, he saw that

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p.173.

'one preaches to men that each one of them has the right and the ability to choose the particular road that should lead to heaven.'²⁶⁶

I am assured that half of the nations of Europe have adopted this new doctrine. That is enough. I do not need to be taught that a great political revolution has preceded and accompanied the religious revolution whose history is provided for me.²⁶⁷

The subsequent challenges to authority in the temporal world, whether they were intellectual or political in nature, were merely an extension of the spirit of the Reformation. In the seventeenth century, 'Bacon, in the natural sciences, and Descartes, in philosophy strictly speaking, abolish accepted formulas, destroy the rule of traditions and overthrow the authority of the master.'²⁶⁸ The *philosophes* of the 18th century 'finally generalising the same principle, undertake to submit to the individual examination of each man the object of all his beliefs.'²⁶⁹ 'Who does not see', Tocqueville claimed, 'that Luther, Descartes and Voltaire used the same method, and that they differ only in the greater or lesser use that they claimed to make of it?'²⁷⁰ Here, Tocqueville is tracing the birth of the psychology of democracy. Each of these men, Luther, Descartes and Voltaire, shared a methodological principle: that of subjecting their beliefs to the light of individual reason. But Luther had applied it only to inherited religious beliefs. Descartes had extended this mentality into the intellectual domain and Voltaire, finally, along with the other *philosophes*, had applied it to every subject on which

²⁶⁶ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.702.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p.703.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p.704.

belief was tied to tradition. This mentality had traversed the religious sphere and entered, albeit gradually, men's considerations on any and all domains of life, including politics.

Tocqueville probed the issue of Franco-American difference. How had the Americans maintained stability if they possessed a similar philosophical disposition to the French? This disposition was, after all, this chapter's purported subject. Why, in other words, had this trajectory created a revolutionary democracy in France and a non-revolutionary one in the United States? Tocqueville answered thus:

It is not because the French changed their ancient beliefs and modified their ancient mores that they turned the world upside down; it is because they were the first to generalise and bring to light a philosophical method by the aid of which you could easily attack all things old and open the way to all new things.²⁷¹

The French had applied this mode of analysis to all areas of life where the Americans had restricted it only to one: religion. This lay at the root of their differences. In both cases, however, the spirit of the Reformation had led to the adoption of democratic forms, to the recognition of equality. Here, Tocqueville addressed the psychology of equality; he would outline the sociology of equality elsewhere.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL PRECURSORS OF DEMOCRACY

The Reformation had prepared the minds of men for democracy. By instilling in them a questioning spirit it had enabled them to challenge inherited opinions and acquired usages. One of the great problems of the era, as I showed in the last chapter, was that of halting this

²⁷¹ Ibid, p.705.

revolutionary spirit. Though the Reformation had laid the philosophical foundations of modern democracy, it was not alone in determining its rise. Other factors, of a sociological bent, had helped to foster the nascent democratic society with which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were concerned.

Tocqueville traced a story of sociological change throughout the opening pages of his *Démocratie*. Here we can see the impact of Guizot and other *Doctrinaire* thinkers on Tocqueville's historical understanding. Tocqueville directed his readers to consider France's remote past, beginning seven hundred years prior to their own era. At this time a small number of families owned the land and governed all of the inhabitants; authority was transferred between generations via the mechanism of inheritance alone; men had only one means of acting on one another, 'force'; and 'landed property' was the sole source of power.²⁷²

But, this began to change gradually. The church acquired greater prominence and with it equality began to 'penetrate' into 'government'. A man who would have 'vegetated as a serf in eternal slavery', Tocqueville averred, 'takes his place as a priest among nobles and often goes to take a seat above kings.' The church acted as the primary motor of social mobility and this was increased by society's advancing civilization.²⁷³ Life in more civilized communities is 'more complicated' than in others and this creates a need for institutional apparatus which can accommodate that complexity. Thus, a need was felt for more 'civil laws', which created new offices for 'jurists' who emerged 'from the dark precinct of the courts and from the dusty recess of the clerks' offices'. From such inauspicious beginnings,

²⁷² Ibid, p.6.

²⁷³ Ibid, p.7.

these men gradually came to sit alongside ‘the prince’ and ‘feudal barons covered with ermine and iron.’²⁷⁴

At the same time as this advancing social mobility was taking place, kings and great nobles gradually ruined themselves in ‘great enterprises [and] private wars’ whilst ‘commoners’ enriched themselves in commercial ventures. Money, trade, and commerce then became important new sources of power and financiers rose to ‘a political power that is scorned and flattered.’ Enlightenment emerged from ivory towers and gilded courts to descend into the crowd. Literature and the arts gained a new prominence and ‘intelligence’ itself became ‘a social force’. Men of letters arrived as a public power.²⁷⁵ ‘As new roads to achieve power are found,’ Tocqueville wrote, ‘we see the value of birth fall.’

In order to maintain their ascendancy over other nobles or a king, noblemen ‘gave political power to the people.’ Often, kings enlisted the power of the people ‘in order to humble the aristocracy.’²⁷⁶ ‘As soon as citizens began to own the land’, Tocqueville argued, ‘no discoveries were made in the arts, no further improvements were introduced into commerce and industry, without also creating as many new elements of equality among men.’

When you skim the pages of our history you do not find so to speak any great events that for seven hundred years have not turned to the profit of equality.²⁷⁷

The diffusion of knowledge, the rise of commerce and the petty struggles of nobles and kings alike furthered the progress of this idea. Finally, the Reformation and Protestantism added the *coup de grâce*. The rebellion against Catholic authority and the gestation of a new

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, pp.7-8.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p.9.

Christian creed taught that ‘all men are equally able to find the way to heaven.’²⁷⁸ But before that psychological blow had been delivered society was already fast progressing toward equality.

Mill offered a comprehensive sociological history of the origins of modern democratic society. This is divided across three entirely separate works: his collection of essays on the *Spirit of the Age*, an 1836 piece on *Civilization* (a title that is likely to have been inspired by Guizot given its subject matter²⁷⁹), and the *Principles of Political Economy*. Given the chronology of these works, it is evident that Mill had been thinking about this issue in detail for at least 17 years. In the *Spirit of the Age*, Mill grappled with a commonplace notion about the socio-political changes taking place around him. They were not the result, as was often held, of an ‘increase of wisdom’. Instead, a more fundamental change had taken place. The size of the political community – and by that I mean those taking part in political discussion or, in Jürgen Habermas’ terms, the public sphere – had increased. ‘Discussion has penetrated deeper into society’, Mill noted. ‘The progress which we have made,’ Mill maintained, ‘is precisely that sort of progress which increase of discussion suffices to produce, whether it be attended with increase of wisdom or no.’²⁸⁰ ‘Men may not reason, better,’ he thought, ‘concerning the great questions in which human nature is interested, but they reason more. Large subjects are discussed more, and longer, and by more minds.’²⁸¹

Pluralization in society had fostered an increased spirit of discussion regarding political issues.

But, how did this promote progressive change? Mill could not have been clearer:

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p.9.

²⁷⁹ Mill’s essay on the subject can be found in *CW XVIII*, pp.117-147. Michael Levin has written about the influence of Guizot’s concept of civilization on Mill in *J.S. Mill on Civilization and Barbarism* (London, 2004), p.13.

²⁸⁰ *CW XXII*, pp.317-318.

²⁸¹ Ibid, p.317.

To discuss, and to question established opinions, are merely two phrases for the same thing. When all opinions are questioned, it is in time found out what are those which will not bear a close examination. Ancient doctrines are then put upon their proofs; and those which were originally errors, or have become so by change of circumstances, are thrown aside.²⁸²

Having identified and established the outcome of the process of pluralization that had taken place, Mill then moved to outline the sociological changes that had resulted in the diversification of the public sphere. At its root lay the gradual encroachment of 'civilisation'.²⁸³ Civilization had a number of effects. First among them was the fact 'that power passes more and more from individuals, and small knots of individuals, to masses: that the importance of masses becomes constantly greater, that of individuals less.'²⁸⁴ Two causes accounted for this change in the dynamics of power. The first related to 'property' and the second to the 'powers and acquirements of mind.'²⁸⁵

Both property and intelligence had been 'confined to a few persons' during the 'early stage of civilisation'. In fact, Mill argued that throughout 'the beginnings of society, the power of the masses does not exist; because property and intelligence have no existence beyond a very small portion of the community'.²⁸⁶

The character of this state of society was the utmost excess of poverty and impotence in the masses; the most enormous importance and uncontrollable

²⁸² Ibid, pp.317-318.

²⁸³ Though this is a concept heavily associated with Guizot, Mill's essay bearing the same title was the culmination of his study of three French thinkers according to Michael Levin: Guizot, Tocqueville and Auguste Comte. All three, in Michael Levin's view, 'surveyed history in the broad sweep.' See Levin, *Mill on Civilization*, p.18.

²⁸⁴ *CW XVIII*, p.121.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

power of a small number of individuals, each of whom, within his own sphere, knew neither law nor superior.²⁸⁷

But the process of civilization had altered the relative positions of both the masses and the small cadre who had exercised power in its entirety. Mill drew his readers' attention to the development of the middle classes through which this process had been exercised.

We need only ask the reader to form a conception of the vastness of all that is implied in the words, growth of a middle class; and then bid him reflect upon the immense increase of the numbers and property of that class throughout Great Britain, France, Germany, and other countries in every successive generation...²⁸⁸

Embodied in the middle classes, the process of civilization across the centuries had led to 'property and intelligence' becoming 'widely diffused among millions' as well as an increase in individuals' ability to compromise and coalesce. This was because, Mill claimed, 'It is only civilised beings who can combine.'²⁸⁹ Mill proceeded to outline in greater detail the gradual unfolding of these elements of civilization – the division of property, the widening of intelligence, and the increasing tendency to coalesce – in the following pages. Only one conclusion could be supported.

The triumph of democracy, or, in other words, of the government of public opinion, does not depend upon the opinion of any individual or set of individuals that it ought to triumph, but upon the natural laws of the progress of wealth, upon the diffusion of reading, and the increase of the facilities of human intercourse.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, pp.121-122.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, p.122.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, pp.126-127.

The ideas he articulated in his essay on *Civilization* were restated in his review of Tocqueville's second volume of *Démocratie*.²⁹¹ It is true that in Mill's view the rise of democracy was only one of the consequences of the broad movement of sociological change that he saw in history. But, J.H. Burns is right to argue that it was by far 'the most important political result of civilization'.²⁹²

Mill drew the attention of his readers to the process of civilization again in his 'Preliminary Remarks' to the *Principles of Political Economy*. Here, though, the focus is less extensive for one obvious reason. The *Principles* was primarily a treatise on political economy.²⁹³ Mill contented himself with demonstrating how wealth had been divided across the ages.²⁹⁴ He noted that 'extraordinary differences' that existed in respect to wealth 'between different ages of the world; differences both in the quantity of wealth, and in the kind of it; as well as in the manner in which the wealth existing in the community is shared among its members.'²⁹⁵

Mill drew an economic picture in which there existed four states in regard to wealth, which he organized into a clear hierarchy. The savage state of wealth Mill placed at the bottom of civilization's pyramid. It was a condition in which 'no one has much more than absolute necessities, and in case of deficiency must share even those with his tribe.'²⁹⁶ Next came the

²⁹¹ Ibid, pp.164-165.

²⁹² J.H. Burns, 'J.S. Mill and Democracy, 1829-1861', in J.B. Schneewind eds., *Mill: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Indiana, 1969), p.296. Tocqueville's figuring of the sociological transformation underlying the rise of democracy is well known. Mill's is not; neither is Carlyle's. J.H. Burns' essay, for example, 'The Light of Reason: Philosophical History in the Two Mills', in J.M. Robson and M. Laine eds., *James and John Stuart Mill/Papers of the Centenary Conference* (Toronto, 1976), pp.3-20, fails to do any sort of justice to Mill's philosophy of history and yet this remains one of a limited number of contributions dealing specifically with the subject. No similar analysis exists for Carlyle.

²⁹³ However, Mill did state on the very first page of the *Principles* that politics and economics, as well as a number of other features of any society, were interrelated. 'The creed and laws of a people act powerfully upon their economical condition', he argued, 'and this again, by its influence on their mental development and social relations, reacts upon their creed and laws.' See *CW II*, p.3.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, pp.3-21.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, p.10.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, p.11.

‘shepherd state’. This was the period in which ‘inequality of possessions’ first entered into human affairs.²⁹⁷ This bore a progressive counterpart. Inequality fostered leisure, if only for a few, which promoted the development of new tastes that required innovation in the various Arts of life in order to be satisfied.²⁹⁸

The agricultural stage followed the shepherd state. Quantities of food hitherto unknown were able to be produced in this era and the ‘surplus’, Mill contended, ‘whether small or great, is usually torn from the producers’ in this state, ‘either by the government to which they are subject, or by individuals, who...have established themselves as lords of the soil.’²⁹⁹ Great monarchies *or* powerful aristocracies resulted from the arrival of this epoch. Throughout it, Mill reflected, ‘the population of each country may be considered as composed, in unequal proportions, of two distinct nations or races, the conquerors and the conquered: the first the proprietors of the land, and the latter the tillers of it.’³⁰⁰ Despite this, progress in the course of civilization continued. The demands of great kings and powerful aristocrats for ever greater luxuries promoted the development of the middle classes, which in turn stimulated new changes in the economic state of civilization.

The final stage that Mill identified – though, he did not claim it was a moment in which history ended – was that of the ‘commercial and manufacturing’ age.³⁰¹ At this point in time, Mill maintained, ‘the immediate cultivators of the soil...ceased to be in a servile or semi-servile state’; progress advanced at a new and speedier pace; national grandeur replaced individual eminence; and ‘conveniences and luxuries, other than food,’ were limited ‘no longer...to a

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p.11.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p.12.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p.13.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p.17.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p.18.

small and opulent class'. These items descended 'in great abundance, through many widening strata in society.'³⁰² In Mill's understanding, then, the triumph of democracy lay only at the two poles of economic development: in the savage state and the highly civilized.

Carlyle hinted at something similar, though his position is far less clear or rigorous than that of Tocqueville or Mill. Where Tocqueville and Mill were evidently attempting to account for the birth of democracy – that is, to show the sociological precursors that made democracy inevitable – Carlyle's object was different in this instance. In his essay on *Chartism*, Carlyle wanted to demonstrate how the present had arisen. Of course, that present was democratic, as he well knew. But the *histoire philosophique* Carlyle advanced here was not intended to account for democracy's existence.

As with Mill and Tocqueville, however, Carlyle's interpretation of the historical sociology of the modern era stretched far into the past. Carlyle showed how the public sphere had gradually increased in size over the centuries. He asked his readers to 'Consider those Barons of Runnymede', indeed, to 'consider all manner of successfully revolting men!' The '*Magna Charta*' was but one instance of such a rebellion in the history of men. What especially did they mean? 'Call it not succession of rebellions', Carlyle implored his readers, 'call it rather succession of expansions, of enlightenments, gift of articulate utterance descending ever lower.'³⁰³ This was the significance of the rebellions and revolutions that punctuated the annals of history – of British history at least.

Class after class acquires faculty of utterance, - Necessity teaching and compelling;
as the dumb man, seeing the knife at his father's throat, suddenly acquired

³⁰² Ibid, p.19.

³⁰³ CE XXIX, p.176.

speech! Consider too how class after class not only acquires faculty of articulating what its might is, but likewise grows in might, acquires might or loses might; so that always, after a space, there is not only new gift of articulating, but there is something new to articulate.³⁰⁴

Once those Barons of Runnymede had been 'satisfied', Carlyle argued, 'a new class hitherto silent...begun to speak'. This was 'the Middle Class'. Amongst this class, Carlyle claimed, 'much had been going on' whilst nobles were busy ruining themselves in 'wars of Red and White Roses, Battles of Crecy, Battles of Bosworth', *ad infinitum*. A process of urbanization and commercialization was under way: 'Sheffield had taken to the manufacture of Sheffield whittles', Carlyle argued, and 'Worstead could form wool spin yarn, and knit or weave the same into stockings or breeches for men.' A veritable *tiers-état* had arrived in England and Carlyle could not let its significance go unnoticed.³⁰⁵

The seven incorporated trades with their million guild-brethren, with their hammers, their shuttles and tools, what an army; - fit to conquer that land of England, as we say, and to hold it conquered!³⁰⁶

This was not all. The middle classes had not only obtained power; they had also obtained the gift of learning. They had 'acquired the faculty and habit of thinking', as Carlyle put it, and 'individual conscience had unfolded itself among them; Conscience, and Intelligence its handmaid.'³⁰⁷ Shakespeare was the finest example of this trend. He had been 'a woolcomber, poacher, or whatever else at Stratford in Warwickshire, who happened to write books!' And

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, p.177.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, pp.177-178.

yet, he amounted to the 'finest human figure', Carlyle thought, 'that Nature has hitherto seen fit to make of our widely diffused Teutonic clay.'³⁰⁸ The industrial revolution had merely exacerbated the existing changes that had long been taking place in society. Carlyle expressed this through recourse to symbolism.

In this clanging clashing universal Sword-dance that the European world now dances for the last half-century, Voltaire is but one choragus, where Richard Arkwright is another.³⁰⁹

Arkwright's ideas and innovations, Carlyle thought, would last far longer than those of Voltaire. When the man himself 'shall have become mythic...we shall still spin in peaceable profit by him'.³¹⁰ This was the sociological story of the development of the modern world that Carlyle advanced. From the cradle of Magna Charta to the industrial and French revolutions, this was the process by which Britain had pluralized. Given Carlyle's breadth of interest and his understanding of European history as a whole, it seems fair to say that it is likely he applied the same logic to the European continent as a whole. Nevertheless, Carlyle's sociological story of the development of the modern world across the ages differed from that of Tocqueville and Mill in aim, as I said above, though much of the principle remains similar.

RELIGION, CONFLICT, JUSTICE: THE HIDDEN MOTORS OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The modern democratic world that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle saw developing around them had been conditioned by the decline of the *ancien régime* and by the rise of classes that had

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p.178.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p.184.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

hitherto been excluded from taking part in the affairs of government and society on equal terms. The previous two sections of this chapter show the way in which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle conceived of these concurrent processes. This section will outline the clandestine forces that each of these men believed lay behind the changes that had shepherded feudal society towards the modern era. For Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle these forces were wholly different. However, they did share a common feature: the notion of conflict.

For Tocqueville, Providence or, at the very least, Christianity had set the world on a course to democracy.³¹¹ 'The entire book that you are about to read', Tocqueville wrote in introducing the *Démocratie*, 'has been written under the impression of a sort of religious terror'. Tocqueville had been unsettled at the sight of an 'irresistible revolution' he perceived as having 'marched for so many centuries over all obstacles' and that was still advancing in the contemporary world 'amid the ruins that it has made.' This *irresistible revolution* was the 'gradual and progressive development of equality', which was at once 'the past and the future' of all history, at least in the Christian world.³¹²

Tocqueville argued that the trend towards equality of conditions was a 'development' of 'the sacred character of the will of God.' Any attempt to turn back the tide would be akin to 'struggling against God himself' and, consequently, men as well as nations must 'accommodate themselves to the social state that Providence imposes on them.'³¹³ The Christian world in Tocqueville's view, as Hugh Brogan put it, was 'condemned to democracy' because God willed it.³¹⁴ It is on this section that the introduction to the *Démocratie* turns.

³¹¹ Levin argued that this feature of Tocqueville's historical typology placed him 'clearly within the tradition of western post-Enlightenment thought', alongside such philosophers as Hegel and Marx. M. Levin, *The Spectre of Democracy: The Rise of Modern Democracy as Seen by its Critics* (London, 1992), p.117.

³¹² Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.14.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.275.

Placed squarely in the middle of Tocqueville's opening section, it demonstrates the goal of his philosophical outline of history. Prior to this page, he had shown how equality had arisen; after it he was concerned only with convincing his readers that they must take control of their bizarre and chaotic age, and impose a new order based on the divine trajectory he had outlined for them.

The rise of the modern world that Tocqueville had perceived was not so much a record of the various causes that had produced the effects he had articulated as it was a form of divine gospel. This is not an extrapolation from Tocqueville's statements on history; his own words convey this perspective much more powerfully than any secondary commentator's possibly could.

It isn't necessary for God himself to speak in order for us to discover sure signs of his will; it is enough to examine the regular march of nature and the continuous tendency of events; I know, without the Creator raising his voice that the stars in space follow the curves traced by his fingers.³¹⁵

Tocqueville's understanding of history as such attests to the magnitude of two of his deepest influences: Pascal and Guizot.³¹⁶ Conflict is central to Tocqueville's conception of history's development. This is not apparent at first sight. Throughout his account of the rise of modern society, though, and even in his description of that new society itself, the force of equality is constantly in conflict with that of inequality. The parallel is not obvious at first simply because

³¹⁵ Tocqueville, *Democratie*, p.14.

³¹⁶ Sainte-Beuve described Tocqueville's relationship with democracy through a comparison with Pascal: 'To me, Tocqueville has every appearance of devoting himself to democracy as Pascal did to the Cross: rabidly.' Cited in Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.340. For a precise description of Tocqueville's relationship with Pascal, see Jaume, *Tocqueville*, pp.159-163.

Tocqueville placed so much emphasis on the idea of equality alone. History, in his view, though, was dialectical.

Mill saw history in similarly dialectical terms. 'The struggle between Liberty and Authority', Mill wrote in the 'Introductory' to *On Liberty*, 'is the most conspicuous feature in the portions of history with which we are earliest familiar'.³¹⁷ Mill's capitalization of these two central ideas, Liberty and Authority is revealing. It is something he had undoubtedly seen in Romantic and pseudo-Romantic writers, Carlyle in particular. He adopted this mode of expression whilst under the influence of Carlyle in the 1830s, as can be seen in various essays he wrote at that time, but subsequently abandoned such an idiosyncratic style. In capitalizing 'Liberty' and 'Authority', however, Mill lent to them a very great significance, and it was a weight he obviously felt they deserved.

These were his two great ideas, in regard to historical development, and it was through their interaction that change occurred. The struggle between these two ideas was 'so far from being new', he thought, and had 'divided mankind, almost from the remotest ages.' The world in which Mill found himself was no different. Mankind may have progressed to an unprecedented level but it was, nonetheless, still under the auspices of these eternally warring precepts. In fact, in 'the more civilised portions of the species' this conflict merely 'presents itself under new conditions' and, therefore, 'requires different and more fundamental treatment.'³¹⁸

The essential elements underlying those societies which Mill placed under consideration had not changed; they had merely acquired *new clothes*. This particular notion was one that he

³¹⁷ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.5.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

had taken, in large measure, from Guizot. J.H. Burns attributed ‘the connected view of history’ that Mill proffered to the influence of Auguste Comte’s *Cours de philosophie positive*, with which Mill was highly conversant.³¹⁹ Comte’s inverse deductive method was certainly important in determining Mill’s means of approaching the past, but the contents of his reflections mirror those of Guizot.

Mill traced, through the rest of the ‘Introductory’ to *On Liberty*, the political (primarily) and sociological (secondarily) manifestations of the constant formations, disintegrations, and reformations that the eternal conflict between liberty and authority had produced in European history.³²⁰ It was this conflict that had been at the root of the movement towards democracy. Moves to limit the power of kings, through securing ‘political liberties or rights’, were the first efforts in this direction. Contravention of these ‘liberties or rights’ justified either ‘specific resistance’ or ‘general rebellion’.

Later, ‘constitutional checks’ were established to limit monarchical authority. The ‘consent of the community’, in this instance, ‘was made a necessary condition to some of the more important acts of the governing power.’³²¹ Finally, ‘men ceased to think it a necessity of nature that their governors should be an independent power, opposed in interest to themselves.’ At this point, it seemed more suitable ‘that the various magistrates of the State should be their tenants or delegates, revocable at their pleasure.’³²² The force of liberty had thus triumphed over that of authority. But, the battle was not won, it had only changed shape. Mill discussed this in detail over the course of the following pages of *On Liberty*.³²³

³¹⁹ Burns, ‘The Light of Reason’, p.7.

³²⁰ Mill, ‘On Liberty’, pp.5-8.

³²¹ Ibid, p.6.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid, pp.7-9.

Significantly, though, and perhaps in contradiction to Mill's actual intentions, he had drawn an historical trajectory that was dependent on a first cause: the conflict between liberty and authority in history. This conflict fostered the sort of pluralization in the public sphere that Mill had charted in other works and had led, ultimately, to the rise of democracy.³²⁴

Carlyle's notion of history was equally dialectical. In Carlyle's work, the conflict that is responsible for the changes that occur in society is always the same. Revolts, rebellions, even revolutions, in history result from the eternal battle between sincerity, truth, or reality and insincerity, falsity, or semblance. The Manichean struggle taking place between these timeless forces operates clandestinely for the most part. But in moments when the *ideal* a system of society is based on ceases to be a reality and the conventions extant in any culture cease to represent the *actual* social situation, conflict between semblance and reality bursts through the thin layer of habit in order to proclaim the truth.

In *Past and Present*, Carlyle expressed this cogently. In any society, he thought, 'the Ideal always has to grow in the Real, and to seek out its bed and board there' and by 'the law of Nature, too, all manner of Ideals have their fatal limits and lot; their appointed periods, of youth, of maturity or perfection, of decline, degradation, and final death and disappearance.'³²⁵ Once the truth that lies in them fades away, the sands of time wash such ideals into the tide of eternity.

The Ideal, the True and Noble that was in them have faded out, and nothing now remaining but naked Egoism, vulturous Greediness, they cannot live; they are

³²⁴ Other works Mill wrote show that this dialectical conception of history was not adopted simply for 'On Liberty'. In his article on 'Guizot's Essays and Lectures on History', Mill demonstrated his adherence to the conflictual nature of all progressive historical movement. This was contrasted against those societies that had been subject to the dominance of one principle alone, be it a military, religious or political principle. Such societies were characterized by stagnation. Only conflict could promote progress. See Mill, *CW XX*, pp.257-294.

³²⁵ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp.61.

bound and inexorably ordained by the oldest destinies, Mothers of the Universe,
to die.³²⁶

Carlyle identified two instances when this had happened, both moments of tremendous upheaval: the English Civil War and the French Revolution. In the former, the 'English Regicides' had utterly destroyed 'Flunkeyism'.³²⁷ Puritanism had been the last appearance of 'conviction and veracity' in England, perhaps in Europe; though, it had since given way to 'hollow cant and formalism'.³²⁸ The French Revolution provided a similar example of falsity giving way to truth. It was, according to Carlyle, a 'true Apocalypse, though a terrible one,' which had demonstrated that 'Semblance is not Reality; that it has to become Reality, or the world will take-fire under it'.³²⁹

His most striking comments on the French Revolution's status as an event in which eternal truths had been reasserted against contemporary fallacies were, unsurprisingly, in his major work on that event. 'Great truly is the Actual', Carlyle stated, 'is the Thing that has rescued itself from bottomless deeps of theory and possibility, and stands there as a definite indisputable Fact'.³³⁰ The French Revolution, more than any other event on record, had proved that lies could not continue, and Carlyle implored his readers to recognize this singular fact. 'Where thou findest a Lie that is oppressing thee,' he cajoled his audience, 'extinguish it. Lies exist there only to be extinguished; they wait and cry earnestly for extinction.'³³¹ The ultimate truth was simple. All lies, regardless of their power, 'have a sentence of death written down against them, in Heaven's Chancery itself; and, slowly or fast, advance

³²⁶ Ibid, pp.195-196.

³²⁷ *CE VI*, p.441.

³²⁸ *CE VI*, p.1.

³²⁹ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.174.

³³⁰ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.33.

³³¹ Ibid, p.34.

incessantly towards their hour.'³³² The revolutionaries themselves, similar to the English Regicides Carlyle identified, had debunked the falsity they found around them and reasserted reality – or at least attempted to. 'A set of mortals has risen,' Carlyle argued of the revolutionaries, 'who believe that Truth is not a printed speculation, but a practical Fact'.³³³

Carlyle's conception of history and the hidden motor of historical development represented, if not, like Tocqueville, a divine plan, at least the reign of divinely sanctioned principles. The eternal struggle between semblance and reality that Carlyle identified presupposed no necessary course of human development outside of moral righteousness. However, in the context of the arguments Carlyle advanced in regard to the sort of society that had existed under the *ancien régime*, which are outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, it is not difficult to see how this theory of historical change accorded with the move towards democracy Carlyle had highlighted. The French aristocracy's corruption and its inability to fulfil the duties towards other classes that were required in order to justify its existence had made its continuation seem spurious. Democracy was the result, as the lower and middle classes rose up in arm against their former leaders' speciousness. Historical change according to such divinely sanctioned principles implies the existence of an underlying form of justice that is inherent in individual human beings. For Carlyle, then, history moves in reaction to divergences from justice.

The views Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle proffered on the historicity of democracy formed the basis of their respective understandings of its inevitability. Long-prepared by changes in the social psychology and social structure of European civilization, democracy's arrival was

³³² Ibid, p.192.

³³³ Ibid, p.436.

inescapable. In this view, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were united. Where they differed was in their notions of just what had been driving the changes that had fostered ever more democratic societies. Tocqueville saw in the historical trajectory he perceived the hands of Providence. Mill thought all historical movement since the end of the classical period had been defined by the interaction of two fundamental principles on a grand scale: liberty and authority. Carlyle believed that the formation, destruction and subsequent reformation of polities occurred in accordance with a divinely-sanctioned and inculcated principle of justice. What should now be obvious is that the notions of democracy with which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were working were not narrowly political. They encompassed much more than the institutional and electoral dynamics of a democratic polity. It is to their respective conceptions of democracy that we shall now turn.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONTOURS OF DEMOCRACY

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were eager to understand the meaning of the new democratic world into which they had been born. What did democracy entail? What were its contours? This was one of the many tasks that occupied a young Tocqueville as he travelled throughout the American continent. Though he has often been criticized for his ambiguous use of the term, Tocqueville clearly understood the importance of arriving at a reliable definition of democracy. In the notes accompanying one of the chapters of his great work on *Démocratie* – ‘That The Salient Point Of The Social State Of The Anglo-Americans Is To Be Essentially Democratic’ – he directed his efforts toward this very end. Tocqueville reminded himself to ‘Explain what is understood by democracy.’³³⁴ That he at times may have strayed from the sort of rigour he demanded of himself and led readers into the realm of ambiguity in consequence adds to the richness and diversity of Tocqueville’s work, according to James Schleifer.³³⁵

Carlyle set himself a similar task. In 1841 Carlyle confided in a letter to Richard Monckton Milnes that democracy still remained to be properly understood. Only ‘a truly brave and seeing man’ would be able to ‘understand that great black *inevitable* fast-swelling rising tide of Democracy’. The task allotted to such a man, though, was more challenging than that of simply defining democracy. To ‘*interpret* it’ was merely a beginning. What was required was a man who could ‘wisely yield to it, wisely resist it, in fact wisely accomplish what of just and

³³⁴ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.76n. Tocqueville, though, never managed to arrive at a conclusive and satisfactory definition. He often used the term in different senses. Schleifer identified as many as eight: inevitable development or tendency, social condition, popular sovereignty, government of the people, mobility, middle classes, equality of conditions, open society. Schleifer, *Tocqueville’s Democracy*, pp.325-339. Jean-François Sutter, in ‘Tocqueville et le problème de la démocratie’, *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 49 (1959), pp.330-40, examined the reason why Tocqueville did not manage to give one single definition of democracy.

³³⁵ Schleifer, *Tocqueville’s Democracy*, pp.338-339.

right it inarticulately means'.³³⁶ By the time he came to write his *Latter-Day Pamphlets* nine years later, Carlyle believed that his contemporaries had still not understood the meaning of democracy.

What *is* Democracy; this huge inevitable Product of the Destinies, which is everywhere the portion of our Europe in these latter days? There lies the question for us. Whence comes it, this universal big black Democracy; whither tends it; what is the meaning of it?³³⁷

Carlyle was sure that it must have a 'meaning', otherwise 'it would not be here.'³³⁸ Once more, he outlined the importance of understanding its significance, using similar language to that which he had in his letter to Monckton Milnes. 'If we can find the right meaning of it, we may, wisely submitting or wisely resisting and controlling, still hope to live in the midst of it'. But he left his readers in no doubt. If the 'right meaning' cannot be found, 'if we find only the wrong or no meaning in it, to live will not be possible!'³³⁹ Understanding democracy was not a mere intellectual exercise for Carlyle, it was central to chances for stability in the contemporary world. Of this, he was sure.

Mill was sceptical about the possibility of understanding democracy. In the second review article he authored on Tocqueville's *Démocratie* he argued that 'Democracy is too recent a phenomenon, and of too great magnitude, for any one who now lives to comprehend its consequences.' At most, he thought, 'A few of its more immediate tendencies may be perceived or surmised; what other tendencies, destined to overrule or to combine with these,

³³⁶ *Carlyle Letters Online*: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/13/1/lt-18411202-TC-RMM-01>

³³⁷ *CE XX*, p.9.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

lie behind, there are not grounds even to conjecture.’³⁴⁰ Despite his obvious scepticism, Mill did attempt to understand democracy’s meaning. He wrote a celebrated treatise on *Representative Government*, which was the culmination of an intellectual life in which he had engaged continuously with democracy, its history and its problems.

This chapter will outline the contents of the term *democracy* in the respective lexicons of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Given the nature of this thesis, and with that end in view, it will examine primarily the overlap between these three men in respect of their understanding of this concept. Doubtless, it is a key idea in the works of each and the manner in which they used it suggests significant overlap between their respective definitions. In assessing these definitions it is possible to see the different intellectual and contextual spheres that influenced their thought.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle each related their notions of democracy to the classical *polis*. The ancient world was significant to their respective understandings of what constituted a democracy. Each thought the ancient republics to be an important category in explaining the political and social features of modern democracy. In this they were little different to their contemporaries. There was a renewed interest in the classical period, specifically ancient Greece, amongst the generation of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. This was particularly pointed in regard to ancient democracy. Debate about the applicability of classical democracy to the nineteenth-century spanned the European continent. Goethe, Hegel, Shelley, and Kierkegaard as well as Arnold, Frazer, Nietzsche and Fustel de Coulanges were among a wide

³⁴⁰ *CW XVIII*, p.190.

variety of scholars, ranging from poets, critics, and historians to philosophers of all kinds that played an active part in this debate.³⁴¹

Benjamin Constant and François Guizot took up the baton in France, arguing that the modern world was qualitatively different from that of the ancient and had little to learn from its illustrious forebear.³⁴² Constant considered the ancient's inability to conduct a life in private inimical to the conditions of the modern era, which had in effect privatized personal lives.³⁴³ Guizot located the source of European civilization not in the Greek world, but in Christianity and the Goth's understanding of moral responsibility, commonality, trust and loyalty.³⁴⁴ In England, Lord Macaulay and Edward Bulwer-Lytton agreed with their French counterparts in seeing the inapplicability of ancient Greece to contemporary political debate and attempted to remove it entirely.³⁴⁵ But, their attitude to the classical world and its applicability was representative of the views of only a minority. Connotations of democracy were still encumbered with the heritage of the classical past and the ancient world was retained as an important lens through which democracy was understood in the early-nineteenth century.³⁴⁶ This was markedly prevalent in Chartist publications and the mainstream press in Britain.³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ F.M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1981), p.1. Recent work by Mark Philp and Michael Drolet, among others, has contributed further to uncovering early-nineteenth century notions about democracy in Britain and France. See J. Innes, M. Philp, and R. Saunders, 'The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s' and M. Drolet, 'Democracy, Self, and the Problem of the General Will in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought'. Both essays are in J. Innes and M. Philp eds., *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2013).

³⁴² Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, p.16.

³⁴³ Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, p.28.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.24.

³⁴⁵ Macaulay conceived of the choice facing his contemporaries in terms that most of them rejected. He thought that they needed to decide between moderate reform and revolutionary change rather than a mixed constitution or democracy. Bulwer-Lytton, not unreasonably, considered the small size of the ancient Athens, its attachment to slavery, and the direct nature (as opposed to *representative*) of its democracy as precluding and realistic comparison to modern states. See: Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, pp.206-210.

³⁴⁶ J. Innes, M. Philp, and R. Saunders, 'The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s', in Philp and Innes Eds., *Re-Imagining Democracy*, p.114.

³⁴⁷ Innes, Philp, and Saunders, 'Rise of Democratic Discourse', pp.126-127.

However, contemporary debates and examples were no less important. In Britain, the examples offered by revolutionary France and America as well as Chartism, with its demands, helped to shape notions of democracy. It was an idea that contained diverse meanings. Many saw in it the spectre of popular power, of the people's exercise of political power.³⁴⁸ Others saw in it a particular social group that was distinguished from both the monarch and the nobility as well as a specific principle that was distinct from the monarchical and aristocratic principles.³⁴⁹ Some equated democracy with social and economic, as well as political, equalization and *la carrière ouverte aux talents*³⁵⁰ whilst others identified it primarily with the institutional reforms suggested by Chartists in the eponymous 'People's Charter'³⁵¹

In France, though, the understanding of the contents of this idea varied much less widely. Of course, the Revolution and the recognition of its persistence in the modern world framed interpretations of democracy broadly.³⁵² But, this was gradually being superseded by a new intellectual synthesis. 'Whether on the left of the political spectrum or on the right,' Michael Drolet argued, 'French political thinkers understood democracy primarily as a form of society, defined by social equalization.'³⁵³ Democratic society was the result of the destruction of the entrenched social divisions that had characterized the *ancien régime*.³⁵⁴

In what remains of this chapter it will become evident that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle synthesized these diverse contextual and historical discourses in order to arrive at a conception of democracy that was distinct from that of their contemporaries. It incorporated

³⁴⁸ Ibid, p.115 and p.122.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p.115.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.117-119 and p.123.

³⁵¹ Ibid, p.121.

³⁵² See M. Drolet, 'Democracy, Self, and the Problem of the General Will in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought', in Innes and Philp Eds., *Re-Imagining Democracy*, p.69.

³⁵³ Drolet, 'Democracy, Self, and the Problem of the General Will', p.70.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, p.70.

a political and social dimension that emphasized the break with the past – the *ancien régime* – that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle had taken such care to establish.

ANCIENT AND MODERN DEMOCRACY

That Carlyle was an active participant in the debate about ancient democracy and its relevance to the modern world should come as no surprise. He was a voracious reader, comfortable with Latin and Greek texts, and well aware of European intellectual trends. He entered this discourse in 1818, in a letter to Robert Mitchell, which contrasted Athens favourably to the modern world via the medium of a private difficulty that was then afflicting him. He was a schoolmaster, but had grown bored with the trade.

Where *then* would be my comfort? Had I lived at Athens, in the plastic days of that brilliant commonwealth, I might have purchased ‘a narrow paltry tub,’ and pleased myself with uttering gall among them of Cynosarges. But in these times – when political institutions and increased civilization have fixed the texture of society – when Religion has the privilege of prescribing principles of conduct, from which it is a crime to dissent – when, therefore, the aberrations of philosophical enthusiasm are rewarded not by admiration but contempt – when Plato would be dissected in the Edinr review, and Diogenes laid hold of by a ‘society for the suppression of beggars’ – in these times – it may not be.³⁵⁵

The political and social contours of the modern world were far more restrictive than they had been in Athens. Thus far Carlyle saw little resemblance between the circumstances of the

³⁵⁵ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/1/1/lt-18181106-TC-RM-01>

two. But this was not the last time he would articulate his thoughts on the ancient world. In 1838 Carlyle delivered a series of *Lectures on the History of Literature* in London, of which the first three dealt exclusively with the ancients. The Greeks were feted. Greece had produced 'the first great spirits of our western world'.³⁵⁶ This nation had given birth to the first remarkable men in history. Carlyle's analysis of Grecian history is divided into three epochs. The first ran from the siege of Troy until the Persian invasion, which marked the beginning of the second. The third, and final, epoch began with the invasion of Philip of Macedon.

For Carlyle, it was in this final period of Grecian history that its splendour was greatest. 'It was the flower time of Greece...and at this period she developed an efflorescence of genius such as no other country ever beheld'.³⁵⁷ Finally, Europe declared her independence from the empires of the East in this era. It bore a startling similarity to Carlyle's own century. This was due both to the character of the French and the influence of the French Revolution. Carlyle perceived 'a remarkable similarity in character of the French to these Greeks.'³⁵⁸ The prime feature of both was a sort of incoherent strength he called '*vehemence*'. Of the Moderns, only the French retained a comparable 'fiery impetuosity'.³⁵⁹

More significantly, Carlyle saw in Greek history an episode that mirrored the French Revolution. This was 'the sedition of Corcyra', of which Thucydides had written so powerfully. 'Here, too, the lower classes were at war upon the higher or aristocrats, as the French would have called them.' It was suspected that the higher orders wished to carry the lower in slavery to Athens. The latter thus imprisoned the former and 'man after man they were brought out of the prison, and then with stabs and pikes they were massacred one after another'. On

³⁵⁶ T. Carlyle, *Lectures on the History of Literature* (London, 1892), p.1.

³⁵⁷ Carlyle, *Lectures*, p.6.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.7.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.8.

learning the fate of their fellow aristocrats the remainder refused to come out when called. The mob then massacred them in a hail of arrows. 'In short,' Carlyle maintained, 'the whole scene recalls to the reader the events of September 1792.'³⁶⁰

Carlyle saw another mirror of the French Revolution in the classical era; this time in the everyday life of the Roman Republic. 'It appears to have been a very tumultuous kind of polity,' he noted, 'a continual struggle between the Patricians and the Plebeians, the latter of whom were bent on having the lands of the State equally divided between them and the upper orders.' Carlyle bemoaned this turbulent, almost revolutionary, state of affairs and did not decry the fall of the Republic when it came. 'I cannot join in the lamentation made by some over the downfall of the Republic'.³⁶¹ Given the status of the French Revolution in Carlyle's thought, as the harbinger of modern democracy, the comparison he drew between it and classical events is telling. Here, he emphasizes the anarchy of democratic politics, not to mention the class conflict inherent in the kind of polity that is based on competition between the rich and the poor, and these are certainly features of his overall notion of democracy.

The similarities Carlyle saw between ancient and modern history went even further into the domain of contemporary political debates. He admired the sense of discipline instilled in and by Romans because it tempered the sort of liberty that characterized democratic politics. Though he acknowledged that it was not 'mild', he thought it was beneficial. 'In spite of all that has been said and ought to be said about liberty,' Carlyle remarked, 'it is true liberty to obey the best personal guidance, either out of our own head or out of that of some other.'

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p.46.

Clearly, he went on, there is no one who 'would wish to see some fool wandering about at his own will, and without any restraint or direction; we must admit it to be far better for him if some wise man were to take charge of him...although it seems but a coarse kind of operation.'³⁶²

Carlyle addressed this issue 30 years later in returning to the example of the Roman Republic in an inaugural address to students at the University of Edinburgh on being elected to the post of Rector. On this occasion, he cited Machiavelli's opinion of democracy, which, he told his audience, had been given in reference to Rome. The Italian, Carlyle remarked, 'in speaking of the Romans,' argued 'that Democracy cannot long exist anywhere in the world; that as a mode of government, of national management or administration, it involves an impossibility, and after a little while must end in wreck.'³⁶³ Here, democracy is conceived of as a means of government or national administration. It is grounded on a central idea, which Machiavelli, Carlyle claims, had denigrated: 'he considers it a solecism and impossibility that the universal mass of men should ever govern themselves.'

Democracy was founded on the idea that each and every individual was responsible for his own governance; at least, Roman republicanism had exemplified this characteristic. Carlyle recounted how Machiavelli had been forced 'to admit of the Romans, that they continued a long time'. However, Machiavelli believed the longevity of this classical democracy 'was purely in virtue of this item in their constitution, namely, of their having the conviction in their minds that it was solemnly necessary, at times, to appoint a Dictator'.³⁶⁴ Carlyle's notion of democracy, therefore, associated it fundamentally with chaos. His comparisons between the

³⁶² Ibid, p.43.

³⁶³ CE XXIX, pp.459-460.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, p.460. Carlyle addressed the concept of the Roman dictator again in his essay on *Dr. Francia*, the Paraguayan dictator. See CE XXIX, pp.272-300.

French Revolution and the ancient Republics, not to mention his criticism the sort of freedom democracy preferred, attest to this.

Carlyle's allusions to the chaotic nature of ancient Republics' political cultures and what they showed modern thinkers when compared to present events did not exhaust his interaction with humanist discourse. 'Of ancient Republics, and *Demoi* and *Populi*," he wrote in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* in 1850, 'we have heard much; but it is now pretty well admitted to be nothing to our purpose'. This was because 'a universal-suffrage republic, or a general-suffrage one, or any but a most-limited-suffrage one, never came to light, or dreamed of doing so, in ancient times.'³⁶⁵ The democracies of the ancient world were inapplicable to modern circumstances precisely because modern conditions were different. Universal suffrage, or even calls for it, had never been a prospect in the city states of the classical period. Ironically, Carlyle thought that this was part of the reason for their prosperity.

When the mass of the population were slaves, and the voters intrinsically a kind of *kings*, or men born to rule others; when the voters were *real* 'aristocrats' and manageable dependents of such, - the doubtless voting, and confused jumbling of talk and intrigue, might, without immediate destruction...go on; and beautiful developments of manhood might be possible beside it, for a season.³⁶⁶

Three years later, Carlyle was reading Plato's *Republic* for the first time in 40 years in an attempt to unlock its political wisdom. He told Ralph Waldo Emerson as much in 1853. 'I was much struck with Plato, last year, and his notions about Democracy'.³⁶⁷ On receiving a new

³⁶⁵ CE XX, p.18.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p.19.

³⁶⁷ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/28/1/lt-18530513-TC-RWE-01>

copy of *The Republic* from a friend in 1852, Carlyle wrote back declaring that the 'Divine Plato is always welcome to me'.³⁶⁸

What does all of this show us about Carlyle and his notion of democracy? Firstly, it demonstrates how significant the example of ancient cultures was to his understanding of the contours of democracy. Carlyle contrasted the idea of democracy present in contemporary political discourse, which included the notion of universal suffrage, with that of the ancient republics and found classical democracies wanting in this regard. Furthermore, he saw in these republics the ideas of liberty and individual responsibility. These were important concepts to modern democrats. They had been of similar importance to the ancients. Carlyle thought that such ideas had led to periodic crises that had to be corrected by the existence of a dictator. Democracy was chaos in Carlyle's view.

Classical practices had denied the majority political power, which was fundamental to democracy. Carlyle expressed this notion in an essay on 'National Education' in 1835. He thought that the 'Democratic Force in England which had long been increasing, has hence forth become irresistible, if still more or less modifiable'. The Scotsman argued 'that while new results of all kinds are rapidly shaping themselves, it is the mass of the people mainly which will decide their shape; that with the mass of the people the whole destiny of all classes in England now lies.'³⁶⁹ The democratic force of which he wrote was synonymous with popular power. In its absence something other than a democracy existed.

Aligned to popular authority, Carlyle explained, was a mode of expression that characterized democracy. It was 'considered a kind of 'Government'', Carlyle noted with some scorn. But

³⁶⁸ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/27/1/lt-18520427-TC-JLD-01>

³⁶⁹ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/8/1/lt-18350203-TC-NE-01>

what kind of government? Parliamentary. In 1839, he told his readers that ‘Democracy, we are well aware, what is called ‘self-government’ of the multitude by the multitude, is in words the thing everywhere passionately clamoured for at present.’³⁷⁰ It had been ‘modelled into suffrages’ and ‘furnished with ballot-boxes’.³⁷¹ ‘The old model, formed long since,’ he continued, ‘and brought to perfection in England now two hundred years ago, has proclaimed itself to all Nations as the new healing for every woe: “Set-up a parliament; let us have suffrages, universal suffrages’.³⁷²

Thus, Carlyle’s understanding of democracy was related to particular institutions, popular engagement, and a notion of liberty that in many ways reflect our own conceptions of such a form of government. A democracy had to rely on active popular engagement in the political process. This was regularized through the development of certain types of institution, such as parliaments. Without these, particularly mass engagement through widespread suffrage, no system of government could claim to be democratic in Carlyle’s understanding of that term. It was for exactly this reason that Carlyle had rejected the example provided by ancient democracy. It is important to note here that this notion of democracy is entirely *political*. Carlyle emphasized the institutional requirements and modes of election in order to define the democratic.

Whilst still struggling to come to terms with his awe, bordering on incredulity, at what he was witnessing on the other side of the Atlantic, Tocqueville, in 1835, offered a similar outcry against the fallacious comparisons that many of his contemporaries were attempting to draw

³⁷⁰ CE XXIX, p.158.

³⁷¹ CE XX, p.14.

³⁷² Ibid.

between the democratic states of the classical past and modern democracies, such as the United States.

When I compare the Greek and Roman republics to these republics of America, the manuscript libraries of the first and their coarse populace, to the thousand newspapers that crisscross the second and to the enlightened people that inhabit the republics of America; when I then think of all the efforts that are still made to judge the one with the aid of the others and to foresee what will happen today by what happened two thousand years ago, I am tempted to burn my books in order to apply only new ideas to a social state so new.³⁷³

What Tocqueville was trying to explain to his readers was how the United States and, by extension, all modern democratic countries, differed entirely from their ancient predecessors. The experience of the ancient world could shed no light on humanity's present predicament. Tocqueville's notes on the 1840 volume of the *Démocratie* expressed, once again, his frustration with those who persisted with such useless comparisons. 'I do not know when people will tire of comparing the democracy of our time with what bore the same name in antiquity. The differences between these two things reveal themselves at every turn.'³⁷⁴ Much like Carlyle, Tocqueville thought the ancient city states were essentially aristocratic in nature.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.490-491. His father, Hervé de Tocqueville, thought this an overstatement. In his comments on this section of the text he wrote: 'I do not like this idea. Why would you burn your books because a thousand newspapers crisscross the territory of the Union?' See Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.491n.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, p.795n.

³⁷⁵ This is one example of Tocqueville's famously comparative method of understanding political and social issues. The central duality that runs throughout Tocqueville's entire oeuvre is that of aristocracy vs. democracy. Though his comparative mode of analysis encompasses geographical and chronological juxtapositions as well as that of aristocracy and democracy, it is the last of these that is best known. For an in depth analysis of Tocqueville's comparative approach, see M. Richter, 'Comparative Political Analysis in Montesquieu and

For me, I do not need to think about slavery or other reasons that lead me to regard the Greeks as very aristocratic nations despite some democratic institutions that are found in their midst. I agree not to open Aristotle to finish persuading me. It is enough for me to contemplate the statues that these peoples have left. I cannot believe that the man who made the Belvedere Apollo emerge from marble worked in a democracy.³⁷⁶

Tocqueville considered the republics of the classical era to be of absolutely no relevance to modern democracies. They had been characterized by entrenched social inequality. This was at the root of their cruellest excesses – such as slavery, for example – and their finest achievements.

The emphasis that Tocqueville placed on the social basis of political regimes appeared again in the 1840 volume of his *Démocratie*. Here, he referred to the Ancients once more: ‘In Athens, all citizens took part in public affairs; but there were only twenty thousand citizens out of more than three hundred fifty thousand inhabitants’. The rest ‘were slaves and fulfilled most of the functions that today belong to the people and even to the middle classes.’ ‘Athens,’ he went on, ‘with its universal suffrage, was, after all, only an aristocratic republic in which all the nobles had an equal right to government.’ ‘Rome’, Tocqueville averred, must be considered ‘in the same light’³⁷⁷

Tocqueville made similar remarks in considering Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories* in 1836. In his notes to these, which he read whilst travelling through Switzerland, he wondered if the

Tocqueville’, in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Jan., 1969), pp. 129-160 and W. Pope, *Alexis de Tocqueville: His Social and Political Theory* (London, 1986), pp.32-43.

³⁷⁶ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.795n.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp.815-816.

Florentine republic was analogous to modern democratic states.³⁷⁸ Tocqueville decided that at no time had Florence been democratic, because it had never possessed a democratic social state of the sort he had outlined in the *Démocratie*.³⁷⁹

From the foundation of the Florentine republic in 1255 until 1343, the city had not only an *aristocratie*, but also a *noblesse*, or body of nobles (*un corps de nobles*) which exercised feudal dominion over the countryside surrounding the city...This *noblesse* possessed considerable wealth, which was transmitted by the laws of inheritance...No one could call this state of affairs a democratic type of society (*état social démocratique*).³⁸⁰

After the *noblesse* fell from its predominant position in 1343, a new aristocracy of wealth replaced what had been one of birth.³⁸¹ Despite the change in Tocqueville's mode of analysis – from an aristocracy of birth to one of wealth – the result remained the same: radical, entrenched social inequality. Ancient and medieval republics differed from their modern counterparts because they had 'been governed by aristocratic rather than democratic principles.'³⁸²

Despite their rejection of ancient and, for Tocqueville, Renaissance republics, did these republics' features contribute anything to Tocqueville's and Carlyle's conception of democracy itself?³⁸³ Yes. They helped them define what democracy was not and could not

³⁷⁸ M. Richter, 'Tocqueville's Brief Encounter with Machiavelli : Notes on the Florentine Histories (1836)', in *History of Political Thought*, Volume 26, Number 3, 2005 p.429.

³⁷⁹ Richter, 'Tocqueville's Brief Encounter with Machiavelli', p.437.

³⁸⁰ Cited in *Ibid*.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp.437-438.

³⁸² *Ibid*, p.429.

³⁸³ Levin argued that Tocqueville's understanding of democracy was largely negative in the sense that it derived its meaning from what it was not. 'Democracy,' Levin maintained, 'denoted not so much a precise constitutional arrangement, as the general movement attacking the traditional system of inherited privileges. It can best be

be. In so doing Tocqueville and Carlyle were able to understand more easily what constituted democracy in the modern world.

Carlyle's understanding of ancient republics' undemocratic nature was grounded on primarily political considerations: the nature and extent of the electoral franchise. Carlyle admired the manner in which the Roman Republic had set limits to the sort of democratic liberty heralded by many of his contemporaries. Ancient democracy had been, in Carlyle's view, a totally different animal to its modern counterpart. Tocqueville, on the other hand, divided the political and the social, only considering the latter. By the time he began to write on this sort of stage, Cheryl Welch argued, the distinction between the political and the social spheres of life had become commonplace.³⁸⁴ Indeed, the development of these separate domains of categorization has been traced by Frederick Neuhouser.³⁸⁵ Tocqueville thought that humanity had entered a new social state, which could be called democratic, and that this was totally unprecedented. Democracy, in this sense, was a new phenomenon and comparisons with republican pasts were redundant for that reason.³⁸⁶

understood in terms of its antithesis, for its primary definition derives from what it is not.' Levin, *Spectre of Democracy*, p.121.

³⁸⁴ C. Welch, *De Tocqueville* (Oxford, 2001), p.67.

³⁸⁵ F. Neuhouser, 'Conceptions of Society in Nineteenth-Century Social Thought', in A.W. Wood and S.S. Hahn eds., *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century (1790–1870)* (Cambridge, 2012), pp.651-675.

³⁸⁶ Tocqueville's treatise on democracy is itself a defining moment in the change in cultural expectations of democracy. 'Until Alexis de Tocqueville', Mogens Hansen argues, 'published his *De la démocratie en Amérique* democracy was almost invariably taken to be direct democracy practised in a small community, such as ancient Athens or 18th-century Basle, and democracy and representation were seen as opposed forms of government.' See M.H. Hansen, *The Tradition of Ancient Greek Democracy and Its Importance for Modern Democracy* (Athens, 2005), p.45. Certainly, Tocqueville's book was defining for Mill. The latter noted in his *Autobiography* that many of his 'new tendencies' – that is, those ideas that supplemented and somewhat contradicted his Utilitarianism in the wake of his mental crisis – were already in place by the early-1830s. What remained to take place was his gradual gravitation toward a 'qualified Socialism' and 'a shifting of my political ideal from pure democracy...to the modified form of it, which is set forth in my *Considerations on Representative Government*.' 'This last change,' Mill continued, 'dates its commencement from my reading, or rather study, of M. de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*'. See, Mill, *Autobiography*, p.149.

But Tocqueville, like Carlyle, came to possess an alternative and competing rights-based notion of democracy. Melvin Richter recently charted the apparent development of this aspect of Tocqueville's thought. He traced the Frenchman's changing conception of democracy from an initial position, which was 'primarily social', to one that incorporated elements 'both social and political' and, finally, to another that was 'primarily political.'³⁸⁷ According to Richter, France's revolutionary experiences were the main drivers of this change. The revolution of 1848 and the subsequent *coup d'état* of 1851 accounted for Tocqueville's radical alteration of Guizot's conception of democracy as a social construct.³⁸⁸ Richter's account built on that of Pierre Manent, who also perceived a unity of political and social democracy in Tocqueville's work.³⁸⁹ Tocqueville came to think of democracy, Jennings concluded, 'as both a political *and* a social principle, as a principle of both government and civil society.'³⁹⁰

Mill took a different approach to classical democracy. Like his friend, the Philosophic Radical George Grote, he expressed almost unbounded admiration for the Athenian polity. Both thought that the Moderns could learn valuable lessons from their ancient counterpart.³⁹¹ The influence of ancient Greek thought and practice on Mill has been charted by others and my intention is not to recapitulate that here.³⁹² I only wish to show how it influenced his notion

³⁸⁷ M. Richter, 'Tocqueville and Guizot on democracy: from a type of society to a political regime', in *History of European Ideas*, 30 (1) (2004), p.63.

³⁸⁸ Richter, 'Tocqueville and Guizot', p.67. Jack Hayward has argued something similar. The notes Tocqueville left for the proposed second volume of *Ancien Régime* confirm his equation of social democracy with liberal democracy, which combined 'both classical and modern conceptions of freedom.' See J. Hayward, *After the French Revolution: Six Critics of Democracy and Nationalism* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), p.162.

³⁸⁹ See P. Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy* (Lanham, 1996).

³⁹⁰ Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic*, p.180.

³⁹¹ J. Riley, 'Mill's Neo-Athenian Model of Liberal Democracy', p.221.

³⁹² See Demetriou, and Loizides, *Mill: A British Socrates*; A. Loizides, *John Stuart Mill's Platonic Heritage: Happiness Through Character* (Plymouth, 2013); Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism*; Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*; T.H. Irwin, 'Mill and the Classical World', in Skorupski eds., *Cambridge Companion to Mill*, pp.423-463; and Rosen, *Mill*, pp.31-48.

of democracy. Mill thought that the Greek heritage had been totally distorted by contemporary historians and polemicists. He declared that 'Athenian democracy had been so outrageously, and without measure, misrepresented' by those who had formerly sought to depict it. Anyone who had read 'Thucydides and the orators with decent intelligence and candour, could easily perceive that the vulgar representation [it had been subjected to] was very wide of the truth'. Fortunately, the 'mountain of error' that had amassed around the subject had been largely dispelled by the efforts of Dr. Thirlwall and Grote. The latter in particular, 'so constantly on his guard against letting his conclusions outrun his proofs', had arrived at a considerable 'positive and certifiable result.'³⁹³

Nonetheless, Mill continued to lament the eighteenth century's unfavourable interpretation of Athenian democracy, which was a staple of nineteenth-century discourse.³⁹⁴ Mill staunchly defended Athens from this sort of ridicule and asserted the inconsistency of this interpretation with the facts. Grote had, more than anyone else, vindicated this incarnation of democracy against these claims. He had shown that:

Athenian government was of surpassing excellence, its time and circumstances considered; that no other form of society known to the ancients realized anything approaching to an equal measure of practical good government; and

³⁹³ *CW XI*, p.312.

³⁹⁴ Following Plato and Aristotle, Philp argued, historians had come to view the range of ancient city states, Athens included, as examples of 'unruly political orders' that possessed a 'tendency to degenerate, through the rise of demagogues, into tyrannies.' See Philp, 'Talking about Democracy', in Innes and Philp eds., *Re-imagining Democracy*, p.101. Mill was well aware of this trend. 'The moral of the history, as related by most modern historians,' Mill wrote in the fifth instalment of his review of Grote's *History*, 'is that democracy is a detestable kind of government, and that the case of Athens strikingly exemplifies its detestable qualities.' See *CW XXV*, pp.78-79.

that this was mainly owing to the nearer approach which it made to democratic institutions.³⁹⁵

Mill's understanding of why Athenian democracy offered a positive picture gives us some comprehension of how he had come to conceive of democracy itself. He thought that Athens had 'many important points in common with democracy.'³⁹⁶

It was a government of unlimited publicity, and freedom of censure and discussion. Public officers were subject to effective responsibility. The tribunals, being multitudinous and appointed by lot, were, like modern juries, generally incorrupt. And there was no distinction in political rights and franchises between poor and rich, lowborn and highborn.³⁹⁷

These were traits of democracy Mill was to refer to again three years later, in 1853, in an extended piece on Grote's *History* for the *Edinburgh Review*. The 'Athenian Constitution' was democratic in as much as it possessed a feature 'more practically important than even the political franchise; it was a government of boundless publicity and freedom of speech', which was the equal of modern liberty of the press. Moreover, it was an open and equal society in one crucial respect. 'Every office and honour was open to every citizen, not, as in the aristocratic Roman republic (or even the British monarchy), almost nominally, but really'.³⁹⁸ Finally, it really 'was government by a multitude, composed in majority of poor persons – small landed proprietors and artisans.'³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ *CW XXV*, pp.78-79.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *CW XI*, pp.307-308.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Mill qualified his acceptance of Athenian democracy and his caveat seriously impinged on its applicability to modern society. He acknowledged that Athens was not an example of a 'democracy in the full sense of the term' because 'women, slaves, and a multitude of permanent residents of all ranks and classes were not citizens'. They could not take part in the political process, nor were they even recognised by the constitution of the state itself.⁴⁰⁰ Mill returned to this theme in 1853 and drew an explicit parallel between the ancient and modern worlds. He argued that the Greek republics were as entitled to the democratic designation as 'the northern States of America', which, much like the Greek governments, excluded women and slaves 'from the rights of citizenship'. Nonetheless, Mill claimed, this was 'an exclusion which...militates against the democratic principle.'⁴⁰¹ He drew attention to this once more in his *Considerations*. There are two 'very different' notions of democracy, he told his readers, which 'are usually confounded' under the same name.⁴⁰²

The pure idea of democracy, according to its definition, is the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented. Democracy, as commonly conceived and hitherto practiced, is the government of the whole people by a mere majority of the people exclusively represented.⁴⁰³

In his view, only the 'former is synonymous with the equality of all citizens'. The 'latter', he argued, 'is a government of privilege in favour of the numerical majority, who alone possess practically any voice in the State.'⁴⁰⁴ The latter represented nothing more than a form of class government. Mill's discussion of antiquity and his thoughts on the possibility of class

⁴⁰⁰ CWXXV, pp.78-79.

⁴⁰¹ CWXI, pp.307-308.

⁴⁰² CW XIX, p.448.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

government reveal something fundamental about his notion of democracy that is little emphasized. It is now a commonplace to claim that his perception of democracy was grounded on the example of the Athenian republic. This was a primarily political understanding that stressed particular institutional arrangements. By and large Mill's statements support this conclusion. However, there is clearly a sociological element to his reflections. States that claimed to be democratic and maintained an element of entrenched social inequality could not be described as democracies.

Unlike Tocqueville and Carlyle, Mill saw in classical democracy much that was to be admired and, in fact, a great deal that was relevant to the contemporary world. The political dimensions of it were significant for Mill and the fact that it was a government exercised by a poor multitude was clearly a characteristic part of what made it a working democracy in his view. Other features such as equality of opportunity, equal access to justice and, crucially, freedom of speech were as important as equal electoral rights in a country being defined as a democratic state. These were aspects of government *and* society that were replicable in the modern world. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle offered their readers distinct perspectives on ancient democracy. Nonetheless, ancient examples provided them with a means of understanding their modern counterparts. Democracy in the modern world connoted something different to that which had gone before. Crucial to this was the dynamic of social equality, which formed an important element of the conceptions of democracy formed by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle.

THE NATURE OF SOCIETY: DEMOCRACY AS EQUALITY OF CONDITIONS

Tocqueville, as we have seen, objected to the democratic claims of the ancient and medieval republics primarily on sociological grounds. This was because – despite Melvin Richter’s recent remarks and in accordance with Drolet’s assessment of French intellectual currents – the basis of Tocqueville’s understanding of democracy was primarily sociological.⁴⁰⁵ ‘Democracy’, he wrote in 1835, ‘constitutes the social state; the dogma of the sovereignty of the people, the political law.’ In the following paragraph he went even further. ‘These two things are not analogous. Democracy is society’s way of being. Sovereignty of the people, a form of government.’⁴⁰⁶

Popular sovereignty was only a form of government because it could be separated from democracy in practice. Tocqueville announced it as a fact that ‘democracy is even more compatible with despotism than with liberty’. Regardless of whether these features were likely to appear together, due to their ‘correlative’ nature as well as the fact that popular sovereignty ‘is always more or less a fiction wherever democracy is not established’, democracy itself did not have to rest on popular sovereignty.⁴⁰⁷ It was thus a social framework on which particular political forms were overlaid.

Whatever its shape equality of conditions was the generative force at the bottom of any democratic society or, as Pierre Manent explained, equality ‘is the common centre of democratic societies, and it prevails in them all, more or less.’⁴⁰⁸ Tocqueville reinforced this

⁴⁰⁵ Jack Lively explored the contours of the social and the political in Tocqueville’s account of democracy. For more information on these aspects of Tocqueville’s thought see J. Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Tocqueville* (Oxford, 1965), pp.71-126. Here, my purpose is simply to illustrate that these divergent aspects of Tocqueville’s definition exist for the purpose of comparison with Mill and Carlyle, not to explore them to their limit.

⁴⁰⁶ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.76.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ P. Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, p.3.

point in his notes in the margin of the manuscript of the *Démocratie*, though the ambiguity that was to impair his work had already begun to appear. In a telling reminder to himself in the gloss accompanying the main text, he wrote that ‘the social state must never be confused with the political laws that follow from it; equality or inequality of conditions, which are facts, with democracy or aristocracy, which are laws.’⁴⁰⁹

Social equality was crucial to Tocqueville’s understanding of democracy. This followed from his understanding of the work of Guizot and the other *Doctrinaires*, such as Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard, that he had encountered in what Siedentop labelled the great debates of Restoration era France.⁴¹⁰ In line with Tocqueville, Mill also created a direct link between the balance of power in society and that extant in the political institutions of the state. *On Liberty* confirmed the distinction that Mill had made between social and political democracy. He told his readers that ‘There is confessedly a strong tendency in the modern world towards a democratic constitution of society, accompanied or not by popular political institutions.’⁴¹¹ The country in which ‘this tendency is most completely realised’ or, put alternatively, ‘where both society and the government are most democratic’, is ‘the United States’.⁴¹²

But where had this come from? Where had Mill learned to distinguish between social and political democracy in this way? Given his knowledge and understanding of Tocqueville, not to mention their close correspondence for several years, it is tempting to attribute this aspect of Mill’s thought to the Frenchman. But, Tocqueville seems to have reinforced rather than fostered Mill’s appreciation of this subtlety. Mill’s francophilia heavily influenced him in this respect. The very same debates that had so influenced Tocqueville during the 1820s had

⁴⁰⁹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.76n.

⁴¹⁰ See Siedentop, *Tocqueville*, pp.20-40.

⁴¹¹ J.S. Mill, ‘On Liberty’, in S. Collini eds., *On Liberty and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 1989), p.87.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

exerted a decided impact upon Mill and his thought. In reflecting on the work of Guizot, Mill came to see in democracy the emergence of a new egalitarian society of the sort Tocqueville described. In a now famous 1835 letter to Joseph Blanco White, Mill not only demonstrated his own debt to Guizot, but made an implicit connection between Tocqueville's work and Guizot's thought.

I have begun to read Tocqueville. It seems an excellent book: uniting considerable graphic power, with the capacity of generalizing on the history of society, which distinguishes the best French philosophers of the present day, & above all, bringing out the peculiarities of American society, & making the whole stand before the reader as a powerful picture. — Did you ever read Guizot's Lectures? If not, pray do.⁴¹³

Five years later, in a letter to Robert Barclay Fox, Mill emphasized his connection to Guizot. 'I have dinned into people's ears', he wrote, 'that Guizot is a great thinker & writer, till they are, though slowly, beginning to read him — which I do not believe they would be doing, even yet, in this country but for me.'⁴¹⁴

Guizot's influence over Mill was profound. Two essays in particular, both extensive pieces, attest to his enduring influence over Mill: *Civilization* (1836) and *Guizot's Essays and Lectures on History* (1845). In the latter, Mill signalled his acquiescence to Guizot's notion of socially determined conditions; that is, the idea that the social disposition of any society is responsible for the laws, habits, and conventions that characterize it. This had certainly been the case in ancient societies. 'Some one idea', Mill confirmed, 'seems to have presided over the social

⁴¹³ *CW XII*, p.259.

⁴¹⁴ *CW XIII*, p.57.

framework, and to have been carried out in all its consequences, without encountering on the way any counterbalancing or limiting principle.’⁴¹⁵ ‘Some one element, some one power in society,’ Mill continued, ‘seems to have early attained predominance, and extinguished all other agencies which could exercise an influence over society capable of conflicting with its own.’⁴¹⁶

Some societies had been under the influence of a theocratic principle, others had operated under the aegis of a military caste or aristocratic body. Still others had been dominated by ‘the democratic principle.’ As an animating force, the principle of democracy in this sense was characterized by the ‘sovereignty of the majority, and the equal participation of all male citizens in the administration of the State’. These were ‘the leading facts by which the aspect of those societies was determined.’⁴¹⁷ Mill understood that modern democracy was as much social as it was political. In *Civilization*, Mill thought that the progress of civilization carried ‘irresistible consequences’ in its wake.⁴¹⁸ The ‘most remarkable’ consequence of the progressive movement of civilization, Mill thought, was ‘that power passes more and more from individuals, and small knots of individuals, to masses’. Or, in other words, ‘the importance of the masses becomes constantly greater, that of individuals less.’⁴¹⁹ This was a sociological fact that had a demonstrable historical trajectory.

An extension of both material and mental acquirements was at the root of this movement. Property and intelligence had been diffused much wider than ever before, and this was a self-perpetuating process. These changes amounted to ‘the greatest ever recorded in human

⁴¹⁵ *CW XX*, p.267.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ *CW XVIII*, p.119.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.121.

affairs'. At this point Mill quoted Tocqueville's prescription for the modern age: 'Il faut...une science politique nouvelle à un monde tout nouveau.'⁴²⁰ It was futile to attempt to maintain and protect the outward manifestations of aristocratic power when society had changed beyond all recognition.

The whole face of society is reversed – all the natural elements of power have definitively changed places, and there are people who talk to us of standing up for ancient institutions, and the duty of sticking to the British Constitution settled in 1688!⁴²¹

Mill returned to this theme in his *Considerations*. In the first chapter, Mill was at pains to understand whether the form of government present in any given society is a matter of choice or otherwise. 'The government of a country, it is affirmed, is, in all substantial respects, fixed and determined beforehand by the state of the country in regard to the distribution of the elements of social power.'⁴²² Was this an accurate or fair reflection of reality? It was only true if, as Mill had already demonstrated in 1836, the elements of 'property and intelligence' were added to 'mere muscular strength'.⁴²³ Once this was accepted, government could not but be admitted to be dependent upon social conditions. However, that was not to say that only one sort of government could suit a particular set of conditions. In fact, the notion 'that the government of a country is what the social forces in existence compel it to be, is true only in the sense in which it favours...the attempt to exercise, among all forms of government practicable in the existing condition of society, a rational choice.'⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p.126.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² *CW XIX*, p.380.

⁴²³ Ibid, p.381.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, p.382.

In the modern world, these changes highlighted something fundamental that he clearly wanted to communicate to his readers. They were the clarion call that announced the advent of democracy. It was the only viable choice, in his view, given the social disposition of the era. 'The triumph of democracy,' he had told his readers in 1836, 'or, in other words, of the government of public opinion, does not depend upon the opinion of any individual or set of individuals that it ought to triumph, but upon the natural laws of the progress of wealth, upon the diffusion of reading, and the increase of the faculties of human intercourse.'⁴²⁵

Democracy's social foundations were clear and they were already in place throughout Europe. The disjunction between the social and the political situation, though, was a potential source of conflict, which is why Tocqueville had recommended a new political science. Mill, for his part, agreed with Tocqueville. 'The distribution of constitutional power', he concluded, 'cannot long continue very different from that of real power, without a convulsion.'⁴²⁶ Democracy was *a fact* in the contemporary world. Guizot and Tocqueville, through their respective works, had demonstrated this adequately to a receptive Mill. The social nature of democracy could not be denied. This complimented Mill's already well-developed sense of the political requirements of a democracy properly so defined.

Carlyle also introduced an important distinction into his figuring of democracy that separated the political and social spheres. In one of his many reformist essays in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 'Downing Street', he drew a picture of democracy that would sit more comfortably alongside those of contemporary French *Doctrinaires*, such as Guizot or Charles de Rémusat. 'For the sake of our Democratic friends,' Carlyle offered 'one other observation' on democracy.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ *CW XVIII*, pp.126-127.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, p.127.

⁴²⁷ *CE XX*, p.119.

Is not this Proposal the very essence of whatever truth there is in 'Democracy'; this, that the able man be chosen, in whatever rank he is found? That he be searched for as hidden treasure is; be trained, supervised, set to the work he alone is fit for.⁴²⁸

'All Democracy lies in this', Carlyle claimed, and this was equal to the 'worth' of 'all the ballot-boxes and suffrage movements now going.' Social equality, which implied a commitment to equal access to careers (particularly those that were governmental in nature), was the *truth* that Carlyle found in democracy. It was the aspect of its portents that he admired. 'Not that the noble soul, born poor, should be set to spout in Parliament, but that he should be set to assist in governing men: this is our grand Democratic interest.'⁴²⁹ 'True democracy', then, in Carlyle's view, 'was a democracy of work where everybody had an equal chance of finding useful employment.'⁴³⁰ Carlyle implored 'reformers, constitutional persons, and men capable of reflection' to consider this. Social equality was the means by which democracy and aristocracy could be conjoined and the benefits of both realized. Carlyle was eager to know 'By what method or methods can the able men from every rank of life be gathered, as diamond-grains from the general mass of sand: the able men, not the sham-able; - and set to do the work of governing, contriving, administering and guiding us!'⁴³¹ 'All that Democracy ever meant', he thought, 'lies there: the attainment of a truer and truer *Aristocracy*, or Government again by the *Best*.'⁴³²

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p.120.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ J. Roper, *Democracy and its Critics: Anglo-American Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth-Century* (London, 1989), p.172.

⁴³¹ CE XX, p.120.

⁴³² Ibid.

In Carlyle's estimation, then, democracy was synonymous with social equality and equality of opportunity. It was this that enabled the development of the sort of meritocracy that he evidently longed for. Carlyle would have seen social equality's equation with democracy in the opening pages of Tocqueville's *Démocratie*, which his letters confirm he read.⁴³³ Here, he would have encountered the ideas of Guizot in a mediated form. Despite his perusal of Tocqueville, his feelings about social equality and equal access to careers for the talented had a longer pedigree. On the one hand it emanated from his religious views. 'All men, we must repeat, were made by God,' Carlyle wrote in *Chartism*, 'and have immortal souls in them.' This represented an underlying equality that Carlyle felt was undeniable. 'The Sanspotato' – an ironic reference to the Irish – 'is of the selfsame stuff as the superfinest Lord Lieutenant.'⁴³⁴ On the other hand, it derived from his appreciation of Napoleon and the French Revolution. In an 1838 piece on *Sir Walter Scott* Carlyle set this out clearly.

Napoleon himself, not the superfinest of great men, and ballasted sufficiently with prudence and egoisms, had nevertheless...an idea to start with: the idea that Democracy was the Cause of Man, the right and infinite cause.⁴³⁵

That Napoleon was apparently 'the armed Soldier of Democracy' and, according to Carlyle, 'did vindicate it in a rather great manner' might have struck contemporary readers – and still does modern readers – as a strange sentiment. How could a man who had himself proclaimed as First Consul for life and then Emperor of France be described as 'the armed Soldier of Democracy'?⁴³⁶ Carlyle did not leave his readers waiting for an explanation.

⁴³³ See Introduction above.

⁴³⁴ *CE XXIX*, p.136.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p.37.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*.

Nay, to the very last, he had a kind of idea; that, namely, of '*La carrière ouverte aux talents*, The tools to him that can handle them'; really one of the best ideas yet promulgated on that matter, or rather the one true central idea, towards which all others, if they tend anywhither, must tend.⁴³⁷

In his final essay *On Heroes*, in 1840, Carlyle returned to this issue once more. This 'new enormous Democracy' that had asserted itself 'in the French Revolution' as 'an insuppressible Fact' was indicative of one truth: '*La carrière ouverte aux talents*, The implements to him who can handle them'; this actually is the truth, and even the whole truth; it includes whatever the French Revolution, or any Revolution, could mean.'⁴³⁸ Carlyle argued that it was in this sense that 'Napoleon, in his first period, was a true Democrat.'⁴³⁹

Modern democracy was not what it had been in the classical world. The differences were clear to Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. However, Mill emphasized the applicability of the classical example of democracy to the modern world where Tocqueville and Carlyle denied it. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle welded distinct currents of thought, ancient and modern, into a new conception of democracy. This demarcation allowed them to expand the idea of democracy to include a notion of equality that was not implicit in classical conceptions.

The principal achievement of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle lay in the separation of democracy's political and social spheres. It is this demarcation that will be pursued in the following two chapters. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, as I have shown, thought that democracy was unavoidable in the modern world. As a result, they committed themselves to examining its

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.205.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

meaning and the problems that arose from it. The former has been discussed in the present chapter; the latter will be addressed in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 4

ON THE PROBLEMS OF A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL STATE

Democracy was *the* force that characterized the modern world. For Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle this was a fact. It was the end towards which the transitional movement from the debris of the *ancien régime* to the modern world was progressing and it had implications for both politics and society. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were acutely aware of the dangers posed by this novel social and political form.⁴⁴⁰ Tocqueville went to the United States in order to see 'if democracy could be made safe for the world.'⁴⁴¹ Mill felt the danger posed by the unchecked force of the numerical majority in a democracy.⁴⁴² 'It is well known', Rosen asserted, 'that Mill was highly ambivalent about the virtues of modern democracy and, like Tocqueville, was critical and fearful of the tyranny of the majority.'⁴⁴³

Mill's hopes for the future of that majority, according to C.L. Ten, 'were tempered by his fears about letting them dominate social and political life in their present unenlightened state.'⁴⁴⁴

Carlyle, despite the fact that he was among democrats, mistrusted democracy perhaps more

⁴⁴⁰ I do not intend to address the problems caused by modern commercial society in either the present or the following chapter. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle had much to say on these, but they are not the focus of this thesis. I note this here because of the connection that Tocqueville and Carlyle made between democracy and commercial society. Mill criticized Tocqueville for this and thought Carlyle's fears exaggerated. In regard to the former, Mill opined that in the *Démocratie* 'the effects of Democracy with the effects of Civilization.' 'He has bound up in one abstract idea', Mill continued, 'the whole of the tendencies of modern commercial society, and given them one name – Democracy; thereby letting it be supposed that he ascribes to equality of conditions, several of the effects naturally arising from the mere progress of national prosperity, in the form in which that progress manifests itself in modern times.' See *CW XVIII*, pp.191-192. In *Chartism*, Carlyle claimed that democracy was merely 'the consummation of No-government and *Laissez-faire*.' See, *CE XXIX*, p.159. He thought that government by these means was responsible for many of the evils afflicting the lower orders of society and 'a government...on a principle of *Let-alone* is no longer possible in England in these days.' See, *CE XXIX*, p.155. In regard to this article, Mill wrote a complimentary letter to the Scotsman in December 1839. However, in this same letter Mill disagreed with Carlyle's view of the condition of the working classes in contemporary England: 'I incline to think that the condition of the working classes has not deteriorated'. See *CW XIII*, p.414. Though Mill did not criticize Carlyle's association of democracy and commercial society, as he had done with Tocqueville, he could not have failed to pick it up and, probably, thought it erroneous.

⁴⁴¹ Roper, *Democracy and its Critics*, p.73.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p.149.

⁴⁴³ Rosen, *Mill*, p.40.

⁴⁴⁴ C.L. Ten, 'Democracy, Socialism, and the Working Classes', in Skorupski eds., *Companion to Mill*, p.372.

than any of his contemporaries.⁴⁴⁵ 'Government', John Morrow argued of Carlyle's view, 'existed only where the less able were placed under the careful superintendence of the more able. Democracy...was, in fact, the consummation of non-government since it left the less able to their own devices.'⁴⁴⁶

However, the strength of their suspicions about the problems democracy posed to the modern world are difficult to judge. Graeme Duncan maintained that Mill's distrust of democracy was so strong that his strictures on the subject leave his view looking distinctly like a form of 'democratic Platonism'.⁴⁴⁷ Joel Johnson also highlighted Mill's Platonic critique of democracy.⁴⁴⁸ Rosen categorically rejected this assertion as did Urbinati.⁴⁴⁹ Francis and Morrow asserted that 'if one assembled all of Mill's statements on democracy it would be easy to demonstrate that he...was convinced that democracy was an unfortunate phenomenon which would have to be tolerated.'⁴⁵⁰ Nevertheless, William Stafford claimed that Mill was more pro-democracy than Tocqueville and that he failed, as a consequence, to 'do full justice' to the latter's doubts about its desirability.⁴⁵¹

Jack Lively's view accorded with that of Stafford. He argued that it was difficult to think of Tocqueville as an 'ardent advocate of political democracy' and claimed that the Frenchman

⁴⁴⁵ Roper, *Democracy and its Critics*, pp.172-173.

⁴⁴⁶ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.94.

⁴⁴⁷ G. Duncan, *Marx and Mill: Two views of Social Conflict and Social Harmony* (Cambridge, 1973), p.259.

⁴⁴⁸ J.A. Johnson, *Beyond Practical Virtue: A Defence of Liberal Democracy Through Literature* (Columbia, 2007), pp.41-42.

⁴⁴⁹ Rosen, *Mill*, p.45. Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, pp.47-54. Rosen rejected this entirely. Urbinati claimed that the perception of Platonic politics that is usually used – that which is drawn from *The Republic* – is incorrect. However, she maintained the variety of Platonism that Mill subscribed to was the political perspective presented in Plato's *Protagoras*. This allows competence to be combined with equality and reflects Mill's views more closely according to Urbinati. See p.53.

⁴⁵⁰ M. Francis and J. Morrow, 'John Stuart Mill: Science, Civilisation and Liberty', in Francis and Morrow eds., *History of English Political Thought*, p.140.

⁴⁵¹ W. Stafford, *John Stuart Mill* (London, 1998), p.114.

only supported democracy because he thought the alternative would be worse.⁴⁵² G.A. Kelly believed that Tocqueville accepted democracy's inevitability, which he had proclaimed of course, with some apprehension and became gradually more fearful of democratic passions as his life progressed.⁴⁵³ 'Tocqueville's view of democracy was neither very broad nor very enthusiastic', Soltau argued; 'he nowhere comes out as the bold champion of positive democracy as the participation of all in the business of government, as did Michelet, Quinet and their school.'⁴⁵⁴

Carlyle feared democracy's incompetence more than the power of the mob, according to Roper, and in thinking that the free rein of the majority would make bad social conditions worse he approached Mill's view by a different route.⁴⁵⁵ B.E. Lippincott was the first to assert Carlyle's similarity to Plato in his criticism of democracy.⁴⁵⁶ Johnson expanded this and incorporated an aesthetic dimension that he claimed Carlyle drew from Platonic discourse.⁴⁵⁷ The Scotsman was, Johnson maintained, at the root of a nineteenth-century critical discourse that reworked Plato's oligarchic ideal of wealth gathering, presented in *The Republic*, and applied it to modern democracy.⁴⁵⁸ Morrow was clear that, for Carlyle, political democracy was synonymous with the minimization of state action. The consequence was disastrous, Carlyle thought, 'because it places political control in the hands of those most in need of guidance and regulation.'⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵² Lively, *Political and Social Thought of Tocqueville*, p.104.

⁴⁵³ G.A. Kelly, *The Humane Comedy: Constant, Tocqueville and French Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1992), p.32.

⁴⁵⁴ Soltau, *French Political Thought*, p.53.

⁴⁵⁵ Roper, *Democracy and its Critics*, p.173.

⁴⁵⁶ Lippincott, *Victorian Critics of Democracy*, pp.10-14.

⁴⁵⁷ Johnson, *Beyond Practical Virtue*, pp.36-38.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.36.

⁴⁵⁹ Morrow, *Western Political Thought*, p.38.

These different views on Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle show that each was highly critical of democracy. Furthermore, much of the criticism Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle levelled at democracy was directed from a similar vantage point. There are a number of areas in which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle agreed in censuring the propensities of modern democracy. This chapter, alongside the next, will outline the areas in which their extensive misgivings about democracy intermingled. The views espoused by Mill and Tocqueville are well-known today, Carlyle's less so. Carlyle has been written off as irrelevant due to his avowed opposition to political democracy, where Tocqueville and Mill were critical friends. This reflects our own normative conceptions more than Carlyle's views. Stafford has expressed this best in his assessment of Mill.

Today, democracy is routine, taken for granted. Questions have become closed which were open in Mill's day. This does not mean that our answers are right; it means that we no longer pose the questions.⁴⁶⁰

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle did pose questions about the consequences of democracy's triumph for institutional viability, the quality of leadership, authority, the status of the individual relative to the mass and the sociability or otherwise of those who lived amongst it. It is to these issues that both the present and the following chapter are dedicated.

DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATURES

Once legislative bodies had assumed sovereign authority they were prone to acting improperly. Imbued with the consent and authority of the majority representatives tended

⁴⁶⁰ Stafford, *John Stuart Mill*, p.121.

to *debate* rather than *act*. In a letter to Carlyle, in the mid-1830s, Mill voiced just such a criticism. Writing in Carlyle's idiosyncratic dialect, Mill appeared to proffer an image of the hero that he came to reject in later years. It is closer to Carlyle's notion of the heroic man's task than some scholars would like to admit and in stark contrast to the expressions of faith in democracy that are commonly cited by admirers of Mill and his works.

'I can perfectly sympathize', he wrote, 'in Bonaparte's contempt of the government of *bavards*: talking is one thing and *doing* another: but while every corner of the land has sent forth its noisy blockhead to talk, over head I am near enough to see the real men of work, and of head for work, who are quietly getting the working part of the machine into their hands, and will be masters of it'. Parliament was characterized as a 'meddling and ignorant assembly', from which only the influence of one man, a hero, could save society from ill consequences.⁴⁶¹ Mill maintained that if his contemporaries:

...let even *one* man come, who with honesty, & intellect to appreciate these *working* men, has the power of leading a mob, – no rare combination formerly, though a very rare one now; and there will be as good a government as there can be until there shall be a better people.⁴⁶²

'How long', Mill concluded this passage by asking, 'is this dreary work [in Parliament] to last; before a *man* appears?'⁴⁶³ Mill's admirers have attempted to account and apologize for this outburst. John Robson attributed Mill's criticism of parliamentary government to 'his desire

⁴⁶¹ *CW XII*, pp.151-152.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

to please and learn' from Carlyle but, Robson claimed, such pronouncements lessened as he gradually grew apart from his Scottish counterpart as the decade progressed.⁴⁶⁴

However, Carlyle was not the only source through which Mill accessed ideas hostile to democracy or the notion of the heroic man in society.⁴⁶⁵ Richard Reeves argued that during the period in question Mill had been captured by conservative 'wolves' in the wake of his personal crisis. These wolves, it is argued, took hold of Mill's political and social thought.⁴⁶⁶ This seems even less tenable. Mill may have been suffering the after effects of his estrangement from strict Utilitarianism, but his independence remained intact.

Whatever the source, Mill concluded in the 1830s that democratic bodies could degenerate into assemblies of *bavards*. He denied the existence of this problem in the *Considerations* in 1861. But his newfound respect for parliamentary institutions was qualified by a proposed separation of responsibilities. Mill argued that although 'Representative assemblies are often taunted by their enemies with being places of mere talk and *bavardage*', he struggled to think of 'a more misplaced derision.'⁴⁶⁷

I know not how a representative assembly can more usefully employ itself than in talk, when the subject of talk is the great public interests of the country, and every sentence of it represents the opinion either of some important body of persons in

⁴⁶⁴ Robson, *Improvement of Mankind*, pp.84-85.

⁴⁶⁵ Mill was exposed to heroic figures as part of the infamous education he received at the hands of his father. 'He was fond of putting into my hands books', Mill wrote, 'which exhibited men of energy and resource in unusual circumstances, struggling against difficulties and overcoming them'. Mill, *Autobiography*, p.30. 'Long before I had enlarged in any considerable degree, the basis of my intellectual creed,' Mill told his readers, 'I had obtained in the natural course of my mental progress, poetic culture of the most valuable kind, by means of reverential admiration for the lives and characters of heroic persons; especially the heroes of philosophy.' Mill, *Autobiography*, p.99.

⁴⁶⁶ The conservative influences that Reeves identified were Coleridge, Goethe, Tocqueville, Comte and Carlyle. See Reeves, pp.106-128.

⁴⁶⁷ *CW XIX*, pp.432-433.

the nation, or of an individual in whom some such body have reposed their confidence.⁴⁶⁸

But this endorsement only held true, Mill thought, 'if assemblies knew and acknowledged that talking and discussion are their proper business, while *doing*, as the result of discussion, is the task not of a miscellaneous body, but of individuals specially trained to it'. Legislative bodies were useful as fora in which assent or other otherwise could be given to legislative measures; but, they were wholly unfit 'to govern and legislate'.⁴⁶⁹

Tocqueville was under no illusion on this front either. In a chapter in the second volume of his *Démocratie*, on 'Parliamentary Eloquence' in the United States, he recorded his horror at the sheer ineffectiveness of the Congressional system. Typically, he abstracted his criticisms from the practical effects of a state of democratic equality. 'All of the laws that tend to make the elected more dependent on the voter', he wrote, 'modify not only the conduct of the legislators...but also their language.'⁴⁷⁰

You can count on the fact that such a system will fill the assembly with mediocre men and that all the mediocre men whom it sends there will make as many efforts to appear as if they were superior men.⁴⁷¹

The consequences of these acts of self-aggrandizement were clear. In an effort to attract the attention of peers and voters alike, representatives would make discussion in democratic assemblies 'vague and muddled'. The assembly would 'crawl toward the goal that is proposed

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, p.433.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.866.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

rather than marching towards it.' This, Tocqueville thought, was a curse particular to 'the public assemblies of democracies.'⁴⁷²

Carlyle echoed much of Tocqueville's criticism in his assessment of the modern history of parliaments. In Britain, at least, parliamentary institutions had surpassed all others in their ability to regard only themselves. 'It is too true that Parliament, for the matter of nearly a century now, has been able to undertake the adjustments of almost one thing alone, of itself and its own interests'. Other issues, such as society's great and present problems, had been disregarded and left 'to rub along very much as they could and would.'⁴⁷³ Parliaments' self-involvement was at the centre of Carlyle's critique of their inutility and he discussed this most pointedly in relation to the Condition of England Question.⁴⁷⁴

Carlyle was at the forefront of contemporary debate in regard to the parlous condition of the labouring poor.⁴⁷⁵ He saw deprivation and distress all around and little relief offered by those in positions of power in Parliament. Such assemblies, which notionally embodied the will of the people and contained governors placed there at their behest, should concern themselves with the state of their electors before anything else. This was particularly true of the 'Reformed Parliament' Carlyle thought, which was more representative of the general public than any had ever been. This had enabled the election of 'Radical Members', who were allegedly 'friends of the people' and had been 'chosen with effort by the people, to interpret

⁴⁷² Ibid, p.867.

⁴⁷³ CE XXIX, p.167.

⁴⁷⁴ For more on Carlyle and the Condition of England Question, see Levin, *Spectre of Democracy*, pp.136-137; Morrow, 'Thomas Carlyle: Political Theory', pp.163-165; Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp.75-103; and Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, pp.174-198.

⁴⁷⁵ Given this context it is no wonder that many of his writings on political issues are characterized by a sense of urgency that is often missing from the work of political thinkers. Carlyle's political ideas, as Morrow demonstrated, were forged in the uncertain atmosphere of the British 1820s and 1830s. It was this milieu that fostered such earnestness in Carlyle's writings on politics. See Morrow, *History of Western Political Thought*, p.38.

and articulate the dumb deep want of the people!⁴⁷⁶ Unfortunately, this theory, though perfectly sustainable as a theory, had not worked in practice and experience proved that 'the remote observer knows not the nature of Parliaments'. For these institutions 'extant there for the British Nations sake, find that they are extant withal for their own sake'.⁴⁷⁷

Add to this that, like Mill and Tocqueville, Carlyle recognized the burdensome nature of parliamentary representatives' loquaciousness and his picture of parliaments becomes even more disparaging. They were prone to 'oceans of windy talk' with little result and had grown into nothing more than a 'National Palaver'.⁴⁷⁸ Assemblies of this sort were thoroughly 'Incapable...of doing business; capable of speech only' and, Carlyle thought, 'this none of the best.'⁴⁷⁹ The evidence of the ineffectiveness of the British Parliament that Carlyle had perceived in its attempt to deal with the Condition of England Question, as well as his musings on parliaments' general tendency toward incessant chatter, fed into a broad theory of parliamentary assemblies as related to sovereign power, which he outlined in 1850. He started by forcing his readers to confront what he thought was the central issue.

It is first of all...to be inquired, Whether your Parliament is actually in practice the Adviser of the Sovereign; or is the Sovereign itself? For the distinction is profound; goes down to the very roots of Parliament and of the Body Politic...⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁶ *CE XXIX*, p.121.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp.121-122.

⁴⁷⁸ *CE XX*, p.220.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.226.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.224.

In England, it was clear that the status of its Parliament in this regard inclined toward the latter in Carlyle's distinction. It was 'the sovereign ruler and real executive King of this Empire'.⁴⁸¹ But what had its sovereignty actually achieved?

The exercise of English Sovereignty, if that mean governance of the Twenty-seven million British souls and guidance of their temporal interests towards a good issue, does not seem to stand on the very best footing just at present!⁴⁸²

The much vaunted 'reformed Parliament' had not distinguished itself as an effective arbiter of sovereign power.⁴⁸³ Why was this the case? Carlyle was forthright. Parliaments were not fit to act 'as Ruling and Sovereign Bodies'. In this function they were 'not useful, but useless or worse.' A 'Sovereign', he contended, 'with nine-hundred or with six-hundred and fifty-eight heads, all set to talk against each other in the presence of thirty-four or twenty-seven or eighteen millions, cannot do the work of sovereignty at all'. Placed in this position, parliaments were 'smitten with eternal incompetence'.⁴⁸⁴ In other words, they were unfit to exercise sovereign power. Thus far, Carlyle agreed with Mill, who, in his *Considerations* had been clear that a Parliament was not an institution fit to implement policy.

The only examples in history of such bodies being effective, Carlyle thought, were those of the Long Parliament in England and the National Convention in France. Both of these had existed in times of crisis and neither, Carlyle argued, were 'inviting instances to the British reformer of this day.'⁴⁸⁵ Carlyle was particularly sensitive to his context, especially the privations of the poor. The inability of the Reformed Parliament in the 1830s to lend them

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, p.227.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, p.231.

succour and ameliorate their condition incurred his ire more acutely than that of his contemporaries. His question to his readers was clear and unambiguous (at least, once his linguistic eccentricities are overcome): if this system of government did not work, should we not try something else?⁴⁸⁶

DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Carlyle was equally concerned about the quality of political leaders democracies could realize. He told his readers in 1850 that he thought 'that true worth, in any department, was difficult to recognise' and 'that the worthiest, if he appealed to universal suffrage, would have but a poor chance.' Levin argued that, in the opinion of the Scotsman, 'Democracy was concerned merely with quantity, whereas Carlyle regarded moral tone and the quality of leadership as the most essential.'⁴⁸⁷ Carlyle illustrated this through reference to historical personages and events, which would have resonated with his audience. 'John Milton, inquiring of universal England what the worth of *Paradise Lost* was, received for answer, Five Pounds Sterling.' Carlyle compared Milton with the fraudulent railway financier George Hudson. The latter had been acclaimed by the majority who had reckoned him, in stark contrast to Milton, to be worth 'Five Hundred Thousand' pounds.⁴⁸⁸

The *actual* relative worth of these two figures Carlyle thought obvious. Morally, there could be no legitimate comparison of the two. The majority's enthusiastic endorsement of Hudson

⁴⁸⁶ Carlyle's disdain for constitutionalism and parliamentary systems of government in particular has been admirably described by John Morrow in his article 'Heroes and Constitutionalists: The Ideological Significance of Thomas Carlyle's Treatment of the English Revolution', *History of Political Thought*, Vol.XIV, No.2, Summer 1993, pp.205-223.

⁴⁸⁷ Levin, *Spectre of Democracy*, p.146.

⁴⁸⁸ CE XX, p.242.

depicted its poor judgment. He pushed this notion even further through reference to religious history. 'Jesus Christ,' Carlyle averred, 'asking the Jews what *he* deserved, was not the answer, Death on the gallows!'⁴⁸⁹ 'As a '*Collective Wisdom*' of Nations' Carlyle continued, 'the talking Parliament, I discern too well, can never more serve. Wisdom dwells not in stump-oratory'.⁴⁹⁰ However, he did allow it authority in some domains.

I will consult it about the quality of New-Orleans pork, or the coarser kinds of Irish butter; but as to the character of men, I will if possible ask it no question: or if the question be asked and the answer given, I will generally consider, in cases of any importance, that the said answer is likely to be wrong...[and] do the reverse of the same.⁴⁹¹

Carlyle concluded this passage with characteristic gusto. In his opinion, any appeal to universal suffrage really amounted to a call on the will of the average. That is to say, it was an appeal to the mass of mediocre men, which could result only in the selection of rulers who represented the lowest common denominator. 'The mass of men consulted at hustings,' Carlyle maintained, 'upon any high matter whatsoever, is as ugly an exhibition of human stupidity as this world sees.' 'Surely', he implored his readers, 'the doctrine of judgment by vote of hustings has now sunk, or should be fast sinking, to the condition of obsolete with all but the commonest human intelligences.'⁴⁹² This criticism is not unique to Carlyle. Both Tocqueville and Mill made similar remarks.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, p.239.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, p.242.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

Tocqueville noted that 'in America, universal suffrage was far from producing all the good and all the evil that are expected in Europe,' but he recognized the inferiority of its leaders immediately.⁴⁹³ 'Many people in Europe believe without saying, or say without believing,' he wrote, 'that one of the great advantages of universal suffrage is to call men worthy of public confidence to the leadership of public affairs.'⁴⁹⁴ In his experience, this was not true.

Upon my arrival in the United States, I was struck with surprise to find out how common merit was among the governed and how uncommon it was among those governing. Today it is a constant fact in the United States that the most outstanding men are rarely called to public office, and we are forced to recognize that this has occurred as democracy has gone beyond all its former limits.⁴⁹⁵

The distinct lack of quality contained within democratic governments sprung from various fonts. All of these related to issues of supply and demand. On the *supply-side*, men of distinction were hard to locate. But why was this true of democracies? The first reason that occurred to Tocqueville emanated from his reflection on a concept that Guizot had introduced him to: civilization. Tocqueville outlined a series of questions related to this idea in one of his pocket notebooks.

Why, when civilization spreads, do prominent men decline in number? Why, when learning becomes the privilege of all, do great intellectual talents become more rare? Why, when there are no more lower classes, are there no more upper classes? Why, when understanding of government reaches the masses, are great

⁴⁹³ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.314.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.314.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.314-315.

geniuses missing from the leadership of society? America clearly poses these questions.⁴⁹⁶

In other words, Tocqueville asked, if sensitively, why, when the middle classes assume predominant power in society, are great political leaders no longer produced?

Added to this tendency was democratic man's disdain for any sign of social distinction. This prevented what Tocqueville called the 'upper classes' from entering politics. 'In the United States, the people have no hatred for the upper classes of society; but they feel little goodwill toward them and carefully keep them out of power'. Tocqueville did not think that the people 'fear great talents' in democracies, 'but they appreciate them little.'⁴⁹⁷ From this, he thought it clear that 'the natural instincts of democracy lead the people to keep distinguished men away from power' and a complimentary 'instinct no less strong leads the latter to remove themselves from a political career'.⁴⁹⁸

The dual factors of the process of civilization and the majority's disdain for the wealthy conspired to constrain the amount of exceptional talent available to electors under democratic conditions. This sort of *supply-side* issue was fundamental to a democratic country's inability to secure effective governors. It was matched by problems on the *demand-side* of the equation. Tocqueville did not doubt the mass of the population's desire to uphold the good interests of the country.⁴⁹⁹ But, the populace had to content itself with leaders of a lower standard than had been present in aristocracies because, in democratic societies, the majority did not possess the *leisure* required to scrutinize political candidates properly.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, p.315n.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, pp.316-317.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, p.317.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p.315.

What long study, what diverse notions are necessary to get an exact idea of the character of a single man! There the greatest geniuses go astray, and the multitude would succeed! The people never find the time and the means to give themselves to this work. They must always judge in haste and attach themselves to the most salient objects.⁵⁰⁰

As a result, 'charlatans of all types' easily construe the manner in which they can please the people: such men flatter its 'slightest passions' and bow before its 'smallest caprices', and by these means gain its approval.⁵⁰¹

Initially, Mill did not endorse Tocqueville's opinion on this issue. In the review Mill authored regarding the first instalment of the Frenchman's *Démocratie* and, once more, in a subsequent essay on a variety of works about the United States, Mill took the contrary position.⁵⁰² In the latter, Mill declared that:

So far as the office of President of the United States is concerned...we had supposed it to be generally acknowledged, not that the experiment had failed, but that it had succeeded a good deal better than perhaps could reasonably have been expected. Of the seven Presidents who have been elected under it, the six first, viz. Washington, the two Adamses, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, – though certainly far from being on a level in point of qualifications for the office, – were all, by general acknowledgment, among the most eminent and best qualified persons in the country.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p.316.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² *CW XVIII*, pp.108-110.

⁵⁰³ Ibid, p.109-110.

In his 1835 review of Tocqueville's *Démocratie*, Mill challenged his French contemporary on the need for extraordinary leaders in ordinary times. Such men were only required, he argued, in periods of emergency. This was why Tocqueville had seen little evidence of gifted men in positions of political authority in America, because it was a stable, prosperous country.⁵⁰⁴

However, Mill reversed his opinion in the *Considerations*. Here, in discussing the electoral system proposed by Thomas Hare, Mill noted that without such a mechanism a democratic people 'would almost certainly miss...leaders of a higher grade of intellect and character than itself.' In other words, such polities ordinarily lacked the 'occasional Pericles' and a 'habitual group of superior and guiding minds.'⁵⁰⁵ Gregory Claeys emphasized this aspect of Mill's thought in his recent work on *Mill and Paternalism*. Claeys argued that Mill thought any government required 'qualities of leadership which, in democracies, rarely emerged'. This was 'Tocqueville's lesson', according to Claeys, and Mill accepted it in the end.⁵⁰⁶

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle each concluded that democracies were devoid of the means of bringing talented governors to the forefront of political life. As a consequence, modern polities were destined to be led by individuals of little capacity.

THE PROBLEM WITH DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Prior to the onset of democracy the locus of authority had been clear: it had resided in a king, an aristocracy, or a combination of the two. The extent of such authority had also been clear.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, pp.75-76.

⁵⁰⁵ *CW XIX*, p.460.

⁵⁰⁶ Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism*, p.70.

But in the age of democracy authority rested – at least theoretically – with the people *en masse*. What did this mean for the force and extent of power in the modern world? Consideration of Carlyle’s notion of authority has tended to concentrate on his proposals for instituting a novel form of aristocratic or pseudo-monarchic control. In this sense, such analysis had focused on the Scotsman’s anti-democratic inclinations and the means he suggested for subverting democratic institutions.⁵⁰⁷ However, much like Mill and Tocqueville, Carlyle’s views on the subject were forged through his analysis of the nature and extent of authority in democratic society and his assessment revealed that the prominent power in the contemporary world offered arresting problems for any political thinker.

In a formative essay on *Voltaire*, Carlyle asserted his primary claim in relation to democratic institutions. Here, his remarks mirrored the concerns he articulated about parliaments. He challenged those who thought that democracy could offer any form of authority whatsoever. It was characterized by ‘the multitude of voices’ and this ‘is no authority’.⁵⁰⁸ Carlyle argued that ‘a thousand voices may not, strictly examined, amount to one vote.’ ‘Mankind in this world are divided into flocks,’ he maintained, ‘and follow their several bell-wethers.’⁵⁰⁹ Authority could dwell only in the leader of a people and not in the people itself.

Carlyle returned to this theme in other works and similar comments can be found in his correspondence. In 1839, he argued that ‘Democracy, take it where you will in our Europe, is found but as a regulated method of rebellion and abrogation’.⁵¹⁰ ‘A Chartist Parliament’, he

⁵⁰⁷ Jonathan Medilow believes that ‘Carlyle elevated Napoleon’s authoritarianism into an ideological principle conforming to his own philosophy of Heroes.’ Medilow, ‘The Political Philosophy of Thomas Carlyle’, p.22. Isaiah Berlin thought that this represented nothing more than the ‘worship of energy, power,’ and ‘the movement of force for its own sake’. See I. Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought* (London, 2006), p.249. Morrow claims that Carlyle’s view of authority upheld his contemporaries’ ‘fundamental right...to appropriate leadership’. See Morrow, *History of Western Political Thought*, p.39.

⁵⁰⁸ *CE XXVIII*, p.193.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, pp.193-194.

⁵¹⁰ *CE XXIX*, p.159.

told Thomas Story Spedding, 'or any form of Democracy is, with me, equivalent to Anarchy, and what the Yankees call "Immortal Smash"'.⁵¹¹ The French Revolution, he noted in his celebrated history of that event, had been 'the baptism-day of Democracy' and what had it signified?⁵¹² 'For ourselves, we answer that the French Revolution means here the open violent Rebellion, and Victory, of disimprisoned Anarchy against corrupt worn-out Authority'⁵¹³ In 1850, Carlyle dedicated himself to uncovering 'what the meaning of this universal revolt of the European Populations, which calls itself Democracy, and decides to continue permanent, may be.'⁵¹⁴

This formed part of Carlyle's wider historical narrative that emphasized the diminution of traditional, hierarchical modes of authority. The hierarchical state, as I demonstrated in the second chapter, had been challenged from the Reformation onwards wherever it was found to reside. Democracy was simply the modern incarnation of this historic movement. Carlyle recognized that contemporary opinion had shifted and, in the words of Vanden Bossche, now represented 'authority as vested in the individuals that constituted the state rather than in monarchical hierarchy.'⁵¹⁵ For Carlyle, this amounted to the destruction of authority and not its realignment.

Democracy could not sustain authority. The same year in which he published his essay on *Voltaire* Carlyle questioned whether freedom could actually be realized under such conditions. He rejected calls for democracy on this basis as myopic and idealistic. Such calls relied on the notion that democracy was essential to individual liberty but Carlyle thought

⁵¹¹ *Carlyle Letters Online*: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/14/1/lt-18420626-TC-TSS-01>

⁵¹² Carlyle, *French Revolution*, p.114.

⁵¹³ *Ibid*, p.180.

⁵¹⁴ *CE XX*, p.10.

⁵¹⁵ Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p.3.

that this required a great deal more than simply the ability to vote. In 'regard to Government itself,' he wrote in 1829, 'can it be necessary to remind anyone that Freedom, without which indeed all spiritual life is impossible, depends on infinitely more complex influences than either the extension or the curtailment of the 'democratic interest'?'⁵¹⁶ As a 'whole', he continued, 'Institutions are much; but they are not all. The freest and highest spirits of the world have often been found under strange outward circumstances'. 'Saint Paul', he pointed out, 'and his brother apostles were politically slaves; Epictetus was personally one.'⁵¹⁷ Freedom was not simply related to the form of government or even to the relationship that existed between the individual and government. It bore a moral and, consequently, immaterial dimension that Carlyle thought more important.

In fact, Carlyle used the examples of Saint Paul and Epictetus to challenge what he believed to be a central feature of democratic politics: freedom from the interference of government. Johnson argued that Carlyle was convinced that in conceding extensive negative liberty to ordinary people democracy could not fail to stifle individual development.⁵¹⁸ Negative liberty was a constitutive feature of the sort of anarchy Carlyle saw as inherent in modern democracies. In fostering an anarchic environment and constraining the possibility of individual development, Carlyle saw in democracy a diminution of freedom rather than its opposite.

This was stated more succinctly in Carlyle's most controversial essay *The Nigger Question*. He was sceptical about the possibility of abolishing slavery. 'My friends,' Carlyle addressed his readers, 'I have come to the sad conclusion that SLAVERY, whether established by law, or by

⁵¹⁶ CE XXVII, pp.71-72.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, p.72.

⁵¹⁸ Johnson, *Beyond Practical Virtue*, p.34.

law abrogated, exists very extensively in the world, in and out of the West Indies; and, in fact, that you cannot abolish slavery by act of parliament, but can only abolish the name of it'.⁵¹⁹ What is more, Carlyle saw in democracy a new form of slavery that had not formerly existed. The 'one intolerable sort of slavery...over which the very gods weep' was not that which was rife in the West Indies, but that which 'prevails in nobler countries.'⁵²⁰

It is the slavery of the strong to the weak; of the great and noble-minded to the small and mean! The slavery of Wisdom to Folly. When Folly all "emancipated," and become supreme, armed with ballot-boxes, universal suffrages, and appealing to the Dismal Sciences, Statistics, Constitutional Philosophies, and other Fool Gospels it has got devised for itself, can say to Wisdom: "Be silent, or thou shalt repent it! Suppress thyself, I advise thee; canst thou not contrive to cease, then?"⁵²¹

Carlyle saw in the assertion of the rights of the stupid over those of the wise in democracy the onset of a novel kind of slavery. Chaos enjoined servitude. 'Well,' Carlyle maintained, 'except by Mastership and Servantship, there is no conceivable deliverance from Tyranny and Slavery. Cosmos is not Chaos, simply by this one quality, That it is governed.'⁵²² Democracy had abrogated the authority of hereditary kings and decadent aristocrats. That Carlyle did not doubt or lament. But the foundations of a new variety of legitimate authority could not be built atop democracy. Only chaos, and with it slavery, could result from the attempt.

⁵¹⁹ CE XXIX, p.359.

⁵²⁰ Ibid, p.360.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid, p.362.

Mill and Tocqueville were concerned less about the absence of authority in modern democratic governments than about its excess, which showed itself through undue centralization. In his *Autobiography*, Mill acknowledged his debt to Tocqueville in this instance. This was a 'subject', he stated, 'on which...I derived great benefit from the study of Tocqueville.' The Frenchman's analysis showed Mill the extent to which the former thought it necessary for the people *en masse*, in modern nations, to carry out 'the collective business of society...without any intervention of the executive government'.⁵²³

In an essay on *Centralization*, written in 1862, Mill placed Tocqueville's views in context: debate about centralization and its consequences had a deeper provenance than the speculations of Tocqueville. 'In the first years of the Restoration,' he wrote, 'the best of the Liberals and the leaders of the Ultra-Royalists joined for a time in demanding local franchises and a limitation of the powers of government.' The contemporary champion of this movement, Camille Hyacinthe Odilon Barrot, demonstrated how 'men of such opposite opinions as MM. de Villèle, de Corbière, Benjamin Constant, Fiévée, Châteaubriand, Royer-Collard, were in this one respect unanimous.'⁵²⁴ Tocqueville had renewed this movement, in Mill's view, and made it more serious.⁵²⁵ Regardless of its origin, Mill thought centralization was 'one among the political questions of the age' and it bore 'the strongest marks of being destined to remain a question for generations to come'.⁵²⁶

Characteristically, his essay commenced with a definition of centralization. What was it precisely? It was a question of 'the limits which separate the province of government from

⁵²³ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.150.

⁵²⁴ *CW XIX*, p.582.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, pp.582-583.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, p.581.

that of individual and spontaneous agency, and of central from local government.⁵²⁷ This much was clear. However, its meaning ran deeper than that. The issue of centralization was about the 'degree in which political authority can justly and expediently interfere, either to control individuals and voluntary associations, to supersede them by doing their work for them, to guide and assist, or to invoke and draw forth their agency'.⁵²⁸

Mill accepted that no single or universal rule could be adduced that could be applied to all situations equally. The degree to which government could interfere in this manner, he felt, 'varies not only with the wants of every country and age, and the capabilities of every people, but with the special requirements of every kind of work to be done.'⁵²⁹ The consequences of this sort of interference, should it become the rule instead of the exception, Mill thought obvious: they would be individually stunting. In one section of his essay he wrote:

...that the concentration of the entire direction of national affairs in a bureaucracy has been more crushing in its effects on the character and capabilities of the nation than tyranny itself, and the main instrument by which tyranny has been established and maintained: that the government, by doing everything through its own officers, which it can possibly contrive so to do – by regulating minutely whatever it allows to be done by others, and requiring, in all cases which involve the smallest collective action, its own previous assent formally obtained, not only to the thing to be done, but to every item of the means proposed for doing it – has dwarfed not only the political, but in a great measure the entire practical, capacity

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

of the people, and even their intellectual activity and moral aspirations in every field of mental action except pure theory.⁵³⁰

These were not Mill's only words on the subject, though they were his most vehement. Centralization was an issue he had addressed years before in his *Principles*. The final chapter of this voluminous treatise on political economy tackled the subject from the perspective of *laissez-faire*. Should central government dominate all of a nation's economic activity? No. 'Laissez-faire,' Mill believed, 'should be the general practice: every departure from it, unless required by some great good, is a certain evil.'⁵³¹ This was particularly important in a democratic government, Mill thought, 'because where public opinion is sovereign, an individual who is oppressed by the sovereign does not, as in most other states of things, find a rival power to which he can appeal for relief'.⁵³²

In his *Considerations*, Mill averred that it 'is but a small portion of the public business of a country which can be well done or safely attempted by the central authorities'.⁵³³ Anything more than this small portion would amount to the administration of the people and this, Mill thought, 'is a relic of barbarism opposed to the whole spirit of modern life'.⁵³⁴ The problems this caused for individual development were clear. Mill cited an analogy of Charles de Rémusat in order to illustrate his point: 'A government which attempts to do every thing is aptly compared...to a schoolmaster who does all the pupils' tasks for them; he may be very popular with the pupils, but he will teach them little.'⁵³⁵ Central government authority, then,

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ *CW III*, p.945. Though, his censure of government activity is considerably weakened by the numerous exceptions to this rule he outlines, which, in my opinion, leave to government a vast amount of agency.

⁵³² Ibid, p.940.

⁵³³ *CW XIX*, p.534.

⁵³⁴ Ibid, p.167.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p.178.

could translate into a form of moral and political oppression were it to be carried too far. Unfortunately, as Mill recognized, Tocqueville had shown this to be a peculiarly modern problem.⁵³⁶ It is to Tocqueville's comments that we now turn.

Tocqueville identified the suffocating force of government action in the second volume of his *Démocratie*. He was clear: democratic society was more prone to despotic government than any other that had previously existed. 'I believe', he wrote near the conclusion of this work, 'that it is easier to establish an absolute and despotic government among a people where conditions are equal than among another'. The consequence of this, in short, was equally clear: 'if such a government were once established among such a people, not only would it oppress men, but in the long run it would rob from each of them some of the principal attributes of humanity.'⁵³⁷ But what was this new and powerful governmental force? Certainly, he thought, 'the old words of despotism and of tyranny' could not offer adequate description.⁵³⁸ Centralization was the force of which Tocqueville spoke and he considered it natural to democracy.

With the fall of the *ancien régime* all intermediate forces between the individual and the state – the aristocracy, the church, powerful cities and corporations – had been either destroyed or marginalized. The very notion of a body of powerful individuals placed in between the individual and his government appeared, in democratic centuries, repulsive to the mind.⁵³⁹ Add to this that the natural inclination of a democratic people disposed them to abandon public affairs and collective interests in favour of private enjoyments, not to mention the fact

⁵³⁶ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.150.

⁵³⁷ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.1262.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*, pp.1248-1249.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid*, p.1195.

that they valued public tranquillity as an aid to commerce.⁵⁴⁰ These contradictory features of democratic individuals' characters – their desire to attain certain public goods without wanting to exert themselves in pursuit of them – led them to seek out a power that could fulfil the ends they have in view. This, Tocqueville told readers, 'naturally disposes citizens to give new rights constantly to or to allow new rights to be taken by the central power, which alone seems to them to have the interest and the means to defend them from anarchy while defending itself.'⁵⁴¹

Every day, democratic individuals give their governments new privileges that they formerly lacked; abdicate responsibility for an aspect of life for which they were hitherto individually or collectively accountable; and abandon the public domain in favour of a peaceful private existence. Government, a machine that knows no finitude relative to individual human life, accrues these privileges gradually and without effort. From this it comes to exercise, somnolently, a 'more extensive and milder' despotism that is able to 'degrade men without tormenting them.'⁵⁴² Democratic peoples asked, through their constant inaction, to be treated like children and their governments obliged. Above them Tocqueville saw rising 'an immense and tutelary power', which alone 'takes charge of assuring their enjoyment and of looking after their fate.'⁵⁴³

It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-sighted and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like it, it had as a goal to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary it seeks only to fix them irrevocably in childhood; it likes the citizens to enjoy themselves, provided that they think only about enjoying themselves. It works

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, p.1201.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid, p.1248.

⁵⁴³ Ibid, p.1251.

willingly for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent for it and the sole arbiter; it attends to their security, provides for their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, settles their estates, divides their inheritances; how can it not remove entirely from them the trouble to think and the difficulty of living?⁵⁴⁴

This was the face of a modern tyranny. In acquiring the management of individuals' affairs, from the most important to those of the minutest significance, central government assumed the guise of master. Individual free will becomes 'rarer every day' as this novel power 'encloses the action of the will within a smaller space and little by little steals from each citizen even the use of himself.'⁵⁴⁵

Tocqueville and Mill disagreed with Carlyle about the nature of the problem of government authority, but they walked in unison with regard to its cause. Democracy lay at the root of the changed aspect of the modern era and this had to be recognized in considering the authority of government as much as anything else. However, if the power of government prompted some discord between Tocqueville and Mill on the one side and Carlyle on the other, the yoke of public opinion did not.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, p.1251.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

FROM POLITICS TO SOCIETY

In this chapter I have addressed many of the problems Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle perceived in democratic politics.⁵⁴⁶ Democracies could foster inadequate institutions and mediocre leaders. This was indicative of a more fundamental problem that lay at the heart of the democratic polity: government itself or, in Carlyle's view, the absence of it could create the conditions for a new form of slavery. Every individual could be subjected to a form of despotism that had hitherto never been seen.

Such a concern was suggestive of the equally well-developed fears Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle bore in relation to democratic society, which I will examine in the next chapter. The democratic age contained within it a powerful force that could restrict individual agency within the tightest confines: public opinion. Popular opinion could introduce into the spirit of modern peoples shackles more constraining than anything else previously conceived. It provided a set of psychological spandrels that could compromise the independence and agency of the individual. But this was not a Romantic *cri de coeur* in the manner of William Blake, who had mourned the decline of man in his poem on *London* and its depravity:

In every cry of every Man,

In every Infants cry of fear,

In every voice: in every ban,

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ Though, I do not pretend to have exhausted these. Tocqueville, for example, outlined a number of other issues not primarily political, but related to the onset of modern democracy. Here, I have drawn attention to the principal political problems Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle identified as inherent in democracy.

⁵⁴⁷ W. Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Oxford, 1970), p.46.

What Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle recognized was a new form of dominance, a popular despotism, exercised in peace and perfect serenity throughout society. It is to this concern that I now turn.

CHAPTER 5

DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY: THE DECLINE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The previous chapter focused on the political problems unique to the modern democratic world. The present chapter is an extension of this analysis. Here, I will consider the social problems Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle identified in the turn towards democratic modernity. This chapter is, therefore, an extension of the previous one and should be read in that context. What were their criticisms of democratic society? Broadly, they related to the decline of the individual. The locus of authority in the modern world had changed. The process of historical movement had resulted in the fall of aristocratic society. Power now resided with a new social group: the mass.

The consequences of this transition cannot be reduced to a single sentence or neat epithet: they will be considered at length in what follows below. The end of the *ancien régime* had released powerful new forces that were coming to dominate society, social relations and, crucially for Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, the individual. The new form of contract that had come to dominate social interaction was proving injurious to social cohesion. It was grounded on the novel ethos of commercial values, which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle thought coterminous with democratic development. Such a form of *society* created vast problems for the individual. These will be explored below.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle realized that the rise of mass authority had negative consequences for individual sovereignty. They were convinced that individuality was being steadily eroded by the operation of democracy. Deviation from the expectations and culture of the mass was not permitted. Any such divergence was perceived by the majority as a harbinger of non-conformity and punished accordingly. Inevitably, the sort of conventionality

this promoted Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle thought harmful to the individual. Eccentricity was treated as a matter of reproach and spontaneity frowned upon.

Even more disturbingly, in comparison to the mass the individual seemed weak and dependent. Great and powerful individuals, characterized by their jealous independence, were valued no longer in democratic states of society. What were the consequences for an age out of love with exceptional individuals? Ennui, stagnation and decline. These are the themes that will be explored below. Each of them derived from the rise of a majoritarian form of authority in the modern world and it is with this that the present chapter will begin.

THE PROBLEM WITH POPULAR AUTHORITY

Despite the focus Carlyle placed on authority, he was concerned by the constraining nature of the social power of the mass. In fact, he thought it truly despotic. Democracy could not provide the sort of liberation required to free the soul of man from the yoke of arbitrary control in his view. Indeed, this was one of the principal reasons for his rejection of the democratic regime. Joel Johnson noted that unless 'democrats can prove that their brand of liberty can invigorate the soul and encourage individual development, Carlyle is inclined to reject the regime.'⁵⁴⁸

In modern democratic society Carlyle had uncovered a force that was, by its very nature, a check on individual development: popular opinion. Public opinion, the handmaiden of democracy, was a new and powerful authority that was more constraining than any that had gone before. Carlyle reproached the nagging hand of mass opinion. It prescribed what

⁵⁴⁸ Johnson, *Beyond Practical Virtue*, p.33.

purported to be a 'superior morality', which contemporaries were encouraged to adopt. In fact, this supposedly exalted morality was nothing other than an 'inferior criminality'. It was not the result of a 'greater love of Virtue,' but, instead, of a more effective 'Police; and of the far subtler and stronger Police, called Public Opinion.'⁵⁴⁹

Carlyle feared the moral agent of the majority and his language recalls Bentham's Panopticon. Public opinion 'watches over us', Carlyle maintained, 'with its Argus eyes more keenly than ever'.⁵⁵⁰ Public opinion had modified and unified the moral life into a picture of conformity. The power of popular opinion was simply the doctrine of 'force of circumstances' applied to the moral world. By arguing in favour of it, Carlyle's contemporaries 'had argued away all force' from themselves. Instead of respecting and furthering the bounds of individuality, democracy had 'leashed together' all men, henceforth 'uniform in dress and movement, like the rowers of some boundless galley.'⁵⁵¹

Wonderful 'Force of Public Opinion'! We must act and walk in all points as it prescribes; follow the traffic it bids us, realise the sum of money, the degrees of 'influence' it expects of us, *or* we shall be lightly esteemed; certain mouthfuls of articulate wind will be blown at us, and this what mortal courage can confront?⁵⁵²

'Thus, while civil liberty is more and more secured to us,' Carlyle lamented, 'our moral liberty is all but lost.' As a statement of the humanistic principles Carlyle applied to his criticism of democracy, with the power of public opinion as its mouthpiece, there is perhaps no finer example. It limited individuality, encouraged conformity and, perhaps most distressing of all,

⁵⁴⁹ *CE XXVII*, p.78.

⁵⁵⁰ *CE XXVII*, p.78.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

denied the individual any claim to agency. ‘Practically considered,’ Carlyle concluded, ‘our creed is Fatalism; and free, in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains.’⁵⁵³

In his tract on *The Nigger Question*, Carlyle returned to this issue once more. He pitted ‘Foolish Tomkins’ and ‘foolish Jobson’ against the individual in order to illustrate the majoritarian tyranny he lamented in democratic societies. These two could not ‘now singly oppress you’, Carlyle thought, but another entity surely could: ‘the Universal Company of the Tomkinses and Jobsons’.⁵⁵⁴ This had inevitable consequences for minorities, not to mention individuals. ‘The flunky-world has peace; and descends, manipulating its ballot-boxes, Coppock suffrages, and divine constitutional apparatus; quoting its Dismal Sciences, Statistics, and other satisfactory Gospels and Talmuds, – into the throat of the Devil; not bothered by the importunate minority on the road.’⁵⁵⁵

Public opinion and the authority it exercised over the security and integrity of the individual was an important theme Tocqueville shared with Carlyle. Tocqueville’s remarks are far more famous than those of Carlyle. Tocqueville’s understanding of the face of modern authority was more subtle.⁵⁵⁶ The problem with democratic authority was that it could very easily degenerate into tyranny. Tocqueville identified a number of tyrannical features in the modern democratic world, all of which originated from the same source – equality of

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ *CE XXIX*, p.361.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, p.360.

⁵⁵⁶ Tocqueville has received rather less treatment in regard to this issue than Mill. His conception of authority has been addressed recently by Jaume. Jaume contrasts Tocqueville’s notion of authority with Guizot’s in order to understand the contours of the former’s view of the subject. In looking to America, Tocqueville appreciated the dispersal of power and authority amongst innumerable political actors, whereas Guizot’s predilection for England led him to postulate the development of a new aristocracy from which power and authority would be derived. See Jaume, *Tocqueville*, p.252.

conditions – and amounted to what Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey referred to as ‘society tyrannising over itself.’⁵⁵⁷

The possibility of a tyranny of the majority over each and every individual was what struck Tocqueville first in the United States.⁵⁵⁸ Majority power was a perverted form of democratic authority. ‘I regard as impious and detestable’, Tocqueville stated, ‘this maxim that in matters of government the majority of a people has the right to do anything’. However, he did not deny ‘that the will of the majority is the origin of all powers.’ This led Tocqueville to an insightful and necessary question: ‘Do I contradict myself?’⁵⁵⁹

In order to answer this question Tocqueville went beyond the pragmatism that characterizes much of the first volume to a higher level of abstraction. The law was his metaphor of choice, justice the specific vehicle used to illustrate his point. ‘A general law exists that has been made...not only by the majority of such or such a people, but by the majority of all men. This law is justice.’ Justice, according to Tocqueville, formed the limit of each people’s right to command beyond which no one could go. ‘A nation is like a jury charged with representing universal society and with applying justice, which is its law. Should the jury, which represents society, have more power than the very society whose laws it applies?’⁵⁶⁰ This example expressed Tocqueville’s understanding of the ideal limits of the majority’s sovereignty aptly.

⁵⁵⁷ L. Strauss and J. Cropsey, *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago, 1964), p.666.

⁵⁵⁸ Tocqueville has been attacked for levelling criticism at American democracy that seems ill-fitted to the United States. Paul Janet explained why some of Tocqueville’s strictures appear to have little relevance to America in an article written soon after Tocqueville’s death. What is ‘certain’, Janet argued, is ‘the problem that disturbed M. de Tocqueville and that brought him to the United States is the problem of European democracy.’ In his view, this gives Tocqueville’s book its ‘grandeur’ and its ‘emotional quality’: ‘Tocqueville describes America, but he thinks of Europe’. See P. Janet, ‘Alexis de Tocqueville et la science politique aux XIX^e siècle’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 34 (1861), p.116. In other words, America offered a useful example of the perils that could be expected in a nascent democracy, such as France, and the troubles he found across the Atlantic left him terrified of what could happen in Europe.

⁵⁵⁹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.410.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Mankind had arrived at a principle of justice and the omnipotence of the majority threatened to disturb it. In refusing to obey the dictates of the majority, Tocqueville claimed that he was simply appealing to the sovereignty of a higher body with greater jurisdiction. 'So when I refuse to obey an unjust law, I am not denying the right of the majority to command; I am only appealing...to the sovereignty of the human race.'⁵⁶¹ In doing so, the dictates of justice could be restored.

However this was not a position advocated by all of the friends of democracy. Some claimed that 'in the objects that concern only itself, a people cannot go entirely beyond the limits of justice and reason'. They declare, Tocqueville claimed, 'that we should not be afraid...to give all power to the majority that represents the people.' In other words, absolute sovereignty should be given to the majority alone. In Tocqueville's opinion this 'is the language of a slave.'⁵⁶² Taken as a whole, the majority was nothing other than 'an individual who has opinions and, most often, interests contrary to another individual called the minority.' If 'an individual vested with omnipotence can abuse it against his adversaries,' Tocqueville claimed, this had to be admitted for the majority also. This formed the basis of his most stringent critique of democratic society up to this point.

What I most criticise about democratic government as it has been organised in the United States, is not its weakness as many people in Europe claim, but on the contrary, its irresistible strength. And what repels me the most in America is not the extreme liberty that reigns there; it is the slight guarantee against tyranny that is found.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid, 411.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 413-414.

If a man suffered an injustice at the hands of the majority in the United States, where could that man turn for recompense? Public opinion was merely the opinion of the majority; the legislature obeyed the will of the majority; the executive was named by the majority; the police force was simply the majority 'under arms'; and the jury was the majority clothed in legal authority.⁵⁶⁴ This led Tocqueville to a startling realization. Given the majority's power there was little room for individual agency. 'I know of no country where,' he declared in a now famous statement, 'there reigns less independence of mind and true freedom of discussion than in America.'⁵⁶⁵ In Europe, no sovereign could prevent the free movement of ideas between interested parties with much success. There, a diverse number of powers remained that could oppose the will of the sovereign authority. In the United States, only one power existed: the majority. Contradicting its will was almost impossible. As long as 'the majority is uncertain' on a topic, Tocqueville announced, 'people speak; but as soon as the majority has irrevocably decided, everyone is silent'.⁵⁶⁶

Kings or aristocrats, Tocqueville argued, could only act on the body as a means of preventing the circulation of unfavourable opinions. But in a democracy, 'the majority is vested with a strength simultaneously physical and moral, which acts on the will as well as on actions and which at the same time prevents the deed and the desire to do it.'⁵⁶⁷ Thoughts were modified at the level of the sub-conscious. It was this that Mill later came to recognize. The will of the majority, Tocqueville believed, 'draws a formidable circle around thought' and punishes

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 414.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, p.417.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. Jaume claimed that Tocqueville believed 'public opinion becomes the god of modern times' as a result of the onset of democracy. See Jaume, *Tocqueville*, p.65. But, as Philip Knee demonstrated, Tocqueville feared the consequences deriving from this. It was part of Rousseau's heritage – the state religion of popular sovereignty – that Tocqueville rejected. Benjamin Constant had rejected it with equal vehemence prior to Tocqueville. See P. Knee, 'Religion et souveraineté du peuple : de Rousseau à Tocqueville', *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, Vol.23, No.2 (Jun., 1990), pp.223-224.

⁵⁶⁷ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.417.

anyone who dares to venture beyond the contours it prescribes. Punishment was softer in a democracy, but more penetrating. The sovereign power no longer cried: 'You will think like me or die'. Instead, it said: 'You are free not to think as I do; your life, your goods, everything remains with you; but from this day on you are a stranger among us. You will keep your privileges as a citizen, but they will become useless to you.'⁵⁶⁸

Democratic public opinion ostracized those who did not conform to its prescriptions, isolating and alienating them from the life of society. Whilst sparing those subjected to its wrath from physical discomfort and allowing them to remain among others, public opinion abrogated any recognizable claim one could make to 'humanity'. 'When you approach your fellows,' Tocqueville warned, 'they will flee from you like an impure being. And those who believe in your innocence, even they will abandon you, for people would flee from them in turn.' Tocqueville concluded this passage with the most unsettling remark of all: 'Go in peace; I spare your life, but I leave you a life worse than death.'⁵⁶⁹

This was not simply idle theorizing of the sort that Tocqueville disparaged; it was based on observable evidence. In America, 'the wealthy classes of society are almost entirely out of public affairs'; 'wealth,' he noted, 'far from being a right, is a real cause of disfavour and obstacle to reaching power.' The majority resented and envied those who were raised, even momentarily, above the mediocrity of the mass. As a result, the rich opted to abandon rather than attempt to sustain 'an often unequal struggle against the poorest of their fellow citizens.' This was one of the reasons, as we saw in the last chapter, why democracies tended to elect

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, p.418.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.418-419.

poor leaders.⁵⁷⁰ The impetus to conformity Tocqueville thought comparable to the travails of the Jews in the middle ages.

Do you see this opulent citizen? Wouldn't you say, a Jew of the Middle Ages who is afraid of arousing suspicion of his wealth? His attire is simple; his gait is modest. Within the four walls of his dwelling, he adores luxury; into this sanctuary, he lets only a few chosen guests that he arrogantly calls his equals.⁵⁷¹

Tocqueville and Carlyle both understood that inherent in the modern era was the possibility of a new sort of tyranny that had not been encountered before. It abhorred diversity, resented anyone who rose above or went beyond the constraints of common opinion, and actively hindered moral freedom. For both of these men, moral freedom was an essential ingredient of any wider notion of human freedom. Its significance went beyond the contours of historical circumstance and chronological setting. Without it, individuals simply could not be free. As such, Tocqueville and Carlyle could not accept the oppressive force of modern public opinion blindly and resolved to highlight its dangers.

Sheldon Wolin claimed that Tocqueville's fear of the majority transformed into 'a cultural formation' in the second volume of the *Démocratie*, which elided the stability of a concrete majority.⁵⁷² This misunderstands Tocqueville's point. The majority itself was unstable and its contours could be different depending on the minority it faced. What is clear is that Tocqueville's understanding of the power of the majority encompassed the material and immaterial domains of human life. The majority could impose its will through laws, the police and the courts *or* via opinion.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, p.287.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, p.288.

⁵⁷² Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, p.251.

What did Mill make of this tendency? Scholars have discussed Mill's views on authority in detail.⁵⁷³ Mill's concern for individuality, it has been argued, 'took pre-eminence over whatever theory one possessed about the foundation of a social union, and whatever the political institutions under which one lived.'⁵⁷⁴ Democracy had the potential to injure individuality. Indeed, Ryan argued that 'Mill had early and wholeheartedly accepted de Tocqueville's view that the great danger to a democracy was its tendency to uniformity'.⁵⁷⁵ The danger posed to individuality formed the subject of his best known political tract: *On Liberty*.

However, issues of authority occupied his earliest thoughts on politics. One of his first journalistic efforts, published under the *nom de plume* 'No Worshipper of Antiquity' in 1823, addressed this issue from an enthusiastically Benthamite perspective. 'All history proves, that in every nation of the earth, the powers of Government have uniformly been monopolized in the hands of a privileged few, who, accordingly, never failed to abuse those powers for the

⁵⁷³ R.B. Friedman was the first to address this aspect of Mill's thought directly in his article 'An Introduction to Mill's Theory of Authority', in Schneewind eds., *Mill: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp.380-425. J.B. Elshtain claims that Mill's notion of authority represents a form of what she labelled '*liberal monism*'. In her view, Mill does not distinguish between legitimate authority and despotism: he conflates the two. See J.B. Elshtain, 'Mill's Liberty and the Problem of Authority', pp.211-212. Joseph Hamburger's view sits at the opposite end of the spectrum. He contends that Mill combines liberty and authority in the end and *On Liberty* is the example *par excellence* of this feature of his thought. 'Mill advocated substantial controls as well as liberty,' according to Hamburger. See Hamburger, *Mill on Liberty and Control*, p.3. Bruce Baum assumes a position in between that of Elshtain and Hamburger. See B. Baum, *Rereading Power and Freedom in J.S. Mill* (London, 2000), p.83. Baum goes on to trace two types of authority present in Mill's work: traditional, which Mill refuted, and modern, which he accepted and promoted. See pp.87-98. ⁵⁷³

Isaiah Berlin thought Mill's position one of negative liberty, which emphasized a prominent role for individual freedom whilst challenging any and all constraining influences. See I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969), pp.139 & 169. Ryan contends that 'Mill insists firmly and frequently that society needs intellectual authority rather than intellectual anarchy'. See Ryan, *Mill*, p.127. John Gray thought Mill 'an unqualified liberal' in the sense that he deemphasized the desirability of authority over the individual. See J. Gray, *Mill on Liberty: A Defence* (London, 1983), p.119. H.S. Jones argued for Mill's credentials as a positive liberal in 'John Stuart Mill as Moralizer', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53 (April-June, 1992): 287-308. In this instance, it is posited that Mill promoted the development of individual virtue that would lead to authority over the self. Bernard Semmel took this position as well in *John Stuart Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue*.

⁵⁷⁴ Francis and Morrow, 'John Stuart Mill', p.149.

⁵⁷⁵ Ryan, *Mill*, p.191.

benefit of themselves and of their connections'.⁵⁷⁶ By the time Mill came to write the *Spirit of the Age* eight years later, his categories of analysis had shifted. He had abandoned his concern with sinister interests, if only temporarily. Nor was he concerned with the arbitrary use of power in this instance. Instead, Mill was concerned by the breakdown of authority.

'A change has taken place in the human mind', Mill argued; 'a change which, being effected by insensible gradations, and without noise, had already proceeded far before it was generally perceived.' Once recognized, 'thousands awoke as from a dream.' It was now 'clear that those were indeed new men' and they 'insisted upon being governed in a new way.'⁵⁷⁷ This was the period of transition, which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle each identified and is discussed in the first chapter above. It provided serious challenges to the existence of any authority. No 'Whig or Tory' could any longer 'command ten followers in the warfare of politics by the weight of his own personal authority?'⁵⁷⁸ There were clear 'divisions among the instructed' and such divisions 'nullify their authority' as 'the uninstructed lose their faith in them.' Mill thought the danger evident. 'The multitude are without a guide; and society is exposed to all the errors and dangers which are to be expected when persons who have never studied any branch of knowledge comprehensively and as a whole attempt to judge for themselves upon particular parts of it.'⁵⁷⁹

The lacuna in authority in the contemporary world, which Mill believed to be the result of the transitional nature of the era, was being filled, gradually, by the majority as the democratic force augmented. The problems that this presented were two-fold: the danger of a new form of sinister interest in government and the elimination of individual moral agency. Mill saw

⁵⁷⁶ *CW XXII*, p.72.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.228.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.231.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.238.

the existence of a very real threat to both the individual and, more broadly, minority interests in the accession of the mass of the population to political rights, such as the suffrage.

In his essay on *Bentham*, Mill alluded to ‘the yoke of public opinion’ in disparaging terms.⁵⁸⁰ By this time, he had read Tocqueville’s first instalment on American democracy and come to the conclusion that the sort of democracy Bentham advocated placed mankind ‘under the absolute authority of the majority of themselves?’⁵⁸¹ The inevitable result, he thought, was ‘the despotism of Public Opinion’.⁵⁸² Mill penned a moving passage on the retarding consequences this would entail.

Where there is identity of position and pursuits, there also will be identity of partialities, passions, and prejudices; and to give to any one set of partialities, passions, and prejudices, absolute power, without counter-balance from partialities, passions, and prejudices of a different sort, is the way to render the correction of any of those imperfections hopeless; to make one narrow, mean type of human nature universal and perpetual, and to crush every influence which tends to the further improvement of man’s intellectual and moral nature.⁵⁸³

To raise the majority to absolute authority would limit each and every individual’s room for manoeuvre. It was necessary to engineer institutions that would be able to shelter ‘freedom of thought and individuality of character’.⁵⁸⁴

Mill extended this line of criticism in his *Considerations*. He argued, in redeploying the language of Utilitarianism to suit novel ends, that ‘sinister interests’ could be as prevalent in

⁵⁸⁰ *CW X*, p.108.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.106.

⁵⁸² *Ibid*, p.107.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.108.

democratic countries as in those residing under the aegis of an aristocracy or a monarchy.⁵⁸⁵ With some derision of his former Philosophic Radical associates Mill noted that 'it is sometimes rather gratuitously assumed that the same kind of injurious influences do not operate in a democracy.'⁵⁸⁶ This was a myopic assumption.

Looking at democracy in the way in which it is commonly conceived, as the rule of the numerical majority, it is surely possible that the ruling power may be under the dominion of sectional or class interests, pointing to conduct different from that which would be dictated by impartial regard for the interest of all.⁵⁸⁷

The Philosophic Radical thought that democracy – particularly universal suffrage – would place checks upon varieties of sinister interest.⁵⁸⁸ But, Mill rejected this line of reasoning. History demonstrated that neither kings nor aristocracies had been able to govern disinterestedly, except in a very few instances. They had mistaken their class interest for the universal interest.⁵⁸⁹ It would be ridiculous to expect more from any, especially the lowest, class of men: 'the Demos, or any other.'⁵⁹⁰

One of the greatest dangers, therefore, of democracy, as of all other forms of government, lies in the sinister interest of the holders of power: it is the danger of class legislation, of government intended for (whether really effecting it or not) the immediate benefit of the dominant class, to the lasting detriment of the whole.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁵ CW XIX, p.442.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ J. Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals* (New York, 1965), p.53.

⁵⁸⁹ CW XIX, pp.444-445.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, p.445.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, p.446.

If authority were to be vested absolutely in the majority there was a very real danger that it could attack the social body in an attempt to expunge diversity. The popular mass could try to exercise power to its advantage alone.

Allied to this was Mill's second and more profound concern. In democratic countries, the majority might assert unlimited dominion over man's moral being. This is the import of *On Liberty*. 'The subject of this Essay', he wrote in 1859, 'is not the so-called Liberty of the Will, so unfortunately opposed to the misnamed doctrine of Philosophical Necessity' – a duality Mill had already exploded in his *System of Logic*⁵⁹² – 'but Civil, or Social Liberty', which amounted to a discussion of 'the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual.' This was a question 'seldom stated', he noted, 'and hardly ever discussed...but which profoundly influences the practical controversies of the age'. Mill thought it was 'the vital question of the future.'⁵⁹³

The evil inherent in the present was clear. The value of individuality and eccentricity was 'hardly recognised by the common modes of thinking'. 'The majority,' Mill continued, 'being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are...cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody'.⁵⁹⁴ Public opinion, whose prophet was the majority, endeavoured to suppress any outlet for the expression of spontaneous or irregular thought that did not correspond to the principles prescribed by the mass.⁵⁹⁵ Mill believed

⁵⁹² See *CW VIII*, pp.836-843.

⁵⁹³ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.5.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.57.

⁵⁹⁵ This had obvious consequences for liberty. In Mill's work, D.E. Miller argues, liberty has two aspects. The first relates to the individual's own liberty and the value of it to each. The second is concerned with the benefits that accrue to a society in which individual freedom is respected. Liberty thus has a double advantage. Both are related to character, as in so much of Mill's work. Allowing to each individual his liberty facilitates the development of unique, strong characters. It allows a place for eccentricity. The individual gains from this because the benefits of a rich and fulfilling life open up before him. Society benefits from the diversity this produces and the strength of individual characters. This entrenches competition – in opinions and desires – in the public sphere, which guarantees progress. See D.E. Miller, *J.S. Mill: Moral, Social and Political Thought*

that 'society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences.' History had moved on from a time when powerful and self-assured magnates could and would defiantly disobey oppressive laws and ordinances. 'In our times, from the highest class of society to the lowest,' he howled with evident discomfort, 'every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship.'⁵⁹⁶

The tutelage of the majority extended beyond the realm of conscious choice and infected the unconscious mind. This produced the sort of servile resignation to fatalism Carlyle had highlighted thirty years before. 'I do not mean that they choose what is customary,' Mill maintained, 'in preference to what suits their own inclination.' On the contrary, 'It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary.'⁵⁹⁷ A people thus administered by the majority were almost sub-human.

Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved...and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own.⁵⁹⁸

(Cambridge, 2010), pp.132-138. Georgios Varouxakis and Paul Kelly claim that it was these 'advanced opinions on the place of private non-conformity in public life' that alienated Mill from the ensuing development of social and political philosophy in the later nineteenth-century. See Varouxakis and Kelly, 'John Stuart Mill's Thought and Legacy: A Timely reappraisal', in Varouxakis and Kelly eds., *John Stuart Mill*, p.2.

⁵⁹⁶ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.61.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, pp.61-62. Sections like this underscore Mill's commitment to the individual and his sovereignty vis-à-vis the masses. In fact, Mill told a French correspondent that this was the primary purpose of *On Liberty*: 'Quant à

The majority was the face of modern tyranny, which was the preserve of democratic ages in which the crowd had assumed precedence over the individual.⁵⁹⁹ Reeves argued that Mill's primary concern in denouncing this novel form of tyrannical behaviour was to protect the individual human being's possibility of development. Without the necessary freedom, Reeves claimed, Mill thought human growth could slow significantly or come to an end.⁶⁰⁰ Urbinati encapsulated this notion with great precision and related it to Mill's intellectual heritage. 'One should compare the kind of tyranny denounced in *On Liberty*', she contended, 'to the all-seeing but unseen guardian of Bentham's Panopticon, where inmates enjoyed the prerogative of habeas corpus (a negative liberty), and yet their moral, mental, and emotional integrity was still thwarted.'⁶⁰¹

INDIVIDUALISM

Urbinati also argued that in creating a society-wide Panopticon, democracy provided a novel basis for social isolation. Panopticon inmates were entirely alienated from one another and

la partie philosophique, vous savez probablement par mon Essai sur la Liberté, dans quel sens et avec quelles limites j'entends notre principe commun, celui de l'autonomie de l'individu. Je reconnais cette autonomie comme une règle rigoureuse dans les choses qui ne regardent que l'individu lui-même ou, si elles intéressent les autres, ne les intéressent que par l'influence de l'exemple ou par l'intérêt indirect que d'autres peuvent avoir au bonheur et à la prospérité de chacun.' *CW XVIII*, pp.1831-1832.

⁵⁹⁹ There is a debate about the extent of Tocqueville's influence over Mill in regard to the latter's conception of the tyranny of the majority. Kahan noted recently that 'Mill's view of modern society was heavily influenced by Tocqueville, and his classic *On Liberty* (1859) is largely a meditation on themes from *Democracy [in America]*'. See Kahan, *Tocqueville*, p.116. Brogan claimed that had Tocqueville been well enough to read the copy of *On Liberty*, sent to him by Mill, 'he would have seen his own influence stamped deep on almost every page of Mill's masterpiece'. See Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.627. Rosen disputed these comments. He asserted that Tocqueville's views were of far greater importance to Mill's *Considerations* than to his tract *On Liberty*, which was more the result of Mill's reflections on Comte than it was on Tocqueville. See Rosen, *Mill*, pp.153-154.

⁶⁰⁰ Reeves, *Mill*, p.278. Ryan perceived this trait throughout Mill's thought: 'Mill's concern with self-development and moral progress is a strand in his philosophy to which almost everything else is subordinate.' Ryan, *Mill*, p.255.

⁶⁰¹ Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, p.150. There are a number of similarities between Urbinati's characterization of Mill's concerns here and Michel Foucault's notion of surveillance mechanisms in the modern apparatus of punishment in *Surveiller et Punir*. See, in particular, Foucault's chapter on 'Le panoptisme' in M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975), pp.229-264.

this precluded the possibility of dialogue ‘with themselves and...others.’ This was achieved through arbitrary intervention in prisoners’ privacy, which destroyed their moral autonomy. ‘In silencing individual self-inquiry,’ Urbinati maintained, ‘the “tyranny of opinion” fosters individualism because it fosters isolation’. This resulted in the rise of ‘selfish characters’, Urbinati continued, which was inimical to the sort of public spirit that Mill cherished.⁶⁰²

Urbinati cited as evidence of this Mill’s perception of Christian morality as the dominant opinion of the majority in contemporary Britain. Selfishness was induced in the social body ‘by disconnecting each man’s feelings of duty from the interests of his fellow creatures, except so far as a self-interested inducement is offered to him for consulting them.’⁶⁰³ And yet, Urbinati’s claim missed the mark she was attempting to hit. Mill was quite clear in this section that it was not democracy that he thought isolating, but Christian morality itself. ‘It holds out the hope of heaven and the threat of hell,’ Mill stated, ‘as the appointed and appropriate motives of a virtuous life: in this falling far below the best of the ancients, and doing what lies in it to give to human morality an essentially selfish character’.⁶⁰⁴

If Mill’s understanding of the isolating potential of modern democracy cannot be seen to the extent that Urbinati claimed in *On Liberty*, can it be found anywhere else? Certainly, Mill addressed this subject in the second review article he authored on Tocqueville’s *Démocratie*. The possibility of individual isolation, as I will show below, was a feature of democracy

⁶⁰² Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, pp.150-151. Despite the forcefulness of Mill’s argument and the many admirers who have endorsed the position he took in regard to majority tyranny, there were a variety of stringent critiques levelled at Mill’s central thesis in *On Liberty*. These are explored in Reeves’ biography of Mill. See Reeves, *Mill*, pp.296-302. Mill chose not to respond to these critics in a second edition of *On Liberty* because, Reeves argued, this text was Mill’s literary memorial to his wife, Harriet. They had written it together and, Reeves stated, ‘*On Liberty* had to remain untouched’. It was only in his *Autobiography* that Mill chose to respond to those who had assailed *On Liberty*. See Reeves, *Mill*, p.302.

⁶⁰³ Mill, ‘On Liberty’, pp.50-51; Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*, p.151.

⁶⁰⁴ Mill, ‘On Liberty’, p.50.

Tocqueville had identified. In fact, Urbinati's attempt to draw a similar argument out of the component parts of *On Liberty* seemed like subtle means of aligning Mill with Tocqueville.

'The Americans,' Mill noted in his article on Tocqueville's work, 'not only profess, but carry into practice, on all subjects except the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and Christian ethics, the habit of mind which has been so often inculcated as the one sufficient security against mental slavery – the rejection of authority, and the assertion of the right of private judgment.'⁶⁰⁵

America's democratic inhabitants, Mill continued, 'are not accustomed to look for guidance either to the wisdom of ancestors, or to eminent cotemporary wisdom, but require that the grounds on which they act shall be made level to their own comprehension.' The problem with this psychological quirk was 'a most licentious abuse of individual independence of thought.'⁶⁰⁶ But, Mill saw immediately that Tocqueville had, in fact, shown his readers that a consequence far more troubling than individual isolation resulted from democratic man's novel psychological disposition. 'It is impossible,' he wrote, 'as our author [Tocqueville] truly remarks, that mankind in general should form all their opinions for themselves: an authority from which they mostly derive them may be rejected in theory, but it always exists in fact.' In a democratic society, individuals cannot locate this authority in a particular caste or individual, but find it 'in the opinions of one another.'⁶⁰⁷ Mill grasped what this meant instantly.

All being nearly equal in circumstances, and all nearly alike in intelligence and knowledge, the only authority which commands an involuntary deference is that

⁶⁰⁵ *CW XVIII*, pp.178-179.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

of numbers. The more perfectly each knows himself the equal of every single individual, the more insignificant and helpless he feels against the aggregate mass, and the more incredible it appears to him that the opinion of all the world can possibly be erroneous.⁶⁰⁸

Thus, Mill saw the danger of individualism that lay latent in a democratic society, but he emphasized the consequence of the individualist psychology far more than the fact of individualism itself. In his understanding, albeit of Tocqueville's account of democracy, individualism prepared the way for individual weakness and, ultimately, individual dependence on the majority. It was also another means through which individuality could be subjected to the constricting conventionality of the greatest number.

Mill's remarks were made in response to Tocqueville's work and it was the Frenchman who addressed this subject first. In the 1840 volume of the *Démocratie* he outlined his concerns at length. Previously, as I have shown above, Tocqueville's concern for the individual in the modern world was that he could be alienated from the mass through its intolerance. He could be forced out of society, isolated through the collective action of the social body. What he now turned his attention to was a different cause that led to the same result.

No longer did the individual simply have to fear the actions of the community as a whole, but he had to be made aware of his own separatist instincts. 'I have shown how, in centuries of equality, each man looked for his beliefs within himself', Tocqueville stated. Now, he wanted 'to show how, in these same centuries, he [the individual] turns all his sentiments toward himself alone.' It is this that distinguished Tocqueville's notion of '*Individualism*'.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.881. It is important to note that Tocqueville did not invent the word *individualism* as is sometimes believed. K.W. Swart, in 'Individualism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, 1826-1860', *Journal of*

‘Individualism’, Tocqueville continued, ‘is of democratic origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions become equal.’⁶¹⁰ He contrasted this novel idea with egoism. Egoism was a vice derived from an emotional base, ‘a depraved sentiment’ as Tocqueville called it. Individualism was not emotional in its origin but rational, the result of ‘an erroneous judgment’. ‘Egoism,’ he confided to his notes to this section of the work, was a ‘vice of the heart’. ‘Individualism,’ on the other hand, was a conclusion consciously arrived at by ‘the mind’. Individualism was ‘considered and peaceful’ in its operation and ‘disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and to withdraw to the side with his family and his friends’. It showed democratic man how to create his own ‘small society’ and, in doing so, enabled him to abandon the wider community willingly.⁶¹¹

It was here that Tocqueville deployed what has become one of his best known arguments. ‘Aristocracy had made all citizens into a long chain that went from the peasant up to the king; democracy breaks the chain and sets each link apart.’⁶¹² In other words, democracy isolated people as a matter of course by enabling individuals to consider themselves as singular, autonomous units. Agnès Antoine applied a Freudian lens in her analysis of Tocqueville’s description of individualism. Under the aegis of democracy, she claimed in relation to Tocqueville’s fears, the individual became a ‘personnalité narcissique’. For such an individual, the ‘outside world is but a second reality’, which is arranged around the self. For democratic

the History of Ideas, 23, 1962, pp.77-86, has claimed that Tocqueville could have borrowed the term from Saint Simon. Siedentop, *Tocqueville*, pp.86-87, maintains that Tocqueville essentially lifted the idea from the Great Debates, which had taken place in France in the 1820s. In this sense, his notion of individualism was merely an extension of the Restoration liberals’ idea of atomisation, though, Siedentop did acknowledge that ‘Tocqueville significantly revises the original use of the idea.’ For an in depth discussion of Tocqueville’s notion of individualism, see J.C. Lamberti, *La Notion d’individualisme chez Tocqueville* (Paris, 1970) and *Tocqueville et les deux Démocraties* (Paris, 1983), pp.217-240.

⁶¹⁰ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.883.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*, p.882.

⁶¹² *Ibid*, p.884.

man, therefore, 'reality...is what concerns himself, that is to say, his body, then the different extensions of the self, beings and things.'⁶¹³ Levin summarized Tocqueville's argument thus: 'Now each individual was on his own, privatised and cut off from wider supports, and devoted merely to personal selfishness and material wellbeing.'⁶¹⁴

The consequences of this new democratic psychology were clear to Tocqueville. Democratic society predisposed individuals to feel that they 'owe nothing to anyone'. Consequently, Tocqueville remarked, 'they expect nothing so to speak from anyone; they are always accustomed to consider themselves in isolation'. 'Thus,' Tocqueville concluded with evident unease, 'not only does democracy make each man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants from him and separates him from his contemporaries'. In short, 'it constantly leads him back toward himself alone and threatens finally to enclose him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.'⁶¹⁵ What sort of society could exist in an environment where sociability was fast dying out? The answer was too unsettling to behold. Tocqueville seemed satisfied with leaving his readers to draw their own conclusions from his argument.

Antoine suggested that Tocqueville saw the root of the modern individual's encasement within himself in democratic man's Cartesian disposition, which he described at the beginning of the second volume of the *Démocratie*.⁶¹⁶ 'America', Tocqueville argued, 'is one of the countries of the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed.'⁶¹⁷ But, what did he actually mean by this? Americans and, by extension, all peoples raised in a democratic atmosphere, flee from the weight of tradition, be it derived from a

⁶¹³ Antoine, *L'Impensé*, p.39.

⁶¹⁴ Levin, *Spectre of Democracy*, p.127.

⁶¹⁵ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.884.

⁶¹⁶ Antoine, *L'Impensé*, p.144.

⁶¹⁷ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.699.

particular 'system', certain 'habits', or the obligations of 'family', 'class', or 'nation'. Tocqueville saw that Americans sought in themselves and by themselves alone 'the reason for things'.⁶¹⁸ In other words, 'they are constantly brought back to their own reason as the most visible and nearest source of truth.' Faith in the opinion and expertise of others was destroyed as 'each person withdraws narrowly into himself and claims to judge the world from there.'⁶¹⁹

Given Tocqueville's analysis of this feature of democratic psychology, it should now be apparent why Antoine located Tocqueville's notion of individualism squarely within it. Democratic man, she asserted, 'has the habit of only drawing his opinions from himself, in submitting all things to the free examination of his reason'.⁶²⁰ But, this led Tocqueville back to the problem of the tyranny of popular opinion that is discussed above. He realized, Antoine argued, that, 'before being an enlightened conviction,' democracy was 'a collection of received beliefs, which varied with the dominant opinion.' It was not the case the individual and collective convictions did, in fact, arise from the light of individual reason, but that they were imparted by the only source of power democratic individuals recognized outside of themselves: the majority.⁶²¹ Tocqueville stated this directly.

It is to be believed that the intellectual dominion of the greatest number would be less absolute among a democratic people subject to a king, than within a pure democracy; but it will always be very absolute, and, whatever the political laws may be that govern men in centuries of equality, you can predict that faith in

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, pp.700-701.

⁶²⁰ Antoine, *L'Impensé*, p.144.

⁶²¹ Ibid, p.145.

common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet will be the majority.⁶²²

Thus, Antoine concluded that Tocqueville's critique of democratic psychology implied that 'the regime supposed to emancipate man from all the obstacles to liberty...risks paradoxically falling into the weightiest intellectual conformism'. It could even drive men to think no longer.⁶²³

The deadening effect of individualism was reinforced, Tocqueville thought, by democratic man's tendency to pursue material well-being to the exclusion of other interests. Tocqueville wrote at some length about this in the second volume of his *Démocratie*. He theorized a link between the insecurity of fortunes in democratic societies, which was the result of the lack of fixed caste structures, and democratic man's particular penchant for material enjoyments.⁶²⁴ Tocqueville thought that this novel inclination resulted in two principal consequences. The first was to strengthen the psychological conditions that facilitated individualism. 'It is not a question of building vast palaces,' Tocqueville argued, 'of vanquishing or deceiving nature, of exhausting the universe, in order to satisfy better the passions of a man'.⁶²⁵ In other words, the quest for material well-being in democratic eras was not about the creation of grand undertakings or public monuments. On the contrary, Tocqueville continued, 'it is a matter of adding a few feet to his fields, of planting an orchard,

⁶²² Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.724.

⁶²³ Antoine, p.145. Antoine went on to claim that in tackling the psychological features of democracy, Tocqueville was addressing 'the major philosophical debate of the Restoration'. This debate first arose among figures in the radical reaction against the doctrines of eighteenth-century French *philosophes* before becoming more widespread. 'Amongst those', Antoine noted, 'who rejected, as with those who accepted the new social order established by the French Revolution, obtruded the idea that the advent of democracy did not only represent a political upheaval, but that it constituted more profoundly a metaphysical fact, which also revolutionized the ontological and moral status of truth.' See Antoine, p.146.

⁶²⁴ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.933.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid*, p.937.

of enlarging a house, of making life easier and more comfortable each moment, of avoiding discomfort and satisfying the slightest needs effortlessly and almost without cost.⁶²⁶ The desire for material well-being, then, was focused squarely on the home, on the family unit, and not on any public undertaking. Such petty projects, to which ‘the soul becomes attached’, Tocqueville told his readers, ‘finish by hiding from the soul the rest of the world, and they sometimes come to stand between the soul and God.’⁶²⁷

The second, equally significant, consequence of democratic man’s love for material enjoyment was related to his ardent individualism. In order to ensure the permanence of individual material well-being, society needed, at the very least, public order. Tocqueville saw in this latent feature of democracy illiberal consequences. ‘This particular taste that the men of democratic countries conceive for material enjoyments is not naturally opposed to order; on the contrary, it often needs order to satisfy itself.’⁶²⁸ What it did not require was freedom. Carlyle’s analysis of this phenomenon is grounded on the sociological rather than the psychological features of democracy. He approached Tocqueville’s notion of individualism via a different route. Carlyle derived his idea of it from the kernel of the cash nexus, a concept he had pioneered in his essay on *Chartism*.⁶²⁹ Though it could appear as if he drew his notion of individualism from a fundamentally economic idea, this would be an unfortunate misrepresentation of Carlyle’s understanding of the cash nexus. Carlyle conceived of democracy as a means of individual self-government. Essentially, that meant the triumph of negative liberty and a limited, anti-paternalist state.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Ibid, pp.937-938.

⁶²⁹ *CE XXIX*, p.162.

This new means of political interaction extended into the social sphere. The fundamental maxim of contemporary negative liberty – *laissez-faire* – was, in Carlyle’s estimation, inherent in democracy. In *Chartism*, he claimed that democracy was merely ‘the consummation of No-government and *Laissez-faire*.’⁶³⁰ It was this that was responsible for many of the evils afflicting the lower orders of society and, Carlyle thought, ‘a government...on a principle of *Let-alone* is no longer possible in England in these days.’⁶³¹

Social relations were no longer conducted on the basis of bonds of loyalty, love and honour, but had been reduced to the medium of cash alone in this novel era. This was both a facet of the decline of the social compact that had characterized the *ancien régime* and a consequence of the onset of democratic conditions. ‘*Cash Payment*’, Carlyle bristled in *Chartism*, has ‘grown to be the universal sole nexus of man to man’. Now, individuals were related ‘as buyer and seller alone, of land or what ever else it might be’.⁶³² ‘With the supreme triumph of Cash, a new time has entered’, Carlyle told his readers.⁶³³ The novel era of which he spoke was democratic in nature.

Carlyle rebuked his contemporaries for their false understanding of what constituted a society. ‘We call it a Society’, he wrote in 1843, ‘and go about professing openly the totallest separation, isolation.’⁶³⁴ But, separation, in Carlyle’s view, was the root of numerous other problems. ‘Our life is not a mutual helpfulness’, he argued, but ‘cloaked under due laws-of-war, named ‘fair competition’ and so forth, it is a mutual hostility.’⁶³⁵ ‘We have profoundly forgotten everywhere’, Carlyle continued, ‘that *Cash-payment* is not the sole relation of

⁶³⁰ Ibid, p.159.

⁶³¹ Ibid, p.155.

⁶³² Ibid, p.162.

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp.152-153.

⁶³⁵ Ibid, p.153.

human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that *it* absolves and liquidates all engagements of man.'⁶³⁶

The novel politico-economic reality into which the world had been flung had destroyed the social bonds that had formerly existed between men and forced them to rely on themselves alone. Life had become competitive where it had once been cooperative and this was damaging the social body.⁶³⁷ Such a situation could not endure in Carlyle's opinion and he ended his analysis of this phenomenon on an optimistic note. 'I have not heard in all Past History, and expect not to hear in all Future History, of any Society anywhere under God's Heaven supporting itself on such a Philosophy.'⁶³⁸ Social isolationism and individualism had arrived, but they could not endure if society was to continue.

THE DECLINE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Popular opinion and the rise of individualism in the modern world were features of a wider trend that democracy underwrote. This was the decline of the individual. Carlyle was the first to address this subject in 1829. 'Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet,' Carlyle wrote, 'we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age.' Mechanism had replaced individual effort as the motor of change. It had infected every aspect of human

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Carlyle outlined at length why competition rather than cooperation was deleterious in the opening pages of his 1831 essay 'Characteristics'. See *CE XXVIII*, pp.1-11. Vanden Bossche showed that Carlyle was not alone in making this argument. Proponents of doctrines such as this, which had originated with Adam Smith, advocated increasingly democratic forms by and large. Their critics, on the other hand, tended to support the old political order and the claims of religion.⁶³⁷ Burke and Samuel Taylor Coleridge lay at the root of this critique, which, though Carlyle extended it, he could not accept its conclusion: there was no going back to the *ancien régime*. See Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, pp.8-9.

⁶³⁸ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.153.

endeavour. 'For the simplest operation, some helps and accompaniments, some cunning abbreviating process is in readiness.' Old modes of action had been discredited and replaced solely by 'the great art of adapting means to ends.'⁶³⁹

But what did Carlyle mean when he spoke of this mechanism? It was the internalization and embodiment of an utter contempt for the capacity of the individual. 'No individual now hopes to accomplish the poorest enterprise single-handed and without mechanical aids'; 'he must make interest with some existing corporation, and till his field with their oxen.'⁶⁴⁰ The modern mentality was dominated by the notion of mechanical contrivance and the preference exhibited for association by Carlyle's contemporaries was, in the Scotsman's opinion, symptomatic of it. Merely 'to live,' Carlyle thought, signifies to unite with a party, or to make one.' Every aspect of intellectual life had come to depend on this novel maxim, from philosophy to science, art, and even literature.⁶⁴¹ Carlyle did not deplore the desire to associate with ones fellows, but he lamented the dependence of the individual on the mass.

No Newton, by silent meditation, now discovers the system of the world from the falling of an apple; but some quite other than Newton stands in his Museum, his Scientific Institution, and behind whole batteries of retorts, digesters, and galvanic piles imperatively 'interrogates Nature,' – who, however, shows no haste to answer.⁶⁴²

It was at this point that Carlyle's critique of democracy became most interesting. 'Nowhere,' Carlyle argued, 'is the deep, almost exclusive faith we have in Mechanism more visible than

⁶³⁹ *CE XXVII*, p.59.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.61.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, pp.61-62.

in the Politics of this time.’ Though Carlyle accepted that ‘Civil government’, by its very nature, naturally includes much that is mechanical, it ‘includes much also that is not mechanical, and cannot be treated mechanically’. Unfortunately, he complained, ‘the political speculations and exertions of our time are taking less and less cognisance’ of this fact. The most obvious ‘sign’ of this trend was ‘the mighty interest taken in *mere political arrangements*’ in contemporary Europe.⁶⁴³

The whole discontent of Europe takes this direction. The deep, strong cry of all civilised nations, – a cry which, every one now sees, must and will be answered, is: Give us a reform of Government! A good structure of legislation, a proper check upon the executive, a wise arrangement of the judiciary, is *all* that is wanting for human happiness.⁶⁴⁴

Political philosophy had taken an exclusively materialist guise. The problems of the present, it was held, could be cured by the implementation of new political machinery. This led Carlyle to conclude that the ‘Philosopher of this age is not a Socrates, a Plato, a Hooker or Taylor’. They had inculcated in ‘men the necessity and infinite worth of moral goodness, the great truth that our happiness depends on the mind which is within us, and not on the circumstances which are without us’.⁶⁴⁵

The doctrines of modern thinkers were exactly opposite. Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham and Jean-Louis de Lolme contended, according to Carlyle, ‘that our happiness depends entirely on external circumstances; nay, that the strength and dignity of the mind within us is itself the

⁶⁴³ Ibid, p.66.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.66-67.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, p.67.

creature and consequence of these.’⁶⁴⁶ The means suggested for ‘securing this all-sufficient perfection of arrangement’ were equally ‘mechanical’. Reformers concerned themselves solely with the external condition of man and not his internal state. That is, they proceeded to attempt to reform him from outside instead of from within. ‘It is no longer the moral, religious, spiritual condition of the people that is our concern,’ Carlyle agonized, ‘but their physical, practical, economical condition’. This led Carlyle to declare, in a now famous phrase, that at present ‘the Body-politic’ is ‘worshipped and tendered’ more assiduously than ever and ‘the Soul-politic less than ever.’⁶⁴⁷ ‘Contrive the fabric of the law aright,’ contemporary political theorists’ claimed, ‘and without farther effort on your part, that divine spirit of Freedom, which all hearts venerate and long for, will of herself come to inhabit it’.⁶⁴⁸

Such an approach to politics, as with any other element of human understanding, was perverse, Carlyle thought, because human beings were ontologically diverse. They were not material beings alone, but possessed aspects of the transcendental. Carlyle claimed that he was speaking ‘a little pedantically’ when he told his readers that ‘there is a science of *Dynamics* in man’s fortunes and nature, as well as of *Mechanics*.’⁶⁴⁹ Unfortunately, modern political discourse was grounded on the latter alone. In other words, the modern urge towards democratic constitutionalism was based on a faulty ontology. Carlyle thought John Locke and the ontological implications of the epistemological position he had crafted in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* lay at the bottom of this. It was this that was washing over the early-nineteenth century and its politics.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, p.67.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid, p.67.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, p.68.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

Locke's 'whole doctrine is mechanical,' Carlyle lamented, 'in its aim and origin, in its method and its results.' Carlyle disputed the validity of Locke's understanding of the mind and its construction. In his view, it was not for one minute 'a philosophy of the mind'. It was, instead, 'a mere discussion concerning the origin of our consciousness, or ideas, or whatever else they are called'. In short, Locke's *Essay* set out the means of arriving at 'a genetic history of what we see *in* the mind.'⁶⁵⁰ It did not examine any of the fundamental issues sitting beneath the mere contents of the mind.

The grand secrets of Necessity and Freewill, of the Mind's vital or non-vital dependence on Matter, of our mysterious relations to time and space, to God, to the Universe, are not, in the faintest degree touched upon in these inquiries; and seem not to have the smallest connection with them.⁶⁵¹

Carlyle admitted that the last batch of thinkers produced by the Scottish Enlightenment had understood that much of what Locke had claimed about the nature of the human mind was incorrect, but they had had no idea 'how to right it.'⁶⁵² 'The school of Reid' – Thomas Reid – 'had also from the first taken a mechanical course, not seeing any other.' Hume had brought this school into being. Carlyle claimed that it had simply 'tugged lustily at the logical chain by which Hume was so coldly towing them and the world into bottomless abysses of Atheism and Fatalism.'⁶⁵³

The materialization of man did not end here. David Hartley's psychology continued via another route the Lockean doctrine. 'Hartley's vibrations and vibratiuncles, one would think,

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid, p.64.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Ibid, pp.64-65.

were material and mechanical enough'. But even he could not rival 'our Continental neighbours'. 'One of their philosophers has lately discovered,' Carlyle noted with evident irony, 'that 'as the liver secretes bile, so does the brain secrete thought'; which astonishing discovery Dr. Cabanis, more lately still, in his *Rapports du Physique et du Morale de l'Homme*, has pushed into its minutest developments.'⁶⁵⁴

Carlyle revelled in the absurdity of Cabanis' *Rapports*. The latter, the Scotsman chortled, had 'fairly' uncovered 'our moral structure with his dissecting-knives and real metal probes'. He had exhibited 'it to the inspection of mankind, by Leuwenhoek microscopes, and inflation with the anatomical blowpipe.' If this was not ridiculous enough, Carlyle lampooned Cabanis' understanding of the genesis of thought, poetry and religion. 'Thought, he is inclined to hold, is still secreted by the brain; but then Poetry and Religion (and it is really worth knowing) are 'a product of the smaller intestines'!'⁶⁵⁵ Carlyle added the *coup de grâce* in stating his respect for Cabanis.

We have the greatest admiration for this learned doctor: with what scientific stoicism he walks through the land of wonders, unwondering; like a wise man through some huge, gaudy, imposing Vauxhall, whose fire-works, cascades and symphonies, the vulgar may enjoy and believe in, – but where he finds nothing real but the saltpetre, pasteboard and catgut.⁶⁵⁶

Joking aside, Carlyle informed his readers of the significance of Cabanis' work. 'His book', the Scot argued, 'may be regarded as the ultimatum of mechanical metaphysics'.⁶⁵⁷ In other

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid, p.65.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

words, Cabanis' materialist doctrines represented the most extensive development of Locke's original ideas.⁶⁵⁸ Locke was coeval with the present; he haunted Carlyle and his contemporaries. The epistemological consequences were clear.

This condition of the two great departments of knowledge, – the outward, cultivated exclusively on mechanical principles; the inward, finally abandoned, because, cultivated on such principles, it is found to yield no result, – sufficiently indicates the intellectual bias of our time, its all-pervading disposition towards that line of inquiry.⁶⁵⁹

Carlyle realized the practical consequences of this trend. Investigation into the sciences was now conducted on an entirely mechanical basis. In the present, 'there are no true sciences' apart from 'the external'. What is more, the inner world of man was probed using the methods appropriate to external science. The road 'to the inward world', Carlyle averred, was held to be 'through the outward', which meant 'that, in short, what cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all.'⁶⁶⁰ The externalism of the era could be traced through every current of thought. It could be seen 'in its intellectual aspect, the studies it most favours and its manner of conducting them'. More importantly, for the present thesis' purpose, it was evident 'in its practical aspects, its

⁶⁵⁸ Jessop argued that Carlyle was not alone in Lockean epistemology in the contemporary world. His friend, Sir William Hamilton was an equally prominent voice in this debate. See R. Jessop, 'Resisting the Enlightenment's Instrumentalist Legacy: James, Hamilton, and Carlyle on the Mechanisation of the Human Condition', in *History of European Ideas*, Vol.39, No.5 (2013), p.632. 'Opposing the mechanistic conception of humanity,' Jessop contended, 'Hamilton and Carlyle were concerned about the moral implications of theories that undermine the fundamentals of philosophic discourse, and the agency, dignity, and general well-being of humanity.' See Jessop, 'Resisting the Enlightenment's Instrumentalist Legacy', p.634.

⁶⁵⁹ *CE XXVII*, p.66.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

politics, arts, religion, morals; in the whole sources, and throughout the whole currents, of its spiritual, no less than its material activity.⁶⁶¹

Faith in the individual and in individual capacity had waned as the emphasis placed on mechanism had waxed. Carlyle thought that this was coterminous with the move towards democracy, because it was the political system that accorded most closely with mechanism. Without faith in the individual, from where would the lights of progress emerge? Could the progress of society ground to a halt if individual genius came to be subjected to the suffocating conformity of institutionalization? This was exactly what Carlyle was implying. In his work *On Heroes* eleven years later, he asserted the centrality of the individual to progress at the outset of his very first lecture. 'Universal History,' which is 'the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.' These had been the leaders of mankind in every field and 'all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world'.⁶⁶² Without such men in what state did the world stand?

Furthermore, Carlyle, as John Morrow recognized, was convinced that 'Independence is a requirement of freedom, and this in turn is necessary for morality'. In order to be legitimate in Carlyle's eyes human action had to be grounded on 'voluntary determination of the will'.⁶⁶³ There are numerous allusions to the importance of the individual and individuality in *Sartor*. 'On the whole, as I have often said,' Carlyle wrote, 'a person is ever holy to us'.⁶⁶⁴ 'Our Life is compassed round with Necessity', he maintained later in the book, and 'yet is the meaning of

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, p.63.

⁶⁶² Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.3.

⁶⁶³ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.72.

⁶⁶⁴ Carlyle, *Sartor*, p.103.

Life itself no other than Freedom, than Voluntary Force'.⁶⁶⁵ Indeed, freedom was almost his primary concern. Democracy, as we have seen in Carlyle's comments above, could not fulfil this criteria. Once again, *Sartor* is where we find the finest example of such a criticism: 'FREEDOM heavenborn and leading heavenward, and so vitally essential for us all, cannot peradventure be mechanically hatched and brought to light in that same Ballot-Box'.⁶⁶⁶

Freedom, individuality and the status of the individual concerned Mill and Tocqueville as much as Carlyle. However, Mill and Tocqueville addressed the individual's decline from a different angle. Individual sovereignty occupied Mill's thoughts for over a quarter of a century, from the early 1830s to the vital pages of *On Liberty*. It was the most important issue in the latter. In it the spectre of Carlyle, not to mention Comte and the Positivists, looms large. In an essay *On Genius*, written in 1832, Mill bemoaned the inferiority of the Moderns compared to the Ancients. History had shown that 'ten centuries of England or France cannot produce as many illustrious names as the hundred and fifty years of little Greece'. In truth, Mill thought it surprising that the Moderns had produced any examples of genius at all. Though he acknowledged that they had had 'some true philosophers, and a few genuine poets' and that 'two or three great intellects have revolutionized physical science', he noted that 'in almost every branch of literature and art we are deplorably behind the earlier ages of the world.'⁶⁶⁷

Civilization and its progress was at the root of this apparent decline. Individual endeavour had been redirected towards ends other than the pursuit of truth, beauty, or art. 'One of the effects of a high state of Civilization upon character,' Mill wrote, 'is a relaxation of individual

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid, p.140.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid, p.189.

⁶⁶⁷ *CW I*, p.338.

energy: or rather the concentration of it within the narrow sphere of the individual's money-getting pursuits.⁶⁶⁸ The softening of manners throughout society, which was a consequence of the move towards political and social pluralization, entailed the rise of the middle classes and the utter destruction of those of the higher. The latter had traditionally pursued those aspects of genius highlighted by Mill. The energies of the former were 'confined to money-getting' only.⁶⁶⁹ Intellectual decline was bound up with the deterioration of the individual in comparison to the mass. Heroic qualities and devotion to the life of the mind weakened in proportion as the power of the majority augmented. 'The consequence is that, compared with former times,' Mill thought, 'there is in the refined classes of modern civilized communities much more of the amiable and the humane, and much less of the heroic.' Mill went further.

The heroic essentially consists in being ready, for a worthy object, to do and to suffer, but especially to do, what is painful or disagreeable: and whoever does not early learn to do this, will never be a great character. There has crept over the refined classes, over the whole class of gentlemen in England, a moral effeminacy, an inaptitude for every kind of struggle.⁶⁷⁰

Men of the present, Mill thought, 'cannot undergo labour, they cannot brave ridicule, they cannot stand evil tongues'.⁶⁷¹ In every aspect of society, he wrote, 'the individual falls in

⁶⁶⁸ *CW XVIII*, p.129.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁰ Mill, 'Civilisation', p.131. Mill gave his readers examples of the opposite tendency from the classical world. 'When we read of actions of the Greeks and Romans, or of our own ancestors, denoting callousness to human suffering, we must not think that those who committed these actions were as cruel as we must become before we could do the like. The pain which they inflicted, they were in the habit of voluntarily undergoing from slight causes; it did not appear to them as great an evil, as it appears, and as it really is, to us, nor did it in any way degrade their minds.' See *CW XVIII*, pp.130-131.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.131.

comparison with the masses'.⁶⁷² He 'becomes so lost in the crowd,' Mill lamented, 'that though he depends more and more upon opinion, he is apt to depend less and less upon well-grounded opinion'.⁶⁷³ Society had tried to replace its 'deficiency of giants by the united efforts of a constantly increasing multitude of dwarfs.'⁶⁷⁴ But this, as Mill's tone demonstrated, had failed.

Mill returned to the theme of individual decline in the final chapter of his *Principles*. At 'present', he thought, 'civilization tends so strongly to make the power of persons acting in masses the only substantial power in society, that there never was more necessity for surrounding individual independence of thought, speech, and conduct, with the most powerful defences, in order to maintain that originality of mind and individuality of character, which are the only source of any real progress'.⁶⁷⁵

On Liberty expressed Mill's concern for the status of the individual in the modern world better than any other contemporary work. In a passage that could have been lifted verbatim out of Carlyle's oeuvre, Mill declared that modern greatness 'Is now all collective: individuality small, we only appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining; and with this our moral and religious philanthropists are perfectly contented.' He argued that it had been 'men of another stamp' who had inaugurated the modern world 'and men of another stamp will be needed to prevent its decline.'⁶⁷⁶

Mill thought that the progress of civilization, the most important consequence of which had been democracy, had weakened individuals. Firstly, this had taken place through the

⁶⁷² Ibid, p.129.

⁶⁷³ Ibid, p.132.

⁶⁷⁴ *CW I*, p.330.

⁶⁷⁵ *CW III*, p.940.

⁶⁷⁶ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.70.

promotion of a sort of moral effeminacy; secondly, as a result of the rise of the mass to which the individual looked in awe. In light of individual decline, Mill, much like Carlyle, introduced the prospect of stagnation. China offered an example of a great society condemned to decline due to intellectual torpor and Mill was afraid that something similar could happen in modern democratic societies.⁶⁷⁷

Tocqueville was at pains to highlight the perils posed to the individual by modern democratic society. 'Among democratic peoples,' he wrote, 'individuals are very weak; but the State, which represents them all and holds them all in its hand, is very strong.'⁶⁷⁸ Unfortunately, Tocqueville thought, nowhere were people more likely to be reduced to inanity than in democracies.

Nowhere do citizens appear smaller than in a democratic nation. Nowhere does the nation itself seem greater and nowhere does the mind more easily form a vast picture of it. In democratic societies, the imagination of men narrows when they consider themselves; it expands indefinitely when they think about the State.⁶⁷⁹

But why did individuals appear weak in opposition to the agglomerated mass? In part, it resulted from the narrow conformity that constrained the eccentricity of each. 'As conditions become equal among a people,' Tocqueville had already seen that 'individuals appear smaller and society seems larger'. But, in reality, 'each citizen, having become similar to all others, is lost in the crowd, and you no longer notice anything except the vast and magnificent image

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, pp.70-71.

⁶⁷⁸ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.796. This was a common theme to much of the era's French literature; it appeared in both academic work and fictional creations. 'The sensation of powerlessness', Roger Boesche notes, 'coupled with a persistent distaste for the new bourgeois society engendered an intense yearning for some to escape from this society or for some force that could transform it dramatically.'⁶⁷⁸ Short of this, the feeling of individual helplessness would continue. See Boesche, *Strange Liberalism of Tocqueville*, p.94.

⁶⁷⁹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.796.

of the people itself.⁶⁸⁰ The death-knell of eccentricity thus signalled the downfall of individual agency.

However, there was an equally powerful structural cause at the root of individual feebleness. In a democratic society, Tocqueville argued, 'all citizens are independent of each other' and this predisposes them to feel a sense of profound weakness. It is impossible to 'discover any one of them who exercises a very great or, above all, a very enduring power over the mass.' 'At first view,' Tocqueville averred, 'individuals seem absolutely powerless over the mass, and you would say that society moves all by itself by the free and spontaneous participation of all the men who compose it.'⁶⁸¹ This was a notion favoured by historians in democratic ages who, seeing the weakness of individuals, attributed the movement of society to impersonal, general forces. Tocqueville thought this an especially pernicious doctrine because it induced a sense of fatality that denied the existence of free will. Such a 'doctrine is particularly dangerous in this period in which we live; our contemporaries are all too inclined to doubt free will, because each of them feels limited on all sides by his weakness, but they still readily grant strength and independence to men gathered in a social body.' More than anything, Tocqueville implored his readers to take care 'not to obscure this idea, for it is a matter of lifting up souls and not finally demoralizing them.'⁶⁸²

Much like Mill, Tocqueville believed that the mildness of modern, democratic mores offered a means of explaining the weakened status of the individual. He acknowledged that this was the result of a complicated process, but that the historical movement towards equality of conditions was its main cause. It directed human energies toward new goals that required a

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, p.1196.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, p.854.

⁶⁸² Ibid, pp.858-859.

new mode of interaction. 'Equality of conditions', as he understood it, 'leads men toward industrial and commercial professions, which need peace in order for men to devote themselves to those professions.' The political and social pluralization that had augmented the ranks of the middle classes softened mores and weakened the power of the individual by taking away the situations in which powerful magnates could prosper. 'Equality of conditions suggests to men the taste for material enjoyments; it distances them imperceptibly from war and violent revolutions.'⁶⁸³

Tocqueville discussed the effect of material pleasures on man's violent tendencies in the concluding chapters of the *Démocratie*. 'Commerce', he maintained, 'is naturally hostile to all violent passions. It loves moderation, takes pleasure in compromises, very carefully flees from anger. It is patient, flexible, ingratiating, and it resorts to extreme means only when the most absolute necessity forces it to do so.' Tocqueville concluded that he knew 'of nothing more opposed to revolutionary mores than commercial mores.'⁶⁸⁴ He did not preclude the possibility entirely of 'enterprising and ambitious citizens' arising from the soil of democracy.⁶⁸⁵ However, he did assert that the natural disposition of democratic nations will be, if not hostile, apathetic in regard to their aims. Great men will thus find it almost impossible to assert themselves.

To his ardour, they [the democracy] secretly oppose their inertia; to his revolutionary instincts, their conservative interests; their stay-at-home tastes to

⁶⁸³ Ibid, pp.988-989.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid, p.1138.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, p1139.

his adventurous passions; their good sense to the flights of his genius; to his poetry, their prose.⁶⁸⁶

Tocqueville could have added another, more telling duality: their mediocrity to his brilliance. A distinguished man would 'exhaust himself,' Tocqueville claimed, 'wanting to animate this indifferent and inattentive crowd, and he finally sees himself reduced to impotence, not because he is vanquished, but because he is alone.'⁶⁸⁷ If this was the destiny that awaited the agency of great individuals, what horrors did democracy have in store for that of ordinary souls? Tocqueville's reflections on the sort of fatalism induced by *le doux commerce* reverses those his great model, Montesquieu, presented in *L'Esprit des lois*. It had the power to enslave people as much as to set them at liberty.⁶⁸⁸

DEMOCRACY: THE CRITIQUE

In the present and previous chapter I have attempted to trace the areas in which the critiques of democracy offered by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle intersected. I do not claim to have exhausted the criticisms each applied to modern democratic politics and society. Were this a study of one of these men, rather than the three in combination, more material could be inserted, which would extend and deepen the barbs aimed at democracy by each. What these two chapters do show is the danger democracy posed to progress, both individual and

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, p.1140.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ See Céline Spector's discussion of this in her chapter 'Commerce, Glory and Empire: Montesquieu's Legacy', in Atanassow and Boyd eds., *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy*, pp.214-216 for a fuller analysis of this aspect of Montesquieu's impact on Tocqueville. The psychological problems posed by democratic commerce have been expertly adumbrated by Laura Janara in her article on 'Commercial Capitalism and the Democratic Psyche: The Threat to Tocquevillean Citizenship', in *History of Political Thought*, Vol.XXII, No.2 (Summer, 2011), pp.317-350.

collective. Practically, it was an inefficient system of politics characterized by poor leaders and ineffective legislatures.

The social pressures introduced by the dominance of commercial values in the wake of the fall of the *ancien régime*, as well as the increasing pressure exerted by the majority in the life of the community, prompted the demise of eccentricity. Stated simply, democracies militated in the direction of mediocrity, conformity and decline. The individual suffered from each of these problems. Indeed, individual strength, energy and freedom relative to the majority was in decline in the modern world, where the mass was assuming a dominant position in political, social and cultural terms. Was the individual sovereign any longer? It was hard to see how.

Now it is time to turn to the solutions Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle suggested to the problems each had identified in the modern world. It is at this point that the differences that existed between their views will become more apparent. Hitherto, their respective notions on the contemporary world's condition, the import of the French Revolution, the bent of the modern world, its antecedent causes, the definition and, finally, the problems of democracy have seemed broadly analogous.

However, Carlyle's views were clearly anti-democratic, at least in political terms, whereas Tocqueville and Mill approached democracy with the intention of mitigating its worst excesses. I have not attempted to disguise this. 'Democracy makes rapid progress in these latter times,' Carlyle maintained, 'and ever more rapid, in a perilous accelerative ratio; towards democracy, and that only, the progress of things is everywhere tending as to the final goal and winning-post.' 'And yet', Carlyle stated forthrightly, 'in democracy can lie no finality'.⁶⁸⁹ In his estimation, nothing could be built atop the Golgotha of democratic society.

⁶⁸⁹ CE XXIX, p.158.

‘Democracy,’ he surmised, ‘is found but as a regulated method of rebellion and abrogation; it abrogates the old arrangement of things; and leaves, as we say, *zero* and vacuity for the institution of a new arrangement.’⁶⁹⁰

Tocqueville warned his readers at the outset of the second volume of his *Démocratie* that far from accepting the irresistible democratic revolution that he had identified without proper consideration, he had ‘often ended up addressing such harsh words...to the democratic societies created by this revolution.’ He claimed that this was not because he was ‘an adversary of democracy’, but because he ‘wanted to be candid about it.’ ‘Men do not receive the truth from their enemies,’ he told his readers, ‘and their friends hardly ever offer the truth to them’.⁶⁹¹ This sentiment was an appropriate opening to a book that would be rooted firmly in reflections on democratic morality. But, there was a further reason Tocqueville had decided to highlight the drawbacks of the democratic social state that was purely pragmatic. ‘I have thought that many would take it upon themselves to announce the new good things that equality promises to men, but that few would dare to point out from a distance the perils with which it threatens them.’⁶⁹²

In the concluding pages of his *Autobiography*, Mill addressed this subject equally directly. ‘As I had shewn in my political writings that I was aware of the weak points in democratic opinions, some Conservatives,’ Mill thought, ‘had not been without hopes of finding me an opponent of democracy’.⁶⁹³ ‘Yet’, he continued, ‘if they had really read my writings they would have known that after giving full weight to all that appeared to me well grounded in the arguments against democracy, I unhesitatingly decided in its favour, while recommending

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, p.159.

⁶⁹¹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.693.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.226.

that it should be accompanied by institutions as were consistent with its principles and calculated to ward off its inconveniences'.⁶⁹⁴

The differences that existed between Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle in regard to democracy will become more apparent in the final three chapters of this thesis: on politics and society, religion, and education. Despite the differences, though, it is striking to remark upon the similarities that remain between these men and their proposed solutions to the problems of democracy.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, pp.226-227.

CHAPTER 6

RECONFIGURING STATE AND SOCIETY

The views offered by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle in respect of the challenges facing the modern democratic world suggest that they considered the principal problem to be one of political culture. What was required in the modern democratic era was a new political culture that was both appropriate to the novel conditions of the age and that could correct the imbalances created by democracy. In their responses to this problem, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle pursued different avenues in many respects, though important similarities remain between their ideas.

The present chapter will focus on the mechanisms outlined by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle in the realm of the state and that of society, which were intended to provide both barriers to the excesses of democratic power in such nations and the means of ensuring that government was effective in the modern world. The next chapter will examine the importance Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle placed on religion as a bulwark of the sort of political culture they wanted to create. The final chapter of this thesis will consider how education contributed to the sort of political culture Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were eager to foster in the contemporary world.

These were the elemental building blocks required in order to found a new political culture appropriate to the modern democratic world. However, they should not be seen as the foundation stones of new and rigorous socio-political systems. 'System-building', according to Francis and Morrow, 'was not a task to which Mill felt drawn and it would be perverse to insist, retrospectively, that he ought to have felt that way.'⁶⁹⁵ The proposals that each of

⁶⁹⁵ Francis and Morrow, 'John Stuart Mill', p.141.

these men directed at democracy were not intended to create complete or ideal political and social models. They were, rather, intended to ameliorate the ills produced by modern democracy and were, in this sense, reactive, though not reactionary.

At the outset, it is necessary to restate a central distinction that existed between Tocqueville and Mill, on the one hand, and Carlyle on the other. For all of the reservations that have been described in the previous two chapters, Tocqueville and Mill were in favour of democracy. Carlyle was its opponent in all political senses, if not those that were properly social.

How did these men think democratic society should be reconfigured? Given their respective concerns about the consequences of the rise of democracy, the solutions that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle suggested for reorganizing the state were different. Tocqueville and Mill wanted to limit government to a considerable degree where Carlyle wanted to increase its influence in modern nations. Equally, in the realm of society, Tocqueville and Mill wanted to create barriers to the masses domineering power where Carlyle wanted to ensure the interconnectedness of classes through a new form of contract. Here, their targets were different as a result of their respective analyses of the problems facing democratic nations and the weight Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle attached to each of these problems.

For example, as I showed above, Tocqueville and Mill thought that it was very possible that central government could amass so much power as to become almost despotic in democratic countries. That is to say, they identified the possibility of the existence of a new, arbitrary and absolute authority. By contrast, Carlyle saw in democracy the potential for chaos. Both of these outcomes were perceived to be individually limiting by their proponents and the common basis of their respective remedies was to reverse such a negative consequence.

If Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle differed in the way in which they wanted to reconfigure the state and society, they were at one in regard to the sorts of people they wanted to see rise to the top of governmental institutions. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were eager to ensure that the most capable individuals worked the levers of government. That the particular professional or social groups that each thought could fulfil this role differed should not obscure the fact that there was a profound agreement between these men in respect to their preference for those who could demonstrate their intelligence or experience and, thus, their suitability for positions of power. What remains of this chapter will explore these areas of the political thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle.

REDESIGNING THE STATE

In 1859, Mill wrote in *On Liberty* that there were three objections that could be made in relation to government interference in the life of the individual other than that it infringed upon the liberty of those its actions restricted. 'The first is,' Mill argued, that the object in view 'is likely to be better done by individuals than by governments'. 'The second objection', he continued, was that even if a government official were more efficient in the achievement of identified objects, 'it is nevertheless desirable that it should be done by them [individuals], rather than by the government, as a means of their own mental education'. In undertaking such actions, individuals' 'active faculties' and 'judgment' would be improved.⁶⁹⁶ Finally, Mill maintained that the 'most cogent reason for restricting the interference of government, is the great evil of adding unnecessarily to its power.'⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.109.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid, p.110.

Every function superadded to those already exercised by the government, causes its influence over hopes and fears to be more widely diffused, and converts, more and more, the active and ambitious part of the public into hangers-on of the government, or of some party which aims at becoming the government.⁶⁹⁸

The problem, as Mill recognized along with Tocqueville, was that in democracies the power of central government tended to augment. In 1861, Mill reinforced his concerns about centralization. He claimed that 'It is but a small portion of the public business of a country which can be well done or safely attempted by the central authorities'.⁶⁹⁹ The solution to this problem, then, was simple in Mill's view: decentralization. However, the benefits of decentralization had to be balanced against the danger of incompetence it entailed. Decentralization was likely to limit central government significantly, but it was also likely to place local power into the hands of those who had not received training in the art of government.

The benefits of decentralization were clear. Mill was explicit in his belief that decentralized political institutions were 'instrumental to the nourishment of public spirit and the development of intelligence.'⁷⁰⁰ By taking part in the life of local political bodies, 'many citizens in turn have the chance of being elected, and many, either by selection or rotation, fill one or other of the numerous local executive offices.'⁷⁰¹ This fostered the ability of citizens 'to act for public interests', rather than their own, and 'to think and to speak'. What is more, because such offices go beyond the 'higher ranks' in their composition, they 'carry down the

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ *CW XIX*, p.534.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid, p.535.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid, pp.535-536.

important political education which they are the means of conferring, to a much lower grade in society.⁷⁰²

The first advantage held out by the localization of governmental administration, in Mill's view, was to improve the populace morally and intellectually. To this, Mill added the advantage local bodies possess with regard to local information: they were better placed than central institutions to understand the particulars of any given locality. Localization promoted the development of public spirit, which counteracted the sort of individualism inherent in modern democracies; enhanced and widened the pool of individual capacity, which increased the overall competence of governmental officials; and facilitated better government through a greater understanding of local issues.

Such advantages were, however, mirrored by a number of disadvantages of, if not equal, certainly, significant weight. In particular, Mill was concerned about the quality of local officials.⁷⁰³ Mill reconciled central and local administration through the doctrine of the division of labour, which incorporated their different advantages, and saw the efficacious operation of government in the co-operation of these two. 'In the details of management,' Mill maintained, 'the local bodies will generally have the advantage, but in comprehension of the principles even of purely local management, the superiority of the central government...ought to be prodigious'. Given this recognition, Mill's prescription seemed obvious. 'The authority which is most conversant with principles should be supreme over principles, while that which is most competent in details should have the details left to it.' The result of this arrangement, according to Mill, was that power would be exercised locally

⁷⁰² Ibid, p.536.

⁷⁰³ Ibid, p.543.

whilst knowledge would be held centrally.⁷⁰⁴ The division enunciated thus was that which Mill thought most conducive to good government in a modern democracy. Mill limited central government by diffusing its exercise more widely and, in so doing, prevented malignant concentrations of power.

Tocqueville offered a similar solution, though it was by no means exactly the same. Government, Tocqueville believed, was not the complex activity Mill thought it to be. In an extremely short section in the *Démocratie*, placed immediately after that in which he had lauded the American township⁷⁰⁵, Tocqueville drew attention to the unspectacular composition of town districts. His example was drawn from New England.

The town in New England falls between the *canton* and the *commune* in France.

Generally it numbers from two to three thousand inhabitants. So it is not too extensive for all its inhabitants to share nearly the same interests; and on the other hand, it is populated enough to assure that elements of a good administration are always found within it.⁷⁰⁶

In other words, any two to three thousand people could govern themselves without encountering any particular difficulties. Townships, as well as the other layers of government covered in Tocqueville's work on America – such as counties and states – provided an

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid, pp.543-544.

⁷⁰⁵ Tocqueville thought that the township was both the foundation of American society and the repository of American liberty. 'The strength of free peoples resides in the town', Tocqueville wrote. 'Town institutions are to liberty', he continued, 'what primary schools are to knowledge; they put it within the grasp of the people; they give them a taste of its peaceful practice and accustom them to its use. Without town institutions, a nation can pretend to have a free government, but it does not possess the spirit of liberty.' Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.102.

⁷⁰⁶ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.103-104.

essential function in his theory of democracy. They prevented the rise of administrative centralization.

Tocqueville claimed that there were two varieties of centralization: governmental and administrative. 'Only the first exists in America', he noted, 'the second is almost unknown there.'⁷⁰⁷ Tocqueville expanded on this point. 'In none of the American republics has the central government ever taken charge of anything other than a small number of objects whose importance attracted its attention. It has never undertaken to regulate the secondary things of society.' What Tocqueville was attempting to show was that 'The majority, while becoming more and more absolute, has not increased the attributions of the central power; it has only made it omnipotent in its sphere.'⁷⁰⁸ This protected the liberty of the individual against arbitrary incursions by the government.

So the municipal bodies and county administrations form like so many hidden reefs that slow or divide the tide of popular will. Were the law oppressive, liberty would still find refuge in the way in which the law would be executed; the majority cannot get into the details, and, if I dare say so, the puerilities of administrative tyranny.⁷⁰⁹

Decentralization, then, and self-government in the township, was an essential ingredient in Tocqueville's quest to draw liberty out of democracy. Tocqueville saw local institutions as intermediary powers that mitigated the force of the state. His advocacy of such bodies has been perceived by scholars to be a consequence of his aristocratic heritage.⁷¹⁰ In his historical

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid, p.427.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid, p.428.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid, p.429.

⁷¹⁰ See Jaume, *Tocqueville*, p.292.

study of the *ancien régime*, it was the failure of the intermediary institutions of the aristocracy that had prepared the way for absolute monarchy and, therefore, servitude.⁷¹¹ Tocqueville hoped to prevent a similar occurrence in the democratic era.

Carlyle's objective was different to that of Tocqueville and Mill to an extent. He was eager to uncover 'How, in conjunction with inevitable Democracy, indispensable Sovereignty is to exist'. This, he thought, was 'the hugest question ever heretofore propounded to Mankind!'⁷¹² Only this, he thought, could remedy the problems posed by the sort of chaos democracy represented if left to itself. A genuine sovereignty, though, could only be provided by an active government in Carlyle's view. 'This that they call 'Organising of Labour' is,' Carlyle argued, 'the Problem of the whole Future, for all who will pretend to govern men.'⁷¹³ But, what did he mean by this phrase?

Carlyle wanted government to regiment the masses. 'It is incalculable', he believed, 'what, by arranging, commanding and regimenting, you can make of men.'⁷¹⁴ Carlyle was eager to place the state at the forefront of progress. The sort of regimentation he imagined would create a number of services for citizens that democracy could not offer in his view. He theorized the creation of 'an Emigration Service, a Teaching Service, considerable varieties of United and Separate Services, of the due thousands strong, all effective as this Fighting Service is; all doing their work'.⁷¹⁵ Under this arrangement, Carlyle conceived of individuals as soldiers. However, Carlyle's modern soldiers would not be organized into units in order to fight any other nation. Instead, they would be engaged 'in continual real action and battle

⁷¹¹ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, pp.118-124.

⁷¹² Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.261.

⁷¹³ *Ibid*, p.267.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.272.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.272.

against Human Starvation, against Chaos, Necessity, Stupidity, and our real 'natural enemies'.⁷¹⁶

Where Tocqueville and Mill sought to limit the impact of the state on individuals' lives, Carlyle was eager to increase its claims over them. This reflected their respective concerns about the influence of democracy over the condition of society in the modern world. Liberty in a democracy, Tocqueville and Mill thought, could only be guaranteed in the absence of a large and cumbersome central state. Chaos, Carlyle argued, could only be prevented by the presence of such a state.

However, Carlyle was not solely focused on order and it is necessary to highlight a final area of his thought in relation to the state before moving on to the next part of this chapter. Carlyle was concerned about liberty. 'Liberty, I am told,' he informed his readers, 'is a divine thing.' But, such 'Liberty', he went on, 'when it becomes the 'Liberty to die by starvation' is not so divine!'⁷¹⁷ Carlyle expounded a notion of liberty that reflected his concern for the individual in the context of the problems presented by a chaotic democracy.

The true liberty of a man, you would say, consisted in finding out, or being forced to find out the right path, and to walk thereon. To learn, or to be taught, what work he actually was able for; and then by permission, persuasion, and even compulsion, to set about doing the same!⁷¹⁸

It was this, Carlyle argued, that was the individual's 'true blessedness, honour, 'liberty' and maximum of wellbeing'.⁷¹⁹ Placed in the context of Carlyle's proposals for a regimentation of

⁷¹⁶ Ibid, p.273.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, p.220.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid, p.220.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid, p.220.

labour, his sentiments on the sort of liberty appropriate for the modern world was no doubt, patriarchal in nature when compared to that of Tocqueville and Mill. However, it was clearly engineered in order to facilitate individual development and prevent individual suffering; the very same goals aimed at by Tocqueville and Mill.

LEADING THE STATE

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were eager to ensure that appropriate leaders occupied the corridors of power in modern countries. Mill's approach to this challenge was the most complicated and it is with him that our discussion will begin. This is a feature of his thought that has received little attention from scholars, though Mill addressed this subject in his *Considerations*. Mill set a clear objective for representative government. 'The meaning of representative government is,' he argued, 'that the whole people, or some numerous portion of them, exercise through deputies periodically elected by themselves the ultimate controlling power, which, in every constitution, must reside somewhere.'⁷²⁰ Mill thought that the controlling power in democratic political arrangements should be the popular chamber.

However, he was quick to point out that a marked difference existed between the controlling power in a constitutional arrangement and a body of implementation.⁷²¹ 'The same person or body may be able to control every thing, but cannot possibly do every thing; and in many cases its control over every thing will be more perfect the less it personally attempts to do.' Mill addressed this by analogy. 'The commander of an army could not direct its movements effectually' he argued, 'if he himself fought in the ranks or led an assault.' Mill was convinced

⁷²⁰ *CW XIX*, p.422.

⁷²¹ *Ibid*, p.423.

that the same applied to elected bodies. 'Some things can not be done except by bodies', he contended, 'other things can not be done well by them. It is one question, therefore, what a popular assembly should control, another what it should itself do.'⁷²² The criticisms that Mill aimed at popular assemblies and their leaders, which I addressed in a previous chapter, must have been on his mind when he wrote this comment.

A popular assembly was not fit to lead a democratic nation, according to Mill, but it was an appropriate body for controlling those who did so. Indeed, Mill rejected, according to Anschutz, 'the view that the many should evoke all political questions to their own tribunal and decide them according to their own judgement.'⁷²³ But, who was capable of leading such nations? Mill's answer to this question is divided into different segments. The two principal areas of leadership occurred through a Legislative Commission and an English Senate. Both of these institutions attest to the influence of classical history on Mill's understanding of politics and his preoccupation with the science of character.

Mill believed that it was necessary to engineer a body dedicated solely to the art of law-making. This is the Legislative Commission that he presented in the *Considerations*. Its task was even clearer in Mill's mind than that of the representative assembly. It is 'true', he claimed, 'that a numerous assembly' is 'little fitted for the direct business of legislation'. This was a trade suited to methodical minds. 'There is hardly any kind of intellectual work which so much needs to be done not only by experienced and exercised minds, but by minds trained to the task through long and laborious study, as the business of making laws.'⁷²⁴ Law making was, in other words, the domain of the expert who was highly conversant with the branches

⁷²² Ibid, pp.422-423.

⁷²³ Anschutz, *Philosophy of J.S. Mill*, p.36.

⁷²⁴ *CW XIX*, p.428.

of political science. 'This is a sufficient reason, were there no other, why they can never be well made but by a committee of very few persons.'⁷²⁵

But, there were other reasons Mill opted for such a commission. Members of Parliament, as he explained later in his *Considerations*, were ordinarily mediocre due to the deficiencies of democratic political culture.⁷²⁶ They could not be expected to harbour the sort of knowledge and experience required to lead in the construction of legislation. Another reason for a democratic assembly's inability to lead in this sense related to the complexity of the law itself. Throughout this process, 'every provision of a law requires to be framed with the most accurate and long-sighted perception of its effect on all the other provisions; and the law when made should be capable of fitting into a consistent whole with the previously existing laws.' This would be 'impossible' if each law was 'voted clause by clause in a miscellaneous assembly.'⁷²⁷ It was at this point that Mill introduced a characteristically Utilitarian grievance.

The incongruity of such a mode of legislating would strike all minds, were it not that our laws are already, as to form and construction, such a chaos, that the confusion and contradiction seem incapable of being made much greater by any addition to the mass.⁷²⁸

The logistical demands of law-making, in Mill's understanding, did not suit the nature of representative assemblies either. 'The mere time necessarily occupied in getting through bills, renders Parliament more and more incapable of passing any, except on detached and narrow points.' The time required to properly consider the whole of any subject, which Mill

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Ibid, p.436.

⁷²⁷ Ibid, p.428.

⁷²⁸ Ibid, pp.428-429.

thought obligatory to an effective legislative process, would mean that any bill of importance would hang over 'from session to session through the sheer impossibility of finding time to dispose of it.'⁷²⁹

Finally, if a bill were to make it through 'the tribunal of ignorance' successfully, the committee process would dismember and disfigure it to the extent that it became unworkable. 'Clauses omitted which are essential to the working of the rest; incongruous ones inserted to conciliate some private interest, or some crotchety member who threatens to delay the bill; articles foisted in on the motion of some sciolist with a mere smattering of the subject, leading to consequences which the member who introduced or those who supported the bill did not at the moment foresee, and which need an amending act in the next session to correct their mischiefs.'⁷³⁰

Mill's Commission would be connected to the democratic process by an indissoluble link. In legislation 'the only task to which a representative assembly can possibly be competent is not that of doing the work, but of causing it to be done'. This entailed the democratic body 'determining to whom or to what sort of people it shall be confided, and giving or withholding the national sanction to it when performed.'⁷³¹ Parliament would retain the ability to accept or reject the proposals put forth by the Commission Mill proposed, but it would not be able to amend them. This was the mark of a government characterised by 'a high state of civilization'.⁷³² Mill offered an example of such a civilization to which he was personally committed.

⁷²⁹ Ibid, p.429.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Ibid, p.430.

⁷³² Ibid.

The necessity of some provision corresponding to this was felt even in the Athenian Democracy, where, in the time of its most complete ascendancy, the popular Ecclesia could pass psephisms (mostly decrees on single matters of policy), but laws, so called, could only be made or altered by a different and less numerous body, renewed annually, called the Nomothetæ, whose duty it also was to revise the whole of the laws, and keep them consistent with one another.⁷³³

Thus, legislative leadership in democracy was the domain of a certain variety of person. The qualities that Mill identified as characteristic of such a person are essential to the effective construction and situation of laws. The authority of these legislative officials was to be exercised in and through the collective body of which each was a part, the Legislative Commission.

Mill supplemented his Legislative Commission with an English Senate. His proposal, modelled on its Roman forebear, was intended to contribute to individual and collective improvement in its own way. It offered two distinct advantages that Mill valued: the balance it offered to the popular chamber and the experience and ability of those who would compose it. At the outset of his chapter 'Of a Second Chamber', Mill told readers that he did not see in bicameralism the same advantages as many of his contemporaries. 'I attach little weight to the argument oftenest urged for having two Chambers – to prevent precipitancy, and compel a second deliberation'.⁷³⁴

Tocqueville had claimed this benefit for such institutions in his *Démocratie*, with which Mill was more than familiar.⁷³⁵ However, Mill had little esteem for any form of government that

⁷³³ Ibid, p.431.

⁷³⁴ Ibid, p.514.

⁷³⁵ See Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.427-429.

did not impose on 'established forms of business...many more than two deliberations' as a matter of course.⁷³⁶ If this was not the benefit such bodies offered, then what did they confer on democratic government that it otherwise lacked? Mill answered this challenge swiftly. The advantage of a second chamber lay in its ability to present a barrier to the *egoism* of a solitary legislative body. 'The consideration which tells most, in my judgment, in favour of two Chambers', he believed, 'is the evil effect produced upon the mind of any holder of power, whether an individual or an assembly, by the consciousness of having only themselves to consult.'⁷³⁷ It was for this reason that the Romans had embraced a dual consulship.

The same reason which induced the Romans to have two consuls makes it desirable there should be two Chambers – that neither of them may be exposed to the corrupting influence of undivided power even for the space of a single year.⁷³⁸

In a democratic age, it was necessary that this take a particular form. In every polity, Mill thought, a 'centre of resistance' is required in order to counteract the 'predominant power'. The contemporary state of civilization demanded a body able to offer 'resistance to the democracy'.⁷³⁹

At this point Mill introduced two caveats. Firstly, any assembly constituted so as to place some 'restraint upon the democracy', in order to be effective, had to command significant 'social support' outside of Parliament.⁷⁴⁰ Secondly, a body like this had to be 'composed of elements which, without being open to the imputation of class interests adverse to the

⁷³⁶ CW XIX, p.514.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

⁷³⁹ Ibid, p.515.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid, p.514.

majority' was able 'to oppose itself to the class interests of the majority'. As such, the House of Lords was ill-suited to play this role in contemporary Britain. It was itself characterized by class interest and, given the progress of the people in number and riches, could no longer command the sort of social support outside of Parliament needed to fulfil this function efficaciously.⁷⁴¹

However, the advantages of Mill's modern Senate extended to a much wider object than that of being a break on the popular assembly, though this last should not be underestimated as a motor of progress in Mill's mind. The Senate had the happy consequence of introducing into democratic legislatures a body of men (and, no doubt, women in Mill's figuring) able to facilitate progress. Furthermore, the body that Mill envisaged had a clear antecedent in the ancient world. 'Of all the principles on which a wisely conservative body, destined to moderate and regulate democratic ascendancy, could possibly be constructed, the best seems to be that exemplified in the Roman Senate, itself the most consistently prudent and sagacious body that ever administered public affairs.'⁷⁴²

Democratic polities' shortcomings were those of the people themselves, as it represented them in its composition, proclivities and actions. In order to correct its excesses a corresponding assembly was required that embodied the features of 'special training and knowledge' in which it was deficient. 'If one House represents popular feeling, the other should represent personal merit, tested and guaranteed by actual public service and fortified by practical experience.'⁷⁴³ Mill put this another way.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid, p.516.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

If one is the People's Chamber, the other should be the Chamber of Statesmen – a council composed of all living public men who have passed through important political office or employment.⁷⁴⁴

Evidently, Mill thought that such a Senate would be able to act as a check on the democratic body. It would be able to command support from a sizeable constituency outside of Parliament and would not exercise a class interest adverse to that of the majority in the manner of an aristocracy. How could it when it would possess no *esprit de corps* like that of an aristocracy?

But, Mill enthused, 'Such a Chamber would be fitted for much more than to be a merely moderating body. It would not be exclusively a check, but also an impelling force.' As well as enjoying 'the power of holding the people back', it, by virtue of its composition, would 'be most inclined to lead them forward in any right course.'⁷⁴⁵ In other words, it was a body of proven leaders that would be able to direct the majority in the path of progress. Mill stated this directly. 'The council to whom the task would be intrusted of rectifying the people's mistakes', he believed, 'would not represent a class believed to be opposed to their interest, but would consist of their own natural leaders in the path of progress.'⁷⁴⁶

No other assembly could match one composed thus 'in giving weight and efficacy' to its function as a moderating force. More significantly, though, it would be 'foremost in promoting improvements', Mill claimed, due to the quality of its members. He gave his readers an overview of the sort of people such a body might contain in modern Britain.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

All who were or had been members of the Legislative Commission described in a former chapter, and which I regard as an indispensable ingredient in a well constituted popular government. All who were or had been chief justices, or heads of any of the superior courts of law or equity. All who had for five years filled the office of puisne judge. All who had held for two years any cabinet office; but these should also be eligible to the House of Commons, and, if elected members of it, their peerage or senatorial office should be held in suspense...All who had filled the office of commander-in-chief; and all who, having commanded an army or a fleet, had been thanked by Parliament for military or naval successes. All governors general of India or British America, and all who had held for ten years any colonial governorships. The permanent civil service should also be represented; all should be senators who had filled, during ten years, the important offices of under-secretary to the Treasury, permanent under-secretary of State, or any others equally high and responsible.⁷⁴⁷

The proposals that Mill made for a Legislative Commission and an English Senate reflected the criticisms he levelled at democratic political arrangements. The Commission would ensure that laws were made in the public interest and with long term consequences in mind. The Senate would balance the popular chamber's naivety with concrete experience. It would also act as a check on the ambitions of the democratic chamber, thus furthering liberty. Finally, as a result of the calibre of persons appointed to it, the Senate would be an engine of progress at the heart of the modern democratic polity.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid, p.517.

Mill's devices for facilitating appropriate political leadership in democracies were thus intended to correct the deficiencies of democratic political culture: inexperience, mediocrity, indecisiveness and tyrannical domination. Of course, Mill did not impose any social criteria on the leaders he identified. They were to be selected according to their talent and experience alone.⁷⁴⁸ Their aim was to ensure continued progressive development in the contemporary world.

Tocqueville located democracy's natural leaders in the judiciary.⁷⁴⁹ 'There is hardly any political question in the United States', Tocqueville argued, 'that sooner or later does not turn into a judicial question.' Cheryl Welch argued that Tocqueville situated the legal profession in neither political nor civil life, but somewhere in between.⁷⁵⁰ A cynic might claim that Tocqueville was preaching for his own church: he was a jurist by training and longed to enter politics. However, the legal profession offered a means of attaining Tocqueville's central goal: freedom. Paul Carrese argued that the legal profession and judicial arena provided 'an indispensable means of maintaining human liberty in the modern world' because of the habits of mind a common law spirit induced in both the populace and the public arena.⁷⁵¹

Tocqueville saw in the United States that most public men had been jurists at some stage in their career and this experience ensured that the 'habits and the turn of ideas that belong to

⁷⁴⁸ This is evident from the sorts of people he chose to comprise his English Senate already described. It is also borne out in the strictures he placed on civil service recruitment in his *Considerations*. See *CW XIX*, pp.528-533.

⁷⁴⁹ F.G. Wilson argued that Tocqueville was interested in discovering the means of producing great men in the modern world. 'Great men', Wilson states in channelling Tocqueville's opinion, 'may be able to check the dangers involved in social power', by which is meant the power of democracy. See F.G. Wilson, 'Tocqueville's Conception of the Elite', in *The Review of Politics*, Vol.4, Issue 3 (July, 1942), p.274. Were jurists Tocqueville's great men? Certainly, they had the capacity to be greater, at least, than their peers.

⁷⁵⁰ Welch, *Tocqueville*, p.68.

⁷⁵¹ P.O. Carrese, 'Judicial Statesmanship, the Jurisprudence of Individualism, and Tocqueville's Common Law Spirit', *The Review of Politics*, Vol.60, No.3 (Summer, 1998), pp.481-482. The legal system is the one element of aristocracy that Seymour Drescher accepts Tocqueville promoted. And it had a distinct utility. 'In the American case at least,' he states, 'the common-law tradition survived the Revolutionary War. Its federal courts were well positioned to moderate majoritarian tides.' See Drescher, 'Who Need *Anciennté*', p.629.

jurists pass into the handling of public affairs.’ Judicial language entered the *agora*; the jurist’s spirit had spread beyond the confines of the courtroom and infiltrated politics and society. Finally, ‘the entire people finishes by acquiring a part of the habits and tastes of the magistrate.’⁷⁵²

But what characterized this all-pervasive spirit of the jurist? Tocqueville was eager to enlighten his audience. In the United States, judges were ‘irremovable’. This in itself bore important consequences. ‘From the moment when a public official is vested with an office for life, he takes a personal interest in society remaining immobile.’ Henceforth, if he is not the ‘enemy of progress’, he is certainly the ‘enemy of revolutions’. By education, the legal man had acquired the taste for ‘stability and he becomes attached to stability by inclination.’ In short, Tocqueville claimed, ‘in what could be called the spirit of the jurist there is something singularly aristocratic.’⁷⁵³

Jurists were possessed of a philosophical mentality. They did not allow themselves ‘to be preoccupied by a fact but by the ensemble of facts, not by a particular period but by the succession of times’.⁷⁵⁴ They were the natural governors of democratic society. They were those who had been ‘called upon to play the first role in the political society trying to be born.’ They possessed ‘a certain taste for forms’, Tocqueville thought, and ‘a sort of instinctive love for the regular succession of ideas’. Naturally, they were ‘strongly opposed to the revolutionary spirit and to the unthinking passions of democracy.’⁷⁵⁵ The highly specialist knowledge that jurists acquired in the course of their education and training made them ‘a

⁷⁵² Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.441.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid*, p.431.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.432.

separate rank in society.’ These men ‘form a sort of privileged class among intelligent people.’⁷⁵⁶

Each day they rediscover the idea of this superiority in the exercise of their profession; they are masters of a necessary science, the knowledge of which is not widespread; they serve as arbiters among citizens, and the habit of leading the blind passions of the litigants toward the goal gives them a certain contempt for the judgment of the crowd.⁷⁵⁷

The links that form between them, through their access to the privileged knowledge of the law, and the spirit that it induces in them leads them, quite naturally, to ‘form a *corps*.’ Their aristocratic status was thus completed. ‘Like the aristocracy,’ Tocqueville noted, ‘they have an instinctive propensity for order, a natural love of forms; like the aristocracy, they conceive a great distaste for the actions of the multitude and secretly despise the government of the people.’⁷⁵⁸

Tocqueville was even clearer about the status of jurists as this chapter progressed. ‘If you ask me where I place the American aristocracy, I would answer without hesitating that it is not among the rich who have no common bond that gathers them together.’ On the contrary, it ‘is at the lawyers’ bar and on the judges’ bench.’⁷⁵⁹ Jurists were a body through which a novel variety of authority could be exercised. This manifested itself in at least three distinct ways. First, in the United States, every political question was ultimately modified and changed into a legal question. This gave judges the power to apply their authority to political matters.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, p.433.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid, p.439.

Second, most political actors – seemingly at both a national and local level in Tocqueville’s view – were or had once been lawyers. This gave the legal corps a dominance over the machinery of government. Finally, and as a result of the preceding factors, the spirit of the jurist extended from the courtroom and into society as a whole. The mentality and habits of the courtroom came to dominate even the meanest individual’s existence.

Tocqueville seems to have had little issue with jurists acquiring such power. Perhaps it was because he considered them to be ‘the sole counterweight of democracy.’⁷⁶⁰ Or, perhaps it was because the ‘jurist belongs to the people by his interest and by his birth’ despite having the ‘habits’ and ‘tastes’ of an aristocrat.⁷⁶¹ Certainly both of these loomed large in Tocqueville’s thought. The jurist was the medium through which the traits of aristocracy could be transposed onto the patchwork of democratic society. And, like any aristocracy, a juridical one operated politically. Tocqueville’s notes to this chapter attest to his understanding of its political potential.

When you examine political society in the United States, you notice at first glance only a single principle that seems to bind all the parts strongly together: the people appear as the sole power. Nothing seems able to oppose their will or to thwart their designs.

But here is a man who appears in a way above the people; he does not get his mandate from them; he has, so to speak, nothing to fear from their anger, nor anything to hope from their favour. He is vested, however, with more power than

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid, p.436.

any one of the representatives of the people; for, with a single blow, he can strike with sterility the work emanating from the common will.⁷⁶²

The legal power that the United States had consecrated in the jurist made him perhaps the most powerful individual in the country. Did Tocqueville approve of jurists' newfound eminence? Certainly, his commentary on their status was adulatory. As much as he knew democracy was the only social and political state possible in the modern world he did not like it particularly. A note Tocqueville wrote in November 1841 in clarification of his political opinions confirms this reading. 'I have for democratic institutions a reasonable taste, but I am aristocratic by instinct, that is to say I fear and despise the crowd.'⁷⁶³ The most telling passage in regard to Tocqueville's view of this new aristocracy of sorts emphasized its importance to the maintenance of modern democracy.

The body of jurists forms the only aristocratic element that can mingle with the natural elements of democracy without effort and combine with them in a happy and enduring way. I am not unaware of the faults inherent in the spirit of jurists; without this mixture of the spirit of jurists with the democratic spirit, I doubt, however, that democracy could govern society for long, and I cannot believe that today a republic could hope to maintain its existence, if the influence of jurists in public affairs did not increase in proportion to the power of the people.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶² Ibid, p.430n.

⁷⁶³ A. de Tocqueville, 'Mon Instinct, Mes Opinions', in A. Jardin eds., *Écrits et Discours Politiques Œuvres Complètes Tome III* (Paris, 1985), p.87.

⁷⁶⁴ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.436-437

Tocqueville was thus content to acknowledge the claims of jurists to exercise political power. It was the sole force by which the *genuine* aristocratic spirit – as opposed to a false one – could be maintained.

However, it was an aristocratic spirit grounded on the successful rise of capable individuals. It was not a caste defined by birth or wealth; it was an aristocracy of talent. Tocqueville was content to replace the leaders of the *ancien régime* with a new variety of aristocrat, the jurist, arrived at via a novel mechanism, *la carrière ouverte aux talents*.⁷⁶⁵ Wilson claimed that Tocqueville was ‘like Aristotle’ as a result of this tendency in his thought. The Frenchman, Wilson argued, ‘wanted a polity which would be a combination of democracy and oligarchy’.⁷⁶⁶ This is too strong. However, what is certain is that Tocqueville was searching for a means to incorporate the spirit of aristocracy within the heart of democracy. This would dilute democratic political culture and, in so doing, help to facilitate liberty by erecting barriers to popular power.

The leaders of modern democratic society that Tocqueville and Mill identified offered a means of correcting the excesses of democratic political culture via liberal means. They sought to acquire new leaders, not through the ballot box, but through the self-selecting mechanism of talent. Carlyle intended that the leaders he championed would be discovered by the same mechanism. However, they were supposed to correct the problems inherent in democratic political arrangements by the effective abolition of such institutions and not by subtly balancing them with a form of leadership based on a contrary principle.

⁷⁶⁵ Tocqueville had been a convert to this doctrine since 1829. See Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.107.

⁷⁶⁶ Wilson, ‘Tocqueville’s Conception’, p.281.

The propositions Carlyle tendered were grounded on the portion of democratic dogma he found convincing: equal access to careers. As I outlined above, Carlyle was a proponent of *la carrière ouverte aux talents* and this underpinned his notion of modern political mechanisms and institutions. Indeed, Levin recognized this feature of Carlyle's political thought. In it, according to Levin, there lies, 'a kind of social rather than political democracy' inasmuch as 'the ablest man might come from any part of society and should not have his path blocked by anachronistic and dysfunctional social attitudes.'⁷⁶⁷

In Carlyle's view, the apparatus of government should be engineered so as to elicit talented governors from all sections of the populace. I gave ample evidence of this in the third chapter of this thesis. However, it bears restating with fresh evidence. In the fourth of his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. 'The New Downing Street', Carlyle made this case anew. 'Who' he asked, 'are available to your offices in Downing Street?' 'All the gifted souls, of every rank, who are born to you in this generation.' Moreover, Carlyle felt so strongly about the claim to power and influence possessed by these people that he grounded it in an idiosyncratic variety of natural law. Such individuals had been 'appointed, by the true eternal 'divine right' which will never become obsolete, to be your governors and administrators'. The manner in which modern governments chose to 'employ them, or neglect to employ them,' would determine whether a 'State be favoured by Heaven or disfavoured.'⁷⁶⁸

Carlyle utilized the language of the prophet to emphasize a point he had expressed previously, in other places, in secular terms. He returned to more moderate language in the paragraph immediately after his prophetic outburst: 'To promote men of talent, to search and sift the

⁷⁶⁷ Levin, *Spectre of Democracy*, p.148.

⁷⁶⁸ *CE XX*, p.130.

whole society in every class for men of talent, and joyfully promote them, has not always been found impossible. In many forms of polity they have done it, and still do it, to a certain degree.⁷⁶⁹

Carlyle had addressed two examples of such a political system in earlier works, *On Heroes* and *Past and Present*.⁷⁷⁰ In this case, his thoughts turned towards the example he had proposed in the latter. 'Think, for example, of the old Catholic Church,' Carlyle noted, 'in its merely terrestrial relations to the State'.⁷⁷¹ The ensuing paragraph outlined Carlyle's thoughts on the beneficial character of the medieval Catholic Church in promoting the social mobility of talented individuals in a polity in stark contrast to that which Carlyle saw around him.⁷⁷² Ecclefechan's most famous son had been committed to social mobility for a considerable time. Some of his earliest writings hint at it, but his clearest statement comes in *On Heroes*, in which he declared it consonant with progress.

There is clear truth in the idea that a struggle from the lower classes of society, towards the upper regions and rewards of society, must ever continue. Strong men are born there, who ought to stand elsewhere than there. The manifold, inextricably complex, universal struggle of these constitutes, and must constitute, what is called the progress of society.⁷⁷³

What was required in the modern world, Carlyle thought, was a similar means of ensuring that talented individuals – from whatever social background – could rise to the head of affairs. The Scotsman advocated the creation of a new *aristocracy of talent*, as he called it. 'We must

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, p.131.

⁷⁷⁰ See Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.208 & Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp.81-95.

⁷⁷¹ CE XX, p.131.

⁷⁷² Ibid, pp.131-132.

⁷⁷³ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.144.

have more Wisdom to govern us,' he maintained in *Past and Present*, 'we must be governed by the Wisest, we must have an Aristocracy of Talent!'⁷⁷⁴

In the absence of such a system of government, society was exposed to all of the problems that could be expected from the leadership of the *incapable* or, at the very least, those of mediocre capacities. This had become apparent in the contemporary world. 'Indisputable enough to all mortals now,' Carlyle declared, 'the guidance of this country has not been sufficiently wise; men too foolish have been set to the guiding and governing of it, and have guided it *hither*; we must find wiser, – wiser, or else we perish!'⁷⁷⁵

A new aristocracy of talent or *meritocracy* had to be constructed in the wake of the fall of the former aristocracy of birth. Democracy had cleared the decks for its arrival Carlyle thought; it was in this that he located its primary service to the world. Meritocracy itself, Carlyle contended, was the only form of government that accorded with the tenets of natural law. Democracy, which he thought contravened the principles enunciated by natural law – to the extent that it abrogated the very notion of hierarchy – was, paradoxically, the means by which political arrangements could be placed in accordance with its precepts once more. It had laid the foundations for a new hierarchy.

But, how to achieve it? Carlyle is often criticized for his impracticality. The shrill of many voices has announced his mastery of criticism; far fewer recognize the gravity of his proposals' constructiveness. And yet, in a number of places Carlyle offered a route back to meritocracy through the apparatus of democracy. The first appeared in *Past and Present*. It was here that the Scotsman proclaimed to the world his vision of a modern aristocracy, fit to meet the

⁷⁷⁴ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.31.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp.30-31.

challenges presented by the new democratic age. It was populated by the eponymous Captains of Industry.

Carlyle drew a distinction between two types of aristocrat, each of which existed in the contemporary world: the *unworking* aristocracy and the *working* aristocracy. The former, he continued, was that 'class of men' who 'live sumptuously on the marrow of the earth; permitted simply, nay entreated, and as yet entreated in vain, to do nothing at all in return'. Such a body 'was never heretofore seen on the face of this Planet', Carlyle maintained, and its very existence in the contemporary era had to be 'transitory'.⁷⁷⁶ He was disgusted by a corporate body in this mould: possessed of power, wealth and position, but concerned only with luxury. This was the state into which the landed aristocracy of birth had fallen.

Its contrary was the working aristocracy. Populated by 'Mill-owners, Manufacturers, Commanders of Working Men', it did contribute to the order and prosperity of the country. Carlyle granted that it required reform – it 'must strike into a new path; must understand that money alone is *not* the representative either of man's success in the world, or of man's duties to man' – but, nonetheless, this was an aristocracy he thought admirable.⁷⁷⁷ These industrialists, in Carlyle's opinion, 'are virtually the Captains of the World; if there be no nobleness in them, there will never be an Aristocracy more.'⁷⁷⁸ Their job, however, was not to imitate 'the old Captains of Slaughter', but to combat the 'Chaos' inherent in the modern world and the 'Necessity' it implied.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid, p.185.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid, pp.184-185.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid, pp.281-282.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid, p.282.

Carlyle did not consign the individual to the vagaries of fatalism. Indeed, this was one of the many things he complained about in the contemporary political order. He endeavoured to liberate man from these shackles. In order to be free, though, Carlyle contended that one must subordinate oneself to a recognized superior. In other words, to one who had proven himself meritorious. 'To order, to just subordination', Carlyle announced, 'noble loyalty in return for noble guidance.' In this way, society would no longer represent 'a bewildered bewildering mob', but 'a firm regimented mass'.⁷⁸⁰ The Scotsman's proposal represented, in many respects, a contract: loyal obedience in return for genuine leadership. But such submission, in his understanding, was due only to those genuine leaders who led the fight against chaos and necessity. All others were doomed to disappear.

Captains of Industry represented the obvious repository of talent and energy in Carlyle's era. They were the class that was leading the way in the marvels of industrial enterprise and were gradually coming to eclipse their landed forebears in wealth and power. It is unsurprising that Carlyle chose such men as the standard bearers for his new conception of leadership. However, they were not the only people he plumbed for. In 'Downing Street', another of his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Carlyle suggested the present political system be reformed so as to enable any talented person to be selected for office.⁷⁸¹

He recognized that 'whatever be the uses and duties, real or supposed, of a Secretary in Parliament, his faculty to accomplish these is a point entirely unconnected with his ability to get elected into Parliament'.⁷⁸² Money or status was no indication of talent. 'Lord Tommy and the Honourable John', Carlyle continued, 'are not a whit better qualified for

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid, p.286.

⁷⁸¹ CE XX, pp.116-117.

⁷⁸² Ibid.

Parliamentary duties, to say nothing of Secretary duties, than plain Tom and Jack; they are merely better qualified, as matters stand, for getting admitted to try them.’ This state of affairs, the Scotsman thought, ‘a reforming Premier, much in want of abler men to help him,’ would alter.⁷⁸³ Carlyle’s proposal for remedying this affront to talent resembled the modern House of Lords.

The Proposal is, That Secretaries under and upper, that all manner of changeable or permanent servants in the Government Offices shall be selected *without* reference to their power of getting into Parliament; – that, in short, the Queen shall have the power of nominating the half-dozen or half-score Officers of the Administration, whose presence is thought necessary in Parliament, to official seats there, without reference to any constituency but her own only, which of course will mean her Prime Minister’s.⁷⁸⁴

Carlyle believed this proposition a ‘very small encroachment on the present constitution of Parliament’, which offered ‘the minimum of change in present methods, and I almost think a maximum in results to be derived therefrom.’⁷⁸⁵ Carlyle had thus presented two types of leader and, what is more, complimentary social and political means of organization that were appropriate for the modern era. In the social sphere, this manifested itself in his theory of the Captains of Industry; in the narrowly political, it showed itself in his desire to select any individual who demonstrated a talent for governing and raise him to a position of authority. It was via these mechanisms – industry and progressive politics – that Carlyle sought to remedy the acute problems of leadership he had identified in the contemporary world. Only

⁷⁸³ Ibid, p.117.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, p.114.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

in finding such new leaders could competence be ensured in the management of society's affairs.

REWORKING SOCIETY

Thus far, this chapter has outlined the manner in which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle sought to re-engineer political institutions in order to correct the problems of democracy and create a liberal, in the case of Tocqueville and Mill, or stable, for Carlyle, political culture with appropriate leaders exercising governmental authority. What remains of the present chapter will examine how Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle sought to achieve these goals in the domain of society.

Mill desired to see discredited established authorities replaced. This is clear from his earliest writings and reflects his Utilitarian upbringing. His rejection of the prevailing aristocracy of birth and his discovery of Coleridge led him to consider the sort of cultural leadership that could be offered by a reconstituted clergy or, in Coleridgean terms, *clerisy*. Mill honoured Coleridge for his advocacy of a clerisy and for having rescued the notion of a leisured class, endowed by the state, from the criticisms of 'Bentham and Adam Smith and the whole eighteenth century'. Contrary to Bentham and Smith, Mill valued this sort of *spiritual* body because he considered it to be the means through which progress could be achieved. 'That such a class is likely to be behind, instead of before, the progress of knowledge, is an induction erroneously drawn from the peculiar circumstances of the last two centuries, and in contradiction to all the rest of modern history.'⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸⁶ CW X, p.150.

How could such a body facilitate progress? In the earliest essay in which he addressed this subject, on *Corporation and Church Property*, Mill suggested that the redirection of means from institutions, such as the church and universities, that had been useful formerly, to the new *clerisy* he proposed was a mechanism through which resources could be allocated to those most likely to make productive use of them. He claimed that it was in the public interest to reassign monies of this kind, especially in light of prevailing political developments, to a new corporation. 'For no one can help seeing that one of the most pressing of the duties which Parliamentary Reform has devolved upon our public men, is that of deciding what honestly may, and, supposing this determined, what *should*, be done with the property of the Church, and of the various Public Corporations.'⁷⁸⁷ Despite protestations from his opponents, Mill held that such a redirection was perfectly legitimate and would not amount to theft because 'there is no fear of robbing a dead man; and no reasonable man who gave his money when living, for the benefit of the community, would have desired that his mode of benefiting the community should be adhered to when a better could be found.'⁷⁸⁸

Mill maintained that Coleridge had proposed a means by which these funds could be employed more usefully. Church officials, both thought, could have no complaints. He reminded contemporaries that in 'the minds of our ancestors they presented themselves, not solely as ministers for going through the ceremonial of religion, nor even solely as religious teachers in the narrow sense, but as the *lettered class*; the *clerici* or clerks'. They had been 'appointed generally to prosecute all those studies, and diffuse all those impressions, which

⁷⁸⁷ *CW IV*, p.195.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp.200-201.

constituted mental culture, as then understood; which fitted the mind of man for his condition, destiny, and duty, as a human being'.⁷⁸⁹ Mill went on:

A national *clerisy* or clergy, as Mr. Coleridge conceives it, would be a grand institution for the education of the whole people: not their school education merely, though that would be included in the scheme; but for training and rearing them, by systematic culture continued throughout life, to the highest perfection of their mental and spiritual nature.⁷⁹⁰

These were themes that he restated in his paean to *Coleridge* seven years later.⁷⁹¹

Mill's *clerisy*, though, was not simply a mode of maintaining progress in new conditions. In the second review he authored on Tocqueville's *Démocratie*, Mill advised the Frenchman that such a Coleridgean scheme could provide a locus of authoritative leadership, which would be at the head of public opinion. This could offset the problems posed by the reign of democracy. 'What is requisite in politics', Mill argued, 'is not that public opinion should not be, what it is and must be, the ruling power; but that, in order to the formation of the best public opinion, there should exist somewhere a great social support for opinions and sentiments different from those of the mass.' Mill was typically historicist. 'The shape which that support may best assume is a question of time, place, and circumstance', he believed, but, in the new era that had dawned 'there can be no doubt about the elements which must compose it: they are, an agricultural class, a leisured class, and a learned class.'⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid, p.220.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ CW X, pp.147-149.

⁷⁹² CW XVIII, p.198.

These elements of society would counterbalance the excesses of public opinion and offer a counterweight to the prevailing commercial spirit. In Mill's mind, they were of substantial importance to his world's chances. Their existence offered one of the 'greatest advantages of this country over America', Mill contended, 'and we believe that the interests of the time to come are greatly dependent upon preserving them; and upon their being rendered, as they much require to be, better and better qualified for their important functions.'⁷⁹³ The prospect of a better future rested on the combined talent of the landed, leisured and learned elites; that of property, wealth and intelligence in other words.

Comte had proposed something similar as a component part of the Religion of Humanity. Initially, Mill had been enthusiastic about Comte's *pouvoir spirituel*, but later distanced himself from the Frenchman's conception of a national spiritual power. By 1844, he had begun to see the cracks in Comte's and, therefore, probably Coleridge's, clerical bodies. 'It is, no doubt, the characteristic evil incident to a corporation of priests, that the exaltation of their order becomes, in and for itself, a primary object, to which the ends of the institution are often sacrificed.' The obvious historical example was 'the Romish Church'. It was through this sort of 'exaltation' that its members had attempted to attain their ends.⁷⁹⁴ Writing to his wife, Harriet, from Rome in 1855 Mill argued that Comte's system of social reform amounted – more than any other – to '*liberticide*'.⁷⁹⁵

On Liberty preached in similar terms. Comte's *Système de Politique Positive* recommended nothing other than 'a despotism over the individual, surpassing anything contemplated in the political ideal of the most rigid disciplinarian among the ancient philosophers.'⁷⁹⁶ Comte

⁷⁹³ Ibid, pp.199-200.

⁷⁹⁴ CW XX, p.240.

⁷⁹⁵ CW XIV, p.294.

⁷⁹⁶ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.17.

rejected all such charges in an exchange of letters.⁷⁹⁷ Mill persisted regardless. In his review of the Frenchman's philosophy late in life, Mill charged that Comte's notion of the *pouvoir spirituel* amounted to 'nothing less than a spiritual despotism'.⁷⁹⁸ In spite of his vitriol, Mill did not reject the spiritual authority of the educated to the degree suggested by, among others, Gregory Claeys.⁷⁹⁹ He allowed that it was desirable that a body of eminent men should exist in order to exercise influence over prevailing opinions. Ultimately, all he rejected was the idea that they should be affiliated and incorporated into a centralized body.⁸⁰⁰ Hamburger expressed this feature of Mill's thought most precisely.⁸⁰¹ Mill believed 'that in order that this salutary ascendancy over opinion should be exercised by the most eminent thinkers, it is not necessary that they should be associated and organized. The ascendancy will come of itself when the unanimity is attained'.⁸⁰²

Tocqueville had no wish to endow a modern clerical establishment with cultural influence or to rely on a dispersed variety of this sort of entity. His musings on the sort of barriers that could be erected against democracy were far more practical and less utopian than Mill's *clerisy*. He saw in associations of individuals a powerful bulwark to the dominance of the majority in democratic societies. In the second volume of his *Démocratie*, Tocqueville argued that it was 'clear that, if each citizen, as he becomes individually weaker and therefore more incapable of preserving his liberty by himself alone, did not learn the art of uniting with his fellows to defend his liberty, tyranny would necessarily grow with equality'.⁸⁰³

⁷⁹⁷ Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism*, p.31.

⁷⁹⁸ *CW X*, p.314.

⁷⁹⁹ Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism*, p.32.

⁸⁰⁰ *CW X*, p.314.

⁸⁰¹ Hamburger, *Mill on Liberty and Control*, p.124.

⁸⁰² *CW X*, p.314.

⁸⁰³ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.895-896.

Tocqueville was building on those comments he had made in regard to associations in the 1835 volume of *Démocratie*. In this instance, he claimed that ‘Of all the countries in the world, America has taken greatest advantage of association and has applied this powerful means of action to the greatest variety of objectives.’ Already, as I showed above, Tocqueville had alluded to those political associations that diluted the power of the state. But, civil associations were different. ‘Apart from permanent associations created by the law, known as towns, cities and counties,’ Tocqueville wrote, ‘a multitude of others owe their birth and development only to individual wills.’⁸⁰⁴

What sort of advantages did civil associations confer on a democracy? Tocqueville saw in them another means of preventing majority tyranny in democratic countries. ‘In our time,’ he argued, ‘freedom of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority.’⁸⁰⁵ Associations were able to do this because they provided a shelter for those individuals, distinguished or otherwise, who did not find themselves in agreement with mass opinion. By associating, such individuals could establish an effective bulwark against the majority’s claims.

In the United States, once a party has become dominant, all public power passes into its hands; its particular friends hold all posts and have the use of all organized forces. Not able to break through the barrier that separates them from power, the most distinguished men of the opposite party must be able to establish themselves outside of it; with its whole moral strength, the minority must resist the material power that oppresses it.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid, p.302.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, p.307.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

Tocqueville accepted that civil associations could be dangerous in themselves, but thought such organizations the lesser of two evils. 'The omnipotence of the majority appears to me to be such a great peril for the American republics', he maintained, 'that the dangerous means used to limit it still seem good to me.'⁸⁰⁷

Tocqueville compared the influence of associations to those of towns, which he had lauded, and, more interestingly, to aristocracies. 'Here I will express a thought that will recall what I said elsewhere about town liberties', he noted. Towns, Tocqueville had already told his readers, provided a powerful check on the intentions of the popular will in democratic countries. Aristocracies had performed a very similar function in regard to the will of the monarch in former ages. Tocqueville's words on the necessity of secondary bodies to correct the abuses of absolute power recall to mind the work of Montesquieu.⁸⁰⁸

There are no countries where associations are more necessary, to prevent the despotism of parties or the arbitrariness of the prince, than those where the social state is democratic. Among aristocratic nations, secondary bodies form natural associations that stop the abuses of power. In countries where such associations do not exist, if individuals cannot artificially and temporarily create something that resembles those natural associations, I no longer see any dike against any sort of tyranny; and a great people can be oppressed with impunity by a factious handful of individuals or by a man.⁸⁰⁹

Similarities existed between Mill's *clerisy* and Tocqueville's associations. Both were intended to act as a bulwark against the majority's dominance of democratic society. However, there

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ See C. de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.24-25.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

were clear differences. Tocqueville did not present his associations as a means of collecting eminent men for the purpose of defining national culture. He perceived them simply as combinations of individuals opposed to majority opinion. This was a very different type of institution to the one suggested by Mill.

Carlyle, for his part, also suggested new variety of social institution that could remedy some of the problems presented by democratic society. His proposal, though, was very different to those offered by Tocqueville and Mill. In many respects, the organization of labour that Carlyle suggested, which is discussed above, was as much a means of reworking society as it was of redesigning the state. The reason for this was simple. The regimentation of labour that Carlyle proposed was to be grounded on a novel form of social contract. This would enshrine the 'principle of Permanent Contract instead of Temporary.'⁸¹⁰

The principle of permanence in the formation of contracts was a means by which Carlyle determined to counter the chaotic nature of democracy and, alongside this, reinstitute the bonds of attachment that were sorely lacking in the modern democratic world. Carlyle expressed the first of these through metaphor.

The 'tendency to persevere,' to persist in spite of hindrances, discouragements and 'impossibilities:' it is this that in all things distinguishes the strong soul from the weak; the civilised burgher from the nomadic savage, – the Species Man from the Genus Ape! The Nomad has his very house set on wheels; the Nomad, and in a still higher degree the Ape, are all for 'liberty;' the privilege to flit continually is indispensable for them. Alas, in how many ways, does our humour, in this swift-

⁸¹⁰ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.287.

rolling, self-abrading Time, show itself nomadic, apelike; mournful enough to him that looks on it with eyes!⁸¹¹

Life in modern democratic Britain resembled that of nomadic tribes. Carlyle thought that this was morally debasing. He wanted to tie individuals together for long periods of time to encourage stability and moral development. 'Month-long contracts please me little,' he stated, 'in any province where there can by possibility be found virtue enough for more.' Such contracts, he thought, 'do not answer well even with your house-servants; the liberty on both sides to change every month is growing very apelike, nomadic'.⁸¹²

Carlyle saw signs of progress around him. 'Some Permanence of Contract is already almost possible', he maintained, 'the principle of Permanence, year by year, better seen into and elaborated, may enlarge itself, expand gradually on every side into a system.'⁸¹³ Carlyle saw in the sort of permanence he outlined the harbinger of moral progress. It would facilitate the emergence of individual constancy as well as improved social relations. 'Once permanent,' he argued, 'you do not quarrel with the first difficulty on your path, and quit it in weak disgust; you reflect that it cannot be quitted, that it must be conquered, a wise arrangement fallen on with regard to it.'⁸¹⁴ Such was the consequence of permanence for the development of constancy. Carlyle used an equine metaphor to express the result of this new contract for social relations. 'The very horse that is permanent,' he noted, 'how much kindlier do his rider and he work, than the temporary one, hired on any hack principle yet known!'⁸¹⁵

⁸¹¹ Ibid, p.288.

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Ibid, p.290.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid, p.291.

In his tract on the *Nigger Question*, Carlyle addressed this issue once more. In fact, it is one of the fundamental bases of his argument in this essay. 'In all human relations', Carlyle emphasized in this essay, '*permanency* is what I advocate; *nomadism*, continual change, is what I perceive to be prohibitory of any good whatsoever.'⁸¹⁶ Carlyle compared the fleeting nature of contemporary relations to a system of 'Marriage by the month' in a passage suffused with irony.⁸¹⁷ Carlyle reinforced this line of argument with gusto.

I am prepared to maintain against all comers, That in every human relation, from that of husband and wife down to that of master and servant, *nomadism* is the bad plan, and continuance the good. A thousand times, since I first had servants, it has occurred to me, How much better had I servants that were bound to me, and to whom I were bound!⁸¹⁸

This was the *half-truth* Carlyle recognized in slavery. The question that remained Carlyle saw with clarity. 'How to abolish the abuses of slavery,' Carlyle wrote, 'and save the precious thing in it: alas, I do not pretend that this is easy, that it can be done in a day, or a single generation, or a single century: but I do surmise or perceive that it will, by straight methods or by circuitous, need to be done'.⁸¹⁹

A NEW STATE OF POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle sought to incorporate principles opposite to that of democracy into the modern polity. They were intended to counteract a number of the undesirable

⁸¹⁶ *CE XXIX*, p.367.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.368.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp.368-369.

consequences of democratic society. Tocqueville and Mill proposed means of counteracting the dominance of majority opinion and set up counterweights that would allow for the existence of minority views. This was essential for the maintenance of human freedom in the modern world. Carlyle was also an advocate of freedom and recognized the need to rework modern democratic government and society in order to promote it. However, his conception of freedom was quite different to that held forth by Tocqueville and Mill. Principally, Carlyle's proposed reforms were intended to ensure that the state's authority could facilitate stability. The sort of stability his reforms promoted would enable individuals to free themselves from the deprivations of poverty and the horror of uncertainty. Ultimately, it would empower them.

These reforms attacked the problems that each perceived in democracy. Supplementary to them were new conceptions of the types of leader appropriate in the modern democratic world. Mill thought that democratic states required leaders who possessed demonstrable competence in order to offset the mediocrity of the conventional democratic chiefs. The leaders that he theorized were intended to supply popular governments with competent leadership. Tocqueville, on the other hand, wanted to ensure that democratic leaders were possessed by an aristocratic spirit. Unlike Mill, Tocqueville did not believe government to be a particularly difficult business. However, he did think that those who rose to the top of democratic politics were often very mediocre. They were also possessed by democratic culture.

Tocqueville's solution was to locate democracy's natural aristocrats and proclaim their suitability as leaders. Carlyle, for his part, stressed the necessity of finding capable leaders in the modern world. In his view, the only measure by which a government official should be

chosen was talent. He saw talented individuals all around him and championed their cause. Unlike Tocqueville and Mill, he did not require his leaders to have undergone a particular sort of training or to have had specific experience. For Carlyle, talent was all that was required. Those who were already governing men (the Captains of Industry) were obvious candidates for leadership, but he did not restrict his pool to these men.

Society itself was reconsidered by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. The suggestions made by Tocqueville and Mill in this domain were, once again, intended to limit the influence of the majority in democratic society. Carlyle's concern was different. He intended to ensure that social bonds were maintained in an age that seemed destined to break them. By instituting a new form of social contract, which was in direct contradiction to that proposed by the *philosophes* of the eighteenth-century, Carlyle thought he had discovered a mechanism to effect this end.

The proposals made by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle in regard to the state and society were important parts of their respective quests to mitigate the problems inherent in democracy. However, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle realised that material changes to the institutions of the state and society would be of limited effectiveness on their own. 'Government can do much,' Carlyle wrote in *Past and Present*, 'but it can in no wise do all.'⁸²⁰ Carlyle was acutely aware of the limitations of material changes in the apparatus of government or society.

Government, as the most conspicuous object in Society, is called upon to give signal of what shall be done; and, in many ways, to preside over, further, and command the doing of it. But the Government cannot do, by all its signalling and commanding, what the Society is radically indisposed to do. In the long-run every

⁸²⁰ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.280.

Government is the exact symbol of its People, with their wisdom and unwisdom;
we have to say, Like People like Government.⁸²¹

Mill made a similar point. Good government was defined by its ability to facilitate progress. ‘Conduciveness to Progress,’ Mill argued, ‘includes the whole excellence of a government.’ In the sense in which he used the term in this instance, he told his readers, ‘Progress is the idea of moving onward’.⁸²² But, Mill conceived of progress in particular terms. The cause and condition that ‘transcends all others’ as a basis for good government, he thought, ‘is the qualities of the human beings composing the society over which the government is exercised.’⁸²³

Any regime that claimed to be tolerably good, then, had to improve those situated beneath it. Mill stated this directly. ‘The first element of good government,’ he noted, ‘being the virtue and intelligence of the human beings composing the community, the most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves.’⁸²⁴ In other words, good government had to ‘increase the sum of good qualities in the governed, collectively and individually’.⁸²⁵ Mill thought this because he believed that the quality of any government reflected the capacity of its people.

Tocqueville told his readers at an early stage in the *Démocratie* that he thought that American ‘mores’ were ‘one of the great general causes to which maintaining the democratic republic in the United States can be attributed.’ He qualified what he meant by this phrase. ‘I understand the expression *mores*’, he wrote, ‘in the sense that the ancients attached to the

⁸²¹ Ibid.

⁸²² *CW XIX*, p.390.

⁸²³ Ibid, p.389.

⁸²⁴ Ibid, pp.390.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

word *mores*; I apply it not only to mores strictly speaking, which could be called habits of the heart, but to the different notions that men possess, to the diverse opinions that are current among them, and to the ensemble of ideas from which the habits of the mind are formed.’ He concluded by noting that ‘by this word I understand the whole moral and intellectual state of a people.’⁸²⁶ Political and social machinery was important for mitigating the ill effects of modern democracy. But, what was more important was the mental and moral condition of the individual. In this, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were united. It is to these themes that we will now turn.

⁸²⁶ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.466-467.

CHAPTER 7

SECURING SOCIETY: THE UTILITY OF RELIGION

‘In the aftermath of the French Revolution,’ Martha Nussbaum argued, ‘the search for new forms of fraternity became almost an obsession.’⁸²⁷ How could society be held together in the novel conditions of a post-revolutionary world in which the traditional bonds of faith and honour had been irremediably shattered? Much of nineteenth-century political thought, Nussbaum continued, was intended to answer this question. ‘It was widely agreed that people are possessed by egoism; the task of building decent and stable democracies depends on combating their narcissism, extending sympathy.’⁸²⁸

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle perceived the elements of a new social bond in religion. Religion offered several benefits to society that would be difficult to realize in its absence. This does not mean that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle attempted to reinforce creeds and religious structures that had prevailed over European peoples and polities for centuries. In fact, each had an unconventional relationship with religion in the abstract and Christianity in particular. The religious beliefs espoused by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle have been adequately covered by other authors and my intention in this chapter is not recapitulate their work.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁷ M. Nussbaum, ‘Reinventing the Civil Religion: Comte, Mill, Tagore’, in *Victorian Studies*, Vol.54, No.1 (Autumn 2011), p.7.

⁸²⁸ Nussbaum, ‘Reinventing the Civil Religion’, p.7.

⁸²⁹ For Tocqueville, see D.S. Goldstein, *Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville’s Thought (...)*, 1975) in particular. It is also worth referring to older works, such as the Abbé Baunard’s *La foi et ses victoires dans le siècle présent* (Paris, 1884) and H. Lacordaire’s *Discours prononcés dans la séance publique tenue par l’Académie française pour la réception de M. Lacordaire* (Paris, 1861). Goldstein also addressed Tocqueville’s religious views in ‘The Religious Beliefs of Alexis de Tocqueville’, in *French Historical Studies*, Vol.1, No.4 (Autumn, 1960). Debate persists about Mill’s religious views. Robert Carr, in ‘The Religious Thought of John Stuart Mill: A Study in Reluctant Scepticism’, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.23, No.4 (Oct.-Dec. 1962), maintains that from an early age Mill was committed to finding a doctrine that could occupy the intellectual and emotional space ordinarily filled by orthodox religion. See, p.477. Placed in context with this quest, Alan Ryan’s belief that the *Three Essays on Religion* were ‘written very much from the standpoint of an outsider’ and that Mill viewed religion solely ‘as a metaphysical and psychological phenomenon rather than anything more’ clearly underplays the significance of religion to Mill personally. See Ryan, *J.S. Mill*, p.219. Maurice Cowling was right to assert that ‘Religion was as much a preoccupation for Mill as it was for any other Victorian moralist.’ See Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism*, p.81. Karl W. Britton has written a good account of Mill’s lifelong interaction with religion. See. K.W.

Instead, the present chapter will concentrate on what Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle thought about the political and social utility of religion. Indeed, their belief in the usefulness of religion in this regard formed an eminent part of their political thought. Religion provided Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle with a powerful means of rectifying many of the problems they had identified in modern democracy. It was an important mechanism by which society could be maintained. The bonds of a common morality could be furthered through the common ideas religion inculcated. This would unite all individuals within society. The shared moral outlook religion offered also provided the basis for some notion of the individual's duty towards other members of the social body. In encouraging the development of a common moral outlook, which suggested particular duties to individuals, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle considered religion an aid to virtue in the modern world.

Religion's ability to provide a shared moral outlook and some conception of reciprocal duties was dependent on the widespread acceptance of an authoritative creed. This is the final instance in which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were united in their notion of the place of religion in the modern world: it had to provide a widely accepted, and therefore authoritative, doctrine. Despite this, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle advocated different religious outlooks. Certainly, each understood that traditional creeds could no longer offer the sort of benefits

Britton, 'John Stuart Mill on Christianity', in Robson and Laine eds., *James and John Stuart Mill: Papers of the Centenary Conference*, pp.21-34.

On Carlyle's religious views, see George McCrie in *The Religion of our Literature* (London, 1878), which accused Carlyle of atheism; John Wilson's *Thomas Carlyle, the Iconoclast of Modern Shams* (Paisley, 1882), which described the Scotsman as a religious reformer. R.J. Bishirjian's 'Carlyle's Political Religion', in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.38, No.1 (Feb., 1976) claimed he was a Gnostic. C.F. Harrold provided the classic analysis of Carlyle's religious ideas. See C.F. Harrold, 'The Mystical Element in Carlyle (1827-34)', in *Modern Philology*, Vol.29, No.4 (May, 1932). For an equally important account, see H.L. Stewart, 'Carlyle's Concept of Religion', in *The American Journal of Theology*, Vol.21, No.1 (Jan., 1917). A. Abbott Ikeler's classic work *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith: Carlyle's Literary Vision* (Ohio, 1972) is required reading on this subject. More recently, R. Jessop has entered this debate with his article on 'Carlyle's Agnosticism: An Altar to the Unknown and Unknowable God', *Literature and Belief*, 25 (1-2) 2005, pp.381-433.

they thought religion in general could, but their suggestions regarding replacements for outmoded beliefs were entirely different.

A COMMON MORALITY

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were committed to the idea that a common morality was a necessary basis for all types of society, democratic or otherwise. In the modern era it was particularly important, given the nature of the problems that each had identified in democracy. Democratic society, as I highlighted in a previous chapter, was fissiparous. It had abnegated the ties that once held people together and was increasingly alienating individuals from one another. Democratic peoples required a set of shared values on which all – or, at least, most – could agree in order to maintain cohesion and sociability. Religion, according to Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, could offer such a set of values.

Indeed, Jack Lively argued that ‘One of Tocqueville’s firmest beliefs was that a general religious faith was a necessary foundation of society’.⁸³⁰ In the second volume of the Frenchman’s work on American democracy he led his readers to this conclusion. Tocqueville started by asserting the necessity of secure ideas. Dogmatic beliefs, which he defined in his notes as opinions ‘that you have not had the time to examine yourself and that you accept on trust’, are both necessary and inescapable in any form of society. Knowledge is limitless and if ‘each person undertook to form all his opinions for himself and to pursue truth in isolation, along paths opened up by himself alone, it is improbable that a great number of men would ever unite together in any common belief.’⁸³¹

⁸³⁰ Lively, *Social and Political Thought of Tocqueville*, p.183.

⁸³¹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.712.

Common ideas were necessary for the maintenance of society and Tocqueville was eager to demonstrate this to his readers. He argued that 'it is easy to see that no society is able to prosper without similar beliefs, or rather none can continue to exist in such a way'. To his mind it was clear that 'without common ideas, there is no common action, and, without common action, there are still men, but not a social body.' 'So,' he concluded, 'for society to exist, and, with even more reason, for this society to prosper, all the minds of the citizens must always be brought and held together by some principal ideas'.⁸³²

The fundamental problem in democratic ages was to find the source of such common opinions in order to counter the innate separatism of the modern psyche. Tocqueville saw in religion an antidote to this problem. Indeed, he maintained that 'among all dogmatic beliefs, the most desirable seem to me to be dogmatic beliefs in the matter of religion.'⁸³³ 'Religion' offered the democratic mind 'a clear and precise solution to a great number of metaphysical and moral questions as important as they are difficult to resolve.' No longer having to settle questions about the *other* world for himself, man's mind was left 'the strength and the leisure to proceed with calmness and with energy in the whole area that religion abandons to it'. It was this settlement between ontological spheres that had enabled 'the human mind' to do 'such great things in the centuries of faith.'⁸³⁴

This last comment provides another window through which to look into Tocqueville's political mind. By sparing man the time and energy required to investigate each and every opinion he

⁸³² Ibid, p.713. Jaume shows very capably Tocqueville's debts to others in regard to the force common ideas exerted on social cohesion. Burke was the most prominent exponent of this theory, which he had used to criticize the French revolutionary *tabula rasa*. Although, Tocqueville had not read Burke at this point. He had read Guizot, though, who emphasized the importance of common ideas to society and drew explicitly on the work of Lamennais. See Jaume, *Tocqueville*, pp.74-75.

⁸³³ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.743.

⁸³⁴ Ibid, p.716.

held, dogmatic beliefs facilitated the development of intellectual grandeur. Despite having to rely on the authority of some other force for many opinions, which weakened the intelligence in one domain, the fact that this left room for deep consideration of particular subjects allowed the individual to be strong and independent in another. 'So, among the various subjects of human opinions, he must make a choice and adopt beliefs without discussing them, in order to go more deeply into a small number that he has reserved to examine for himself.'⁸³⁵ Dogmatism in this sense preserved the individual's liberty. Tocqueville revelled in the reconciliation of paradoxical ideas and this is a prime example of that tendency. 'It is true that every man who receives an opinion on the word of others puts his mind into slavery', he noted, 'but it is a salutary servitude that allows making a good use of liberty.'⁸³⁶

Tocqueville had seen this theory enacted first hand in the United States. In the first volume of the *Démocratie* he recounted all of the benefits of religion he had seen without stating the general theory he had arrived at by the time he wrote the 1840 edition. Despite the 'innumerable multitude of sects' present in America, each subscribed to a common morality.⁸³⁷ 'All differ in the worship that must be given to the Creator,' Tocqueville noted, 'but all agree on the duties of men toward one another.'⁸³⁸ 'So each sect worships God in its way,' he continued, 'but all sects preach the same morality in the name of God.'⁸³⁹ This led Tocqueville to reflect on the social utility of religious belief.

⁸³⁵ Ibid, p.715.

⁸³⁶ Ibid, pp.715-716.

⁸³⁷ Ibid, p.473.

⁸³⁸ Ibid, pp.473-474.

⁸³⁹ Ibid, p.473.

If it is useful to a man as an individual that his religion be true, it is not the same for society. Society has nothing either to fear or to hope concerning the other life; and what is most important for society is not so much that all citizens profess the true religion but that they profess a religion.⁸⁴⁰

Common ideas or, to speak in a little more detail, a recognizable, easily comprehensible and widespread public morality, provided the ground on which Americans could act in common. But, where was such a common morality to be found? Tocqueville told readers of his *Démocratie* that only in a reformed Catholicism could modern democratic society find an appropriate moral foundation. ‘America is the most democratic country on earth,’ Tocqueville stated, ‘and at the same time the country where, according to trustworthy reports, the Catholic religion is making the most progress.’⁸⁴¹ Tocqueville thought that the Catholic religion held a secret charm for democratic peoples. ‘Several of the doctrines and practices of the Roman Church astonish them; but they experience a secret admiration for its government, and its great unity attracts them.’⁸⁴²

Part of the reason for this was related to the psychological disposition of democratic peoples. ‘Equality’, Tocqueville restated, ‘disposes men to want to judge by themselves’. Oddly, though, he thought that this same cause gave democratic peoples ‘the taste and the idea of a single social power, simple and the same for all.’ The consequence of this was clear. In democratic centuries religious authorities will be rare. ‘But,’ Tocqueville continued, if such an authority were to be endowed with the consent of democratic peoples, ‘they at least want

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid, p.754. Tocqueville also realized that Unitarianism was growing in the United States and that it provided an alternative to Catholicism. However, his comments on Unitarianism remained firmly ensconced in the letters he sent home from America and were not incorporated into the final edition of his *Démocratie*. See Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.163.

⁸⁴² Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.755.

it to be unitary and uniform'. That is to say, 'religious powers that do not all lead to the same centre (or in other words national churches) are naturally shocking to their intelligence, and they imagine almost as easily that there is no religion as that there are several.'⁸⁴³

Catholicism offered a democratic people precisely the sort of unified, centralized spiritual power that was attractive to them. But, Tocqueville did not present the spiritual power he advocated uncritically. He recognized that democratic peoples' disdained 'forms'. They were accustomed to relying on their own reason and this 'leads them to scorn forms, which they consider useless and inconvenient veils placed between them and the truth.'⁸⁴⁴ Tocqueville maintained 'that nothing revolts the human mind more in times of equality than the idea of submitting to forms.' Such peoples will 'endure representations impatiently; symbols seem to them puerile artifices that you use to veil or keep from their eyes truths that it would be more natural to show them entirely naked and in full light of day'. This had dramatic consequences for religion. In short, 'the trappings of ceremonies leave them cold, and they are naturally led to attach only a secondary importance to the details of worship.' The consequence of this mentality for the present was clear: 'religions must attend less to external practices in democratic times than in all others.'⁸⁴⁵ A Catholicism fit for democracy had to heed these words.

Tocqueville added a qualification. He did not think religious belief could be sustained in the absence of some forms. 'I do not imagine that it is possible to maintain a religion without external practices'. Nevertheless, in the modern era 'it would be particularly dangerous to multiply them inordinately'. Tocqueville brokered a compromise. Forms 'must be restricted';

⁸⁴³ Ibid, p.754.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid, p.701.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid, p.750.

churches 'should retain only those that are absolutely necessary for the perpetuation of the dogma itself, which is the substance of religions'.⁸⁴⁶

A religion that would become more minutely detailed, more inflexible and more burdened by small observances at the same time that men are becoming more equal, would soon see itself reduced to a troop of passionate zealots in the middle of an unbelieving multitude.⁸⁴⁷

In democratic eras, religion would have to make forms subservient to the truth, otherwise they risked oblivion. Catholicism needed to reform itself in order to ensure its continued success in democratic centuries. This was one of Tocqueville's deepest reflections on religion. It was also one of his most mature, coming in the second volume of his *Démocratie*.

Tocqueville outlined another area in which Catholicism had to change if it was to maintain its influence in the present. Religion had to be disestablished: it could not ally itself with the state. In 1835, he outlined the benefits religion would secure from independence. Democracies suffered from the insecurity of constantly changing political leaders and ideals. In such countries, 'power will pass from hand to hand' and 'political theories will succeed one another'; 'men, laws, constitutions themselves will disappear or change each day, and not for a time, but constantly.' Connecting any doctrine, religious or otherwise, with such a political form aligned its fate with that of the natural perambulation of democratic whim. In this sense, it was simply 'dangerous to unite religion with authority'.⁸⁴⁸

Tocqueville admitted that the separation of Church and State made religion 'less powerful than it has been in certain times and among certain peoples' but, crucially, it made religion's

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid, p.484.

‘influence...more durable.’⁸⁴⁹ Tocqueville believed that European experience confirmed his view.

In Europe, Christianity allowed itself to be intimately united with the powers of the earth. Today these powers are failing and Christianity is as though buried beneath their debris. It is a living thing that someone wanted to bind to the dead: cut the ties that hold it and it will rise again.⁸⁵⁰

Thus, Tocqueville reflected in the second volume of his *Démocratie*: ‘If Catholicism succeeded finally in escaping from the political hatreds to which it gave birth, I hardly doubt that this very spirit of the century, which seems so contrary to it, would become very favourable to it, and that it would suddenly make great conquests.’⁸⁵¹ This led him to a conclusion that would have filled his French readers with either hope or gloom, depending on their political bent. ‘I am led to believe’, Tocqueville declared, ‘that our descendants will tend more and more to divide into only two parts, some leaving Christianity entirely, others going into the Roman Church.’⁸⁵²

Carlyle addressed the significance of religion to politics in idiosyncratic terms. At this stage, his singularity should come as little surprise. ‘Church-Clothes’, by which Carlyle meant the forms and vestures under which men had at various periods embodied and represented to themselves the principles of the spiritual, were, in his words, ‘unspeakably the most important of all the vestures and garnitures of Human Existence.’⁸⁵³ But why were they of such significance in Carlyle’s view? He was remarkably clear. In *Sartor* he argued that ‘Society

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid, p.485.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid, p.488.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid, p.755.

⁸⁵² Ibid.

⁸⁵³ Carlyle, *Sartor*, p.162.

is founded upon Cloth' and 'sails through the infinitude on Cloth, as on Faust's Mantle'. In the absence of 'such Sheet or Mantle,' he went on, society 'would sink to endless depths, or mount to inane limbos, and in either case be no more.'⁸⁵⁴

Church-Clothes were the pre-eminent form of apparel, according to Carlyle, because they were the garb that made society possible. Religion and society operated in a sort of double hermeneutic in his view: society, through association, begot religion, and religion helped to foster society. 'Church-Clothes', he emphasized, 'are first spun and woven by Society; outward Religion originates by Society, Society becomes possible by Religion.'⁸⁵⁵ It was only by the light of religion that society could be constituted: 'only in looking heavenward, take it in what sense you may, not in looking earthward, does what we call Union, mutual Love, Society, begin to be possible.'⁸⁵⁶

Society originated in religion and could do so only via the common ideas and mutual affection religious belief fostered. The consequences for an irreligious people were dramatic.

I remark, fearlessly enough, that without such Vestures and Sacred Tissues Society has not existed, and will not exist. For as Government is, so to speak, the outward SKIN of the Body Politic, holding the whole together and protecting it; and all your Craft-Guilds, and Associations for Industry, of hand or of head, are the Fleshy Clothes, the muscular and osseous Tissues (lying *under* such SKIN), whereby Society stands and works; - then is Religion the inmost Pericardial and Nervous Tissue, which ministers Life and warm Circulation to the whole.⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid, p.41.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid, p.162.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid, p.163.

Religion was the animating force that gave life to the body of society. Without it, the ‘Bone and Muscles’ would be ‘inert’; ‘the SKIN would become a shrivelled pelt, or fast-rotting raw-hide; and Society itself a dead carcass’. In such a state men would no longer be ‘Social, but Gregarious’ creatures, ‘which latter state also could not continue, but must gradually issue in universal selfish discord, hatred, savage isolation, and dispersion’. Without religious belief, society would be ‘abolished.’⁸⁵⁸

Life was the first benefit religion held out to society in Carlyle’s estimation. Carlyle emphasized this in the imagery he used to express the importance of religious belief. Society was an organism with a definable body. It was composed of bones, tissues, muscles, a heart, a nervous system, and was animated by circulation. Like any living organism, society could exist in either a state of health or one of illness. A healthful state required the existence and appropriate balance of each of the parts of the body Carlyle identified.

He addressed this notion in an 1831 essay, *Characteristics*. The doctrines of ‘corporeal therapeutics’, Carlyle told readers, hold in circles as diverse as ‘moral, intellectual, political’, and even ‘poetical’ fields. What is more, the proper balance of forces – one could almost say *humours*, for the metaphor seems peculiarly Greco-Roman – was essential to a healthy disposition in any of these. Carlyle articulated this with characteristic panache.

In the Body, for example, as all doctors are agreed, the first condition of complete health is, that each organ perform its function unconsciously, unheeded; let but any organ announce its separate existence, were it even boastfully, and for

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid.

pleasure, not for pain, then already has one of those unfortunate 'false centres of sensibility' established itself, already is derangement there.⁸⁵⁹

Balance in the various parts of corporeal entities was essential to preventing an undesirable state of disease, decline, and, ultimately, death. The problems of the contemporary world resulted from the palpable *imbalance* between the material and immaterial that existed within European societies, which had infected politics as much as any other domain of European culture.⁸⁶⁰ Religion was required in order to restore the balance between these forces.

Carlyle located the foundation of a modern moral disposition in a peculiar religious outlook. He offered his contemporaries a creed grounded on the divine nature of work.⁸⁶¹ He was convinced that 'there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work.' Work provided individuals with a means of comprehending nature's laws. 'Work,' Carlyle argued, 'is in communication with Nature' and 'the real desire to get Work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to Nature's appointments and regulations, which are truth.'⁸⁶² In other words, it enabled the individual to understand the tenets of natural law.

⁸⁵⁹ CE XXVIII, p.1.

⁸⁶⁰ Brian Young alluded to this aspect of Carlyle's thought. The Scotsman, Young suggested, often juxtaposed the devout, heroic seventeenth century and its irreligious, unheroic successor in attempting to divine a route out of the contemporary world's malaise. But, it was the eighteenth century that had 'opened up the tragic momentum that the nineteenth century seemed destined to maintain; it was a period that looked very like a second Fall to Carlyle'. See Young, *Victorian Eighteenth Century*, p.23.

⁸⁶¹ In itself, this doctrine demonstrates the diversity of influences that acted on Carlyle. In the first place, it highlights Carlyle's Calvinism. In *Sartor*, he justified work through reference to Gospel, specifically a passage in John 9:4: 'Work while it is called To-day; for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work'. Carlyle, *Sartor*, p.149. But, this was supported by Carlyle's reference to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* later in *Sartor*: 'Hadst thou not Greek enough to understand thus much: *The end of Man is an Action, and not a Thought*'. Carlyle, *Sartor*, p. 120. Kathleen Blake argued that the Gospel of Work also depicted Carlyle's Romanticism, as it incorporated the feeling of 'Renunciation' and through it Carlyle rebuked 'Benthamism for being at base a philosophy of pleasure.' K. Blake, *Pleasures of Benthamism: Victorian Literature, Utility, Political Economy* (Oxford, 2009), p.83.

⁸⁶² Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.203.

Kathleen Blake maintained that Carlyle's message was that to pursue one's 'vocation', in other words, 'to work...in the face of constraint, amounts to the realization of freedom.'⁸⁶³ This was borne out in Carlyle's own words. 'Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself,' he remarked, 'all these like helldogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves.' The result was moral confirmation and independence: 'The man is now a man.'⁸⁶⁴ 'Carlyle's work ethic', Blake argued, was, therefore, 'oriented towards realization of personal welfare.'⁸⁶⁵ However, in the context of the modern world that Carlyle had so criticized, it seems equally likely that he perceived in the spiritual nature of work a means of redressing the materialism of his era. Work, therefore, offered Carlyle's contemporaries a common moral perspective that enjoined freedom and independence as well as an instruction in the precepts of natural law.

Mill's essay on *The Utility of Religion*, published soon after his death, was his most direct contribution to this subject. In it, he surveyed religion and its utility with a typically critical eye. Mill was more direct than Carlyle, but he was far more sceptical about religion's specific claim to be able to provide a common morality to citizens. His 'inquiry' divided itself into two parts, 'corresponding to the double aspect of the subject; its social, and its individual aspect.' Mill wanted to understand what religion gave society and what it did for the individual. This took a particular tack. 'What amount of benefit to social interests, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, arises from religious belief? And what influence has it in improving and ennobling

⁸⁶³ Blake, *Pleasures of Benthamism*, p.143.

⁸⁶⁴ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.177.

⁸⁶⁵ Blake, *Pleasures of Benthamism*, p.93. Interestingly, Blake sees seemingly unlikely parallels between Carlyle's gospel of work and the labour theory of value Mill outlined in his *Principles*. This is one of many instances where Carlyle's ideas, whilst critical of Utilitarian political economy, bear an affinity with its precepts. See Blake, *Pleasures of Benthamism*, pp.89-99.

individual human nature?⁸⁶⁶ 'It has sometimes been remarked', he claimed, 'how much has been written, both by friends and enemies, concerning the truth of religion, and how little, at least in the way of discussion or controversy, concerning its usefulness.'⁸⁶⁷

Of course, the truth of a religion and its usefulness were intrinsically linked in one respect. 'If religion, or any particular form of it, is true,' Mill opined, 'its usefulness follows without proof. If to know authentically in what order of things, under what government of the universe it is our destiny to live, were not useful, it is difficult to imagine what could be considered so.' In such a situation, Mill continued, 'to ask the use of believing could not possibly occur' to people. To pursue this line of enquiry any further would be fruitless.

Mill thought that questions on this subject were, in fact, really appeals to those who did not place their faith in a dogma. They were asked not to disclose their doubts for fear of disturbing the benefits accrued from such a belief.⁸⁶⁸ This was an intellectually credible claim in Mill's view. It was 'perfectly conceivable', he maintained, 'that religion may be morally useful without being intellectually sustainable'. Indeed, 'it would be a proof of great prejudice in any unbeliever to deny, that there have been ages, and that there are still both nations and individuals, with regard to whom this is actually the case.'⁸⁶⁹

However, Mill believed that morality could be inculcated in individuals through means other than religion. As such, he beseeched his readers to consider 'how tremendous is the power of education; how unspeakable is the effect of bringing people up from infancy in a belief, and in habits founded on it.'⁸⁷⁰ He understood its power better than most. Any 'system of

⁸⁶⁶ *CW X*, p.406.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.403.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.403.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.405.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.408.

social duty' taught to children would have equal advantages. It is especially powerful at this stage of life because it is here that it obtains 'command over the feelings' as well as the intellect. Sparta, Mill thought, was the most obvious example in history of this truth.⁸⁷¹ Similarly, patriotism – 'love of country' – was a sort of secular religion and it, Mill thought, offered similar benefits to those that had formerly been provided by conventional religions, such as a common morality.⁸⁷²

Ultimately, though, 'Mill,' Ryan contended, 'was happy to agree that morality would be the better and more effective for being embedded in a religion' and he thought that in Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity he had discovered 'the essential elements of a secular creed.'⁸⁷³ Mill was clear about this in his writings on both Comte and religion. The 'Religion of Humanity', he claimed, was equal, indeed superior, to 'supernatural religions even in their best manifestations'.⁸⁷⁴

What was the Religion of Humanity exactly? In his essay on *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill told his readers that Comte's religion was 'without a God' and this presented no obstacle to its status as a religion. In stating this so directly, Mill thought he 'had done enough to induce nine-tenths of all readers...to avert their faces and close their ears.' Such a claim, Mill believed, was widely held to be ludicrous. Nevertheless, Mill asserted that although he was 'conscious of being in an extremely small minority,' he was certain 'that a religion may exist without belief in a God, and that a religion without a God may be, even to Christians, an instructive and profitable object of contemplation.'⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷¹ Ibid, pp.408-409.

⁸⁷² Ibid, p.421.

⁸⁷³ Ryan, *Mill*, p.234.

⁸⁷⁴ *CW X*, pp.422-423.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid, p.332.

Given the Religion of Humanity's evident peculiarity to the majority of Mill's audience, not to mention its dubious status as a religion, he attempted to return his readers to first principles in the domain of religion. This strategy was intended to demonstrate to them the validity of Comte's creed as a genuine religion. Mill posed a pressing question: 'What, in truth, are the conditions necessary to constitute a religion?' The answer he offered was seemingly uncontroversial. In any religion, he argued, there 'must be a creed, or conviction, claiming authority over the whole of human life'. Attached to this must be 'a belief, or set of beliefs, deliberately adopted, respecting human destiny and duty, to which the believer inwardly acknowledges that all his actions ought to be subordinate.' Alongside a particular morality any religion required 'a sentiment', Mill contended, powerful enough to enable it to exert 'authority over human conduct to which it lays claim in theory.' Finally, Mill told his readers that religious beliefs gained even greater advantage from such a sentiment if it was crystallized 'round a concrete object; if possible a really existing one, though, in all the more important cases, only ideally present.'⁸⁷⁶

Mill proceeded to discuss the ways in which the Religion of Humanity accorded with this definition. It provided a system of morality, with corresponding 'obligations of duty' and 'sentiments of devotion'. Comte had developed these in reference 'to a concrete object, at once ideal and real', Mill proclaimed: 'the Human Race'. Humanity bore the hallmarks of eternity, because it was 'conceived as a continuous whole, including the past, the present, and the future.' Mill summarized these arguments in a fashion intended to convince as much as to conclude. 'Candid persons of all creeds', he wrote, 'may be willing to admit, that if a person has an ideal object, his attachment and sense of duty towards which are able to

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

control and discipline all his other sentiments and propensities, and prescribe to him a rule of life, that person has a religion'.⁸⁷⁷

Mill continued in this vein in his essay on *The Utility of Religion*. He argued that a love of that wider constituency – 'the world' – could offer a similar locus of 'strength' as the God of conventional religions, 'both as a source of elevated emotion and as a principle of duty.'⁸⁷⁸ That is to say, it could provide at once the individual *and* the social benefits claimed for supernatural religions. It could offer both a settled morality applicable to the entirety of society and an aid to individual development. Mill expressed this in a long passage that deserves to be quoted in full.

A morality grounded on large and wise views of the good of the whole, neither sacrificing the individual to the aggregate nor the aggregate to the individual, but giving to duty on the one hand and to freedom and spontaneity on the other their proper province, would derive its power in the superior natures from sympathy and benevolence and the passion for ideal excellence: in the inferior, from the same feelings cultivated up to the measure of their capacity, with the superadded force of shame. This exalted morality would not depend for its ascendancy on any hope of reward; but the reward which might be looked for, and the thought of which would be a consolation in suffering, and a support in moments of weakness, would not be a problematical future existence, but the approbation, in this, of those whom we respect, and ideally of all those, dead or living, whom we admire or venerate.⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid, p.421.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

It is passages such as the one above that led Hamburger to the view that Mill proposed a sort of 'moral education that shaped character and instilled the ethos of a new religion of humanity.'⁸⁸⁰ Where Tocqueville saw in a reformed Catholicism the foundations for a new and viable popular morality and Carlyle perceived these in his doctrine of work, Mill believed that Comte's Religion of Humanity could offer a similar outcome.

RECIPROCAL DUTIES

Religion provided a basis on which a system of interpersonal relations could be built. This was because religions in general imposed a series of reciprocal duties between individuals. In the modern era, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle thought, this could provide the basis for the sorts of sociable impulses that democracy lacked. Clearly, given their ample criticisms of the individualizing nature of democratic society, any force that could counteract this tendency was important.

Evidently, Mill did not believe that the basis for reciprocal duties between members of modern societies could be provided by conventional religions. In fact, he stated this directly. 'It is usual to credit religion *as such* with the whole of the power inherent in *any* system of moral duties inculcated by education and enforced by opinion.' Religion was commonly held to be responsible for 'precepts of justice, veracity, beneficence' as well as for the repression of 'the opposite vices'. But, Mill thought that this was facile. Certainly, religion had been active in teaching morality, but it could equally well have been taught via 'any generally accepted system of rules for the guidance and government of human life.' Any 'doctrine' that

⁸⁸⁰ Hamburger, *Mill on Liberty and Authority*, p.135. However, it must be restated here that Mill did not accept Comte's views uncritically. I showed in the previous chapter that Mill was forthright in his rejection of the *pouvoir spirituel*, which was a fundamental feature of Comte's Religion of Humanity.

is generally accepted to be true can be inculcated in a people so long as it is 'impressed on the mind from the earliest childhood'.⁸⁸¹

Such comments demonstrate that Mill had returned to some of his earliest concerns about the nature and constitution of authority in the social world. Indeed, the language of authority suffused the passages of his essays dedicated to religious subjects. In discussing Comte's Religion of Humanity in his assessment of the Frenchman's broader philosophical works, Mill argued that it was, 'without doubt, the necessary condition of mankind to receive most of their opinions on the authority of those who have specifically studied the matters to which they relate.'⁸⁸² Once more, in a posthumously published piece on *Theism*, Mill contended that 'it is by authority that the opinions of the bulk of mankind are principally and not unnaturally governed.'⁸⁸³

In the *Utility of Religion*, Mill stated that any 'rule of life and duty', whether founded on religion or not, obtains a hold over the popular mind when it has 'conspicuously received the general assent'.⁸⁸⁴ In other words, the sort of authority to which Mill's Religion of Humanity was subject was that of widespread consent. 'This is the power of public opinion', Mill averred later in the essay, 'of the praise and blame, the favour and disfavour, of their fellow creatures'. It was this that was the 'source of strength inherent in any system of moral belief which is generally adopted'.⁸⁸⁵ As evidence, Mill cited a quotation from Novalis that he had found in Carlyle's *On Heroes*. 'My belief has gained infinitely to me from the moment when one other human being has begun to believe the same'.⁸⁸⁶ These reflections led Mill to conclude that

⁸⁸¹ *CW X*, p.407.

⁸⁸² *Ibid*, p.313.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid*, p.441.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.408.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.410.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp.407-408.

any system of reciprocal duties was the result of unified public opinion instilled in the individual from an early age rather than a religious perspective *per se*.

What sort of reciprocal duties could Mill's modern religion encourage? Mill gave his readers a brief summary of his thoughts in the concluding pages of *Theism*. The 'Religion of Humanity', he noted, was sometimes referred to as the religion of 'Duty.' This was because it cultivated 'a religious devotion to the welfare of our fellow-creatures as an obligatory limit to every selfish aim'. In pursuing this end, according to the Religion of Humanity, 'no sacrifice can be too great'.⁸⁸⁷ Mill addressed this feature of his preferred religion in his essays on *Auguste Comte and Positivism*. 'M. Comte', Mill surmised, 'infers that the good of others is the only inducement on which we should allow ourselves to act; and that we should endeavour to starve the whole of the desires which point to our personal satisfaction'.⁸⁸⁸

In order to engender such a feeling of duty, the entirety of 'education and all moral discipline', Mill wrote of Comte's proposals, 'should have but one object, to make altruism...predominate over egoism.' Mill thought this object valid and endorsed it to an extent. 'If by this were meant only that egoism is bound,' he wrote, 'and should be taught, always to give way to the well-understood interests of enlarged altruism, no one who acknowledges any moral authority would object to the proposition.' However, Comte wanted to exclude all individual impulses that were not directed toward the good of the social body in order to ensure the fuller development of personal feelings of altruism, which he thought would be hindered by the existence of all desires egoistic in nature.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid, p.488.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid, p.335.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

Mill could not go as far as Comte in this path. He perceived in Comte's arguments a logical fallacy that undermined the extreme nature of the altruism he proposed. In Mill's estimation, 'the notion of a happiness for all, procured by the self-sacrifice of each...is a contradiction.' Any system of 'self-devotion', by which Mill meant individual devotion to others and not individual devotion to the self, had to be made 'pleasant' and not, as in Comte's system, 'painful.'⁸⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Mill agreed with Comte's broad outline of the nature of duty. 'It is as much a part of our scheme as of M. Comte's,' Mill affirmed, 'that the direct cultivation of altruism, and the subordination of egoism to it, far beyond the point of absolute moral duty, should be one of the chief aims of education, both individual and collective.'⁸⁹¹

Tocqueville disagreed with Mill on one vital feature in regard to reciprocal duties. He contended that religion was the only form of dogmatic belief that could provide a source of authority outside of man himself. Tocqueville thought that religion was unique in this sense because 'Fixed ideas on God and human nature are necessary to *all* men and *every* day to *each* man, and it is found that there are only a few, if any, men who are capable by themselves of fixing their ideas on these matters.' For this reason, Tocqueville continued, 'there is the most to gain and the least to lose by having dogmatic beliefs' in these matters.⁸⁹²

This combatted the twin spectres of materialism and individualism. 'The greatest advantage of religions is to inspire entirely opposite instincts.' In fact, Tocqueville claimed that there was 'no religion that does not place the object of the desires of men above and beyond the good things of the earth, and that does not naturally elevate his soul toward realms very

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid, p.338.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid, p.339. Hamburger noted the centrality of altruism to Mill's conception of the Religion of Humanity. It was this that 'ought to inform social relationships' rather than 'selfishness', because the latter 'was destructive and unworthy.' See Hamburger, *Mill on Liberty and Authority*, pp.131-132.

⁸⁹² Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.742n.

superior to those of the senses.'⁸⁹³ This counteracted democratic man's propensity to gaze at his own navel. In acting thus religion countered democracy's stunting of human development.

Allied to this Tocqueville found a specifically sociable impulse in religion, which further offset the democratic individual's tendency to withdraw from his fellows. Every religion imposed 'on each man some duties toward the human species or in common with it'. In this way such doctrines 'drag him, from time to time, out of contemplation of himself.' This could even be seen, Tocqueville thought, 'in the most false and most dangerous religions.'⁸⁹⁴ Tocqueville's words on the conception of reciprocal duty religion promoted were not as extensive as Mill's. However, they were directed towards more pragmatic ends.

Carlyle championed the role of religion in maintaining reciprocal duties for the first time in *Characteristics*. He declared that society, which, as we have seen, resulted directly from religion in his view, bred 'an altogether new set of spiritual activities' and that these were superadded to those already existing in the individual, which are themselves 'immeasurably quickened and strengthened.' Having describing society's broad effects upon the individual, Carlyle contrasted the sociable with the 'solitary man'. In the latter condition, in which man is 'folded in' and 'stunted' so as to appear 'only half alive', the individual was 'but a small portion of himself'.⁸⁹⁵

Religion, the agent that fostered society and brought man out of his solitary sphere, improved the man himself. Carlyle developed this analysis even further, clearly using religious language to reinforce the point he was trying to make. 'The Duties of Man to himself,' he wrote, 'to

⁸⁹³ Ibid, p.745. `

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid, pp.745-746.

⁸⁹⁵ CE XXVIII, p.10.

what is Highest in himself, make but the First Table of the Law'. On top of this is placed 'a Second': 'the Duties of Man to his Neighbour'. It was in the interaction of the latter with the former that the former realized its true importance. 'Man has joined himself with man', Carlyle proclaimed, and in so doing, 'Life, in all its elements, has become intensified, consecrated.'⁸⁹⁶

Crucially, the spiritual union that inaugurated society resulted in the interconnection of minds and the reactive interchange of ideas. This had the further benefit of producing not only new intellectual realities but, even more significantly for Carlyle, new modes of action. 'The lightening-spark of Thought', he averred, 'reverberated from mind to mind, fed also with fresh fuel in each...acquires incalculable new light as Thought, incalculable new heat as converted into Action.'⁸⁹⁷ Communities, in this way, had produced all that was valued by philosophers and ordinary men alike.⁸⁹⁸

The principal outcomes of the sorts of reciprocal duties religion fostered were similar for Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. The bonds of sympathy and sociability that religion enabled counteracted individualizing forces in the modern world. However, there was a further dimension to the reflections of these men. Religion offered a means of individual development; it was an elevating force in the contemporary world. This could be seen most clearly in the manner in which it facilitated the development of virtue.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid, p.11.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

VIRTUE

Norbert Campagna argued that Tocqueville followed Montesquieu in believing virtue necessary to the maintenance of freedom in democratic countries.⁸⁹⁹ Tocqueville realized that the sort of virtue extant in ancient republics could not be replicated in modern democracies, nor could it have the same foundation.⁹⁰⁰ Virtue, in the present, had to rely on faith because only religion promoted self-sacrifice in the modern era.⁹⁰¹ But, what sort of virtues did religion encourage and how did they help to mitigate the problems posed by democracy?

Tocqueville had seen that America was perhaps the only country in the contemporary world where Christianity 'retained true power over souls'. No other experience had been as effective in showing him 'how useful and natural religion is to man, since the country where today it exercises the most dominion is at the same time the most enlightened and the most free.'⁹⁰² Vitality, in America, religion had introduced into democratic man's habits a level of order and restraint, which was beneficial to society as a whole. This resulted from the relationship between religion, the family and society in the United States.

⁸⁹⁹ N. Campagna, 'Virtue in Tocqueville's America', in *American Studies*, Vol.52, No.2 (2007), p.173.

⁹⁰⁰ Campagna, 'Virtue in Tocqueville's America', pp.174-175.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid, p.184. Campagna asserted that this sort of virtue was not '*aesthetic*' in character, as it had been in ancient republics, but '*utilitarian*'. This relied on demonstrating to the individual that it was in his interest to sacrifice some of his immediate selfish interests in order to further the public good. See pp.179-180. Cheryl Welch has claimed that such appeals to the principle of utility were 'a species of offering to a God that he [Tocqueville] can no longer wholeheartedly embrace.' See. Welch, *Tocqueville*, p.182. Lucien Jaume tacked closer to Campagna. Religion encouraged Americans to interact not on the basis of 'love of one's neighbour (the Christian precept) nor on sincere interest in others but rather on an elementary calculation'. Jaume traced this through the concept of *l'honnête*, which had Jansenist roots. This was the common man's virtue and would never produce grandeur. See Jaume, *Tocqueville*, pp.149 & 153-158. For another perspective on Tocqueville's Jansenist influences, see M.L. McLendon, 'Tocqueville, Jansenism, and the Psychology of Freedom', in the *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.50, No.3 (July, 2006).

⁹⁰² Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.473.

Tocqueville illustrated this by contrasting America with Europe. There, 'nearly all of the disorders of society are born around the domestic hearth and not far from the marital bed. That was where men first conceived scorn for natural bonds and permitted pleasures, taste for disorder, restlessness of heart, instability of desires.' The troubles of the private sphere translated into public disorder. The European begrudgingly and with difficulty submits 'to the legislative powers of the State.'⁹⁰³

The United States presented a different spectacle. In America, where 'the marriage bond is most respected', the family was 'the image of order and peace.' Surrounded by 'innocent and tranquil' pleasures 'he achieves happiness by the regularity of life, he easily gets used to regulating his opinions as well as his tastes.'⁹⁰⁴ In other words, the family prepared American citizens to submit to the claims of order. 'While the European seeks to escape his domestic sorrows by troubling society' Tocqueville maintained, 'the American draws from his home the love of order that he then carries off into the affairs of the State.'⁹⁰⁵

Tocqueville acknowledged that some members of American communities were not sincere in their adherence to Christianity. Others undoubtedly were. Politically, though, what was so striking was that despite the varied levels of devotion present in America 'Christianity rules without obstacles, with the consent of all'. This facilitated the sort of certainty and fixity in the moral world that the political world lacked. Religion was important because it limited the extent to which innovation could be carried. The 'human mind', Tocqueville wrote, 'never sees a limitless field before it; whatever its audacity, it feels from time to time that it must

⁹⁰³ Ibid, p.474.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.

stop before insurmountable barriers. Before innovating, it is forced to accept certain primary givens, and to subject its bolder conceptions to certain forms that retard and stop it.⁹⁰⁶

In constraining the horizon of the human mind religion prevented democracy from becoming revolutionary as it had in France. As with so much in the *Démocratie*, Tocqueville hesitated to say this directly.

These habits of restraint are found in political society and singularly favour the tranquillity of the people, as well as the continued existence of the institutions that the people have given themselves....If the mind of the Americans were free of all hindrances, you would soon find among them the boldest innovators and the most implacable logicians in the world. But the revolutionaries of America are obliged to profess publicly a certain respect for Christian morality and equity that does not allow them to violate laws easily when the laws are opposed to the execution of their designs.⁹⁰⁷

The common morality afforded by religion guided the Americans in their handling of democracy by providing them with the virtues of restraint and orderliness required to avert disaster.

Tocqueville went even further. He is famous for proclaiming his horror at the three great maladies of life: death, disease and religious doubt. Of the three the last was the worst in his view.⁹⁰⁸ The emotional difficulty this posed to a man as sensitive as Tocqueville was doubtless

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.475.

⁹⁰⁸ Cited in Brogan, *Tocqueville*, p.619.

severe. However, in the *Démocratie* the political problem presented by doubt is clear. Doubt promoted only inaction.

So men have an immense interest in forming very fixed ideas about God, their soul, their general duties toward their creator and toward their fellows; for doubt about these first points would leave all their actions to chance and would condemn them in a way to disorder and impotence.⁹⁰⁹

Tocqueville was even more explicit about this a few pages later.

When religion is destroyed among a people, doubt takes hold of the highest portions of the intellect and half paralyzes all the others. Each person gets accustomed to having only confused and changing notions about the matters that most interest his fellows and himself. You defend your opinions badly or you abandon them, and, since you despair of being able, by yourself, to solve the greatest problems that human destiny presents, you are reduced like a coward to not thinking about them.⁹¹⁰

Why was this problematic? How was it related to politics? Caught in the midst of trying to fashion some ideas on fundamental values; unable to dedicate the necessary time to considering political and social principles; and discouraged from acting in the social sphere by an overwhelming sense of inadequacy, doubt 'prepares citizens for servitude.'⁹¹¹ The psychological and social effects of religious doubt end by extinguishing liberty because of the

⁹⁰⁹ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.743.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid, pp.744-745.

⁹¹¹ Ibid, p.745.

consequences they entail for individual confidence and, as a result, the *vita activa*. Action itself, therefore, was raised to the status of a virtue in Tocqueville's democratic theory.

Tocqueville concluded his thoughts on religion with the contentious assertion that man can never 'bear complete religious independence and full political liberty at the same time'. 'I am led to think that, if he does not have faith, he must serve, and, if he is free, he must believe.' This was, in his words, 'the great utility of religions'.⁹¹² In making this claim, Tocqueville was trying to ally religion and liberty, something that Benjamin Constant had tried to do before him.⁹¹³ Constant, however, was not the only point of reference.

Tocqueville's ideas were also in accordance with those of Rousseau. According to Philip Knee, Rousseau made strong claims for the social utility of religion's authority, particularly its role in repelling democratic man's inward-looking nature and his preference for material pleasures.⁹¹⁴ That Tocqueville conceived of a role for religion in modern politics was – and remains – very controversial in France. Antoine described how this has influenced the reception Tocqueville has been accorded in France. 'In the French cultural context,' Antoine argued, 'long marked by an anti-religious tendency amongst the laity, Tocqueville's analysis of religion has often been neglected, indeed hidden or criticized, insofar as it has come to taint the modernity of the thinker of egalitarian conditions and his specifics.'⁹¹⁵

⁹¹² Ibid. Sanford Kessler produced an account of Tocqueville's understanding of the utility of religion that can only be described as granular in character. It provides a blow-by-blow account of the importance of religion in Tocqueville's theory and the dangers attendant upon its removal. See S. Kessler, 'Tocqueville on Civil Religion and Liberal Democracy', in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.39, No.1, (Feb., 1977), pp.119-146.

⁹¹³ Lively, *Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville*, p.185.

⁹¹⁴ Knee, 'Religion et souveraineté du peuple', p.222.

⁹¹⁵ A. Antoine, 'Démocratie et Religion : Le Point de Vue Tocquevillien, in *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, Vol.XXVII, No.2, 2006, p.1. Matthew Mancini maintained that 'Religion possessed a political importance for Tocqueville far greater than for any of his contemporaries.' See M. Mancini, *Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York, 1993), p.51. This was certainly true of his French peers, if not of those he found in Britain.

Mill recognized the importance of religion's utility as a restraining influence on individuals in the modern world in 1840. In his essay on *Coleridge* he showed how the philosophers of the previous century had wanted nothing more than to 'tear away' from all that they saw in existence around them. Their 'millennium,' Mill continued, would be free of 'superstition, priestcraft, error and prejudice of every kind'.

In abolishing religion, they had destroyed the contemporary system of practical education, which had instilled a '*restraining discipline*' in the individual that fostered 'the habit, and thence the power, of subordinating his personal impulses and aims, to what were considered the ends of society'. Mill was not dogmatic about this. He acknowledged that such discipline could be upheld through different means in differing eras. 'The entire civil and military policy of the ancient commonwealths', for example, 'was such a system of training'. It was just that it happened to be the case that 'in modern nations its place has been attempted to be supplied principally through religious teaching.'⁹¹⁶

Mill referred to this feature of the ancient commonwealths again in *Auguste Comte and Positivism* and he treated it in equally approving terms. 'We recognize the value', he told his readers, 'of ascetic discipline in the original Greek sense of the word.' What is more, he stated that he agreed with 'Dr. Johnson' in as much as he thought 'that he who has never denied himself anything which is not wrong, cannot be fully trusted for denying himself everything which is so.' The sort of virtues that had been present in the military nations of the ancient world – individuals' ability 'to control their appetites, to brave dangers, and submit voluntarily to pain' – were absent in the contemporary world. It was this realization that led Mill to assert that 'Something has been lost as well as gained by no longer giving to every citizen the training

⁹¹⁶ CW X, p.133.

necessary for a soldier.⁹¹⁷ These virtues of self-denial, bravery and fortitude were supplemented by another: the concept of duty. No expedient could be too onerous that aimed 'to form the habit, and develop the desire, of being useful to others and to the world, by the practice, independently of reward and of every personal consideration, of positive virtue beyond the bound of prescribed duty.'⁹¹⁸

Mill did not contradict himself in 1874, when his posthumous essays on religion were published, despite the fact that he was revolted by the claims of those who saw religion as a means of maintaining order.

The value of religion as a supplement to human laws, a more cunning sort of police, an auxiliary to the thief-catcher and the hangman, is not that part of its claims which the more highminded of its votaries are fondest of insisting on: and they would probably be as ready to admit, that if the nobler offices of religion in the soul could be dispensed with, a substitute might be found for so coarse and selfish a social instrument as the fear of hell.⁹¹⁹

He knew, as he demonstrated in *Theism*, that this had been the case heretofore in the history of humanity. Mill was well aware that 'rulers and instructors' had 'at all times...encouraged to the utmost of their power the belief that there is a life after death, in which pleasures and sufferings far greater than on earth, depend on our doing or leaving undone while alive, what we are commanded to do in the name of the unseen power.' Such authorities had acted thus 'with the view of giving greater effect to their mandates whether from selfish or from public

⁹¹⁷ Ibid, p.339.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid, p.415.

motives'.⁹²⁰ That he recoiled at the idea that religion was useful as a supplement to the law did not mean that he no longer recognized its value as a means of fostering the common good vis-à-vis individual egoism.

In fact, in his essay on the *Utility of Religion*, Mill extended his thoughts on the potential of religion to endow individuals with virtuous characteristics. Mill claimed that the 'value' of religious belief 'to the individual, both in the past and present,' was 'as a source of personal satisfaction and elevated feelings'. This he did not dispute.⁹²¹ Religion addressed itself to 'the same part of the human constitution' as poetry. Both offered the individual a source 'of ideal conceptions grander and more beautiful than we see realized in the prose of human life.'⁹²² Conceptions of the ideal encouraged individual aspiration and this was an important virtue. Mill stated this directly in *Theism*.

To me it seems that human life, small and confined as it is, and as, considered merely in the present, it is likely to remain even when the progress of material and moral improvement may have freed it from the greater part of its present calamities, stands greatly in need of any wider range and greater height of aspiration for itself and its destination, which the exercise of imagination can yield to it without running counter to the evidence of fact; and that it is a part of wisdom to make the most of any, even small, probabilities on this subject, which furnish imagination with any footing to support itself upon.⁹²³

⁹²⁰ Ibid, p.463.

⁹²¹ Ibid, p.420.

⁹²² Ibid, p.419.

⁹²³ Ibid, p.483.

Mill's view of religious belief, in this passage at least, took the form of a *choix Pascalien*. We have already seen that Mill believed that the benefits of religion did not have to be explained to anyone who had faith. In the passage immediately above, though, he implied that true or not, belief in the ideal rendered a service to the individual. It was important, therefore, to have a faith for this reason if not for that of genuine worship.

Other than encouraging individual aspiration to gravitate towards the ideal, Mill thought the Religion of Humanity in particular bore the potential to diffuse particular virtues across society. It could inculcate disinterestedness where conventional religions encouraged selfishness; it could emphasize the importance of intellectual endeavour where traditional religions demanded torpid conformity; and it could anoint sincerity where its forebears had required hypocrisy. Moreover, Mill believed that this could have as much of an effect on 'common minds' as on those that were exceptional.⁹²⁴ In other words, Mill's preferred faith would promote the impartial pursuit of truth, untrammelled by the dogmatism of traditional religions.

Carlyle promoted religion's utility as an aid to political stability. 'Polities are formed', in which, according to Carlyle, 'the weak' submit 'to the strong' or, expressed in better terms, 'the ignorant' submit 'to the wise'.⁹²⁵ This was true in even the most backward communities because, in Carlyle's view, 'man never yields himself wholly to brute Force' – though, he allowed that man may partially yield to force – 'but always to moral Greatness', which was far superior in his mind.⁹²⁶ However, religion offered a deeper advantage: it was an aid to the pursuit of truth and righteousness.

⁹²⁴ Ibid, pp.422-423.

⁹²⁵ CE XXVIII, p.11.

⁹²⁶ Ibid, p.12.

In concluding his fourth lecture *On Heroes*, 'The Hero as Priest', which considered the importance of Luther, the Reformation, John Knox and Puritanism, Carlyle assessed Knox's desire to establish a theocratic state. This was the 'unforgiveable offence' with which he had been charged. But what had he really meant by it? Carlyle was quick to answer. Knox had striven 'to set up Priests over the head of Kings.' However, this was not a Machiavellian compromise, in Carlyle's estimation, a means of one segment of society acquiring power at the expense of another.

On the contrary, Carlyle thought Knox had sought to establish a veritable 'Government of God.' This meant simply that 'Kings and Prime Ministers', in their public and private dealings, 'should walk according to the Gospel of Christ, and understand that this was their Law, supreme over all laws.' Knox had wished to see the Kingdom of Heaven established here below. He grieved when he saw political figures taking hold of Church property and diverting it away from its 'true churchly uses, education, schools, worship'. Knox had not attempted to assert the political hegemony of the clergy, according to Carlyle, but its ability to direct the morality of rulers into a virtuous path. He had offered a 'scheme of right and truth', Carlyle thought.⁹²⁷

If we think his scheme of truth was too narrow, was not true; we may rejoice that he could not realise it; that it remained, after two centuries of effort, unrealisable, and is a 'devout imagination' still. But how shall we blame *him* for struggling to realise it? Theocracy, Government of God, is precisely the thing to be struggled for!⁹²⁸

⁹²⁷ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.130.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*

There was nothing incongruous about wanting to shape society and its rulers along these lines. 'God's Law', which, in Carlyle's understanding, amounted to the quest for 'right and truth...is the Heavenly Ideal...towards which the Reformer will insist that all be more and more approximated.'⁹²⁹ This was what Carlyle understood in Knox's desire to realize a theocracy and it was the ideal after which he himself strove.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle saw in religion a means of uniting their contemporaries around a set of values. A common morality was an essential ingredient of a cohesive society. It outlined a series of reciprocal duties that forced individuals to embrace the public sphere and not remain hidden from public life behind the veil of individual interest. In using religion in this fashion they attempted to endow it with a political and social significance that many of their co-travellers in the early nineteenth-century denied.

Religion was not only useful as a mechanism by which the individualizing tendencies of the modern world could be combatted. It was an aid to the development of individual virtue. Of course this had beneficial social consequences, but this should not obscure the advantages that accrued to the individual as a result of a firmly held faith. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, as we have seen, promoted widely different creeds. However, what they shared was a belief in the utility of religion to modern democratic society. Its usefulness lay in its ability to foster the sort of public and private goods I have just described. However, individual development in particular could be stimulated more effectively via another mechanism: education. It is to this, and the advantageous political and social consequences it entailed, that the final chapter of this thesis is dedicated.

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

REFORMING THE INDIVIDUAL: THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

Concern for human improvement was a hallmark of the thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle.⁹³⁰ No longer was it possible for the vast majority of the populace to be excluded from instruction. Both the dictates of justice and the characteristic features of modern democratic politics demanded popular enlightenment. Individual human growth was the means by which stability could be ensured in the modern era. What is more, it held out the route to progress through the maturation of an increased amount of talent.

Morrow argued this in relation to Carlyle. The system of state-sponsored education that Carlyle advocated was envisaged 'as a means for developing the intellectual capacities of the

⁹³⁰ 'To write about Mill', Ryan recently claimed, 'is to write about education.' See A. Ryan, 'J.S. Mill on Education', in *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol.37, No.5, October 2011, p.653. Heydt has sketched the different faces of Mill's educational philosophy. See and C. Heydt, *Rethinking Mill's Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education* (London, 2006), pp.111.-128 and 133-149. A.O. Rorty has added her voice to this chorus: pedagogy was 'a central feature' of his political philosophy. See Rorty, 'The Ruling History of Education', in A.O. Rorty eds., *Philosophers on Educations: Historical Perspectives* (New York, 1998), p2. Much less has been written on Tocqueville's relation to education. Wendy Donner and Richard Fumerton added their voices to this crowd. They argued that 'Mill holds a conception of happiness organized around the notion that human flourishing consists in the development and exercise of certain capacities and virtues.' See W. Donner and R. Fumerton, *Mill* (Oxford, 2009), p.76.

E.T. Gargan declared Tocqueville's disinterested in educational matter: he had little concern with education according to this theory. See Gargan, 'The Silence of Tocqueville on Education', in *Historical Reflections*, Vol.7, No.2/3, (Autumn, 1980), p.565. Boesche challenged this line of thought, but alluded to the significance of traditions, customs and laws as means of providing individuals with a culture from without that would prove effective in enabling them to attain a level of self-mastery. In this instance, Tocqueville's thought resembles that of Burke, Bossuet, Montesquieu and Rousseau. See Boesche, *Strange Liberalism*, pp.165-172. Tocqueville 'stressed' the importance of 'political education,' according to Kahan, by which the Frenchman meant the 'education directed at the individual's relationship with society'. Kahan claims that the text of Tocqueville's *Démocratie* was intended as a lesson in itself. In many respects it was a user manual that showed how democracy could be led to a desirable end. See Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*, p.131. The problem was, as Sheldon Wolin has demonstrated, that this sort of education was the most difficult to achieve. 'The traditional problem had been to each restraint' to rulers, Wolin claims; it was now to 'arouse the politically indifferent.' The task in the modern world was to convince the dominant middle classes to prefer public duty to private interest. See Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, p.413. Brian Danoff authored a recent study on the respective political educations offered by Tocqueville and Hannah Arendt, which is enlightening on both accounts. See B. Danoff, 'A School or a Stage? Tocqueville and Arendt on Politics and Education', in *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol.41, Issue 3, 2012, pp.117-124.

Carlyle's views on education have received almost no attention. I. Campbell essayed lately on Carlyle's notion of education. It was as liberal as any could be. See Campbell, 'Carlyle and Education', in Kerry and Hill *Thomas Carlyle Resartus*, pp.51-52.

entire population, not merely as an instrument for reconciling the lower classes with their lot, or facilitating social control.' Morrow maintains that Carlyle's remarks on 'popular education' were the result of 'a humanistic, and, in this sense, classless and egalitarian, perspective'.⁹³¹ Despite Morrow's brief analysis, no commentator has alerted readers to the political significance Carlyle saw in education. His humanistic focus was genuine, but it carried with it political consequences.

F.W. Garforth claimed something similar in relation to Mill: he was unquestionably one of 'few Englishmen who have given themselves so unreservedly...to the task of improving the intellectual, moral, political, economic, and cultural life of his own country, especially among the 'labouring classes'.⁹³² No similar quotation exists for Tocqueville. However, he was equally committed to human development. Below, I shall investigate the extent to which their humanistic commitment to individual development was designed to ameliorate some of the problems presented by modern democracy. This represents the final instalment in the attempts made by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle to reform contemporary political and social practices.

THE POLITICS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In the opening chapters of his *Considerations*, Mill told his readers that the ultimate object of any political system was to ensure good government. The prime feature of good government was, in Mill's view, highly specific: the improvement of the people themselves. The promotion of 'the virtue and intelligence of the people', he argued, is 'the most important

⁹³¹ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.100.

⁹³² F.W. Garforth, *Educative Democracy: John Stuart Mill on Education in Society* (Oxford, 1980), p.3. This work is supplementary to Garforth's first book on the subject: *John Stuart Mill's Theory of Education* (Oxford, 1979).

point of excellence which any form of government can possess'.⁹³³ That is to say, any polity could be judged according to the extent it tended 'to foster in the members of the community the various desirable qualities, moral and intellectual, or rather...moral, intellectual, and active.' Anshutz argued that this accorded with Mill's perception of the object of life in general: 'the end of life is self-development' and, as such, 'the prime duty of government for him is to assist self-development.'⁹³⁴

Indeed, Mill was interested, as he had stated in *On Liberty*, in promoting 'the permanent interests of man as a progressive being'.⁹³⁵ Any government that served this end, he believed, 'has every likelihood of being the best in all other respects, since it is on these qualities, so far as they exist in the people, that all possibility of goodness in the practical operations of government depends.'⁹³⁶ Ryan maintains that Mill's notion of the relationship between education and government 'is not quite a pedagogical view of the political process, but not far from it.'⁹³⁷

Mill was an enthusiastic follower of the educational debates that infused his era. His correspondence shows that he was conscious of the nationwide debate taking place on education, which reached its climax with John Arthur Roebuck's proposals that all children between six and twelve should have access to schooling. In a letter to Carlyle, in 1833, Mill

⁹³³ *CW XIX*, p.390.

⁹³⁴ Anschutz, *Philosophy of J.S. Mill*, p.46.

⁹³⁵ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.14.

⁹³⁶ *CW XIX*, p.390.

⁹³⁷ Ryan, 'Mill on Education', p.654. Robson is even more emphatic in his analysis of the importance Mill accords to education. 'The grand project for the civilization of humankind', he claims of Mill's view, 'comes down finally to education, to teachers and taught, to those who know and those who need to know, and to the means of getting the knowledge from one to the others.' Education, then, was not only a feature of good government, it was also indispensable to progress. See. J. Robson, "Civilization and Culture as Moral Concepts' in Skorupski eds., *Cambridge Companion*, p.362.

advised him to 'read Roebuck's paper on National Education⁹³⁸ in Tait's last number'.⁹³⁹ Mill was among those Utilitarians who helped to secure the foundation of University College, London in 1828.⁹⁴⁰ His interest in university establishments extended further than this. Mill eagerly received news about the emergence of other institutions, such as New College in Manchester.⁹⁴¹ Reeves stated that from a very early point in his career as a nomadic intellectual, Mill increasingly recognized the dangers an ill-educated, ill-informed democratic electorate posed to society.⁹⁴² Indeed, this was an important motivation in his campaign for popular education. For example, writing to William Lovett, the London Chartist leader, in 1842, Mill told him that he could not recommend universal suffrage due to 'the present state of civilization'.⁹⁴³

However, he did not restrict this diagnosis to the lower classes alone. Writing to Edward Hereford in early 1850, Mill opined that progress in all fields of endeavour, politics included, 'is coming to a halt, by reason of the low intellectual and moral state of all classes: of the rich as much as of the poorer classes.' 'Great improvements in education', Mill continued, 'are the only thing to which I should look for permanent good.'⁹⁴⁴ Individual coarseness had political consequences. In 1859, whilst giving his *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, Mill contended that 'None are so illiberal, none so bigoted in their hostility to improvement, none so superstitiously attached to the stupidest and worst old forms and usages, as the uneducated.' 'None are so unscrupulous,' he continued, 'none so eager to clutch at whatever

⁹³⁸ J. Roebuck, 'National Education', in *Tait's Magazine*, II (London, 1833), pp.755–65, in which Roebuck said that one of the first duties of a reformed Parliament should be to see how "a comprehensive national, or universal education, may be established."

⁹³⁹ *CW XII*, p.145.

⁹⁴⁰ Garforth, *Educative Democracy*, p.2.

⁹⁴¹ *CW XIII*, pp.476-477.

⁹⁴² Reeves, p.110.

⁹⁴³ *CW XIII*, p.533.

⁹⁴⁴ *CW XIV*, p.45.

they have not and others have, as the uneducated in the possession of power. An uneducated mind is almost incapable of clearly conceiving the rights of others.’ Though Mill admitted that there had been a general weakening in the dread felt by property *contra* democracy in recent years, modern history demonstrated the danger posed by the universal enfranchisement of a coarse populace. ‘Recent example’, he claimed, probably in relation to Louis Napoleon’s seizure of power in France, ‘has shown that, if it [universal suffrage] subverts a constitution, it is as likely to do so in favour of despotism as of democracy.’⁹⁴⁵

It was a theme he returned to in the *Considerations*. One of his major concerns about the democratic polity was the danger posed by ‘a low grade of intelligence in the representative body’.⁹⁴⁶ Without skilled, competent citizens, from whence could effective governors be drawn? In the absence of an educated populace, society would be exposed to the sort of problems Mill thought natural to democracy (which I highlighted in a previous chapter), namely: mediocre rulers; despotic, uninformed public opinion; and class legislation. It was for this reason, Mill claimed in his *Autobiography*, that he and his wife Harriet had turned away from democracy to some extent. ‘We were now much less democrats than I had been,’ Mill remembered, ‘because so long as education continues to be so wretchedly imperfect, we dreaded the ignorance and especially the selfishness and brutality of the mass.’⁹⁴⁷ He was very clear in his *Considerations* that those without at least a basic education should not be admitted to the franchise.

⁹⁴⁵ *CW XIX*, p.327.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.448.

⁹⁴⁷ Mill, *Autobiography*, p.175.

I regard it as wholly inadmissible that any person should participate in the suffrage without being able to read, write, and, I will add, perform the common operations of arithmetic.⁹⁴⁸

On this he could not compromise. 'If society has neglected to discharge two solemn obligations,' he maintained, 'the more important and more fundamental of the two must be fulfilled first; universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement.' Education was far more important to Mill than widening political access. In fact, it was the means by which political pluralization had to proceed. He argued that the ability to hold power over others, particularly where it concerned 'the whole community,' must not 'be imparted to people who have not acquired the commonest and most essential requisites for taking care of themselves'.⁹⁴⁹ But, what else must an elementary education contain? Mill offered his thoughts willingly.

It would be eminently desirable that other things besides reading, writing, and arithmetic could be made necessary to the suffrage; that some knowledge of the conformation of the earth, its natural and political divisions, the elements of general history, and of the history and institutions of their own country, could be required from all electors.⁹⁵⁰

Ideally, Mill wanted to offer each and every individual a broad-based education, though he was sceptical about the viability of such a project.⁹⁵¹ Ryan described this tendency in Mill's

⁹⁴⁸ *CW XIX*, p.470.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.470-471.

⁹⁵¹ Mill was quick to point out that 'these kinds of knowledge, however indispensable to an intelligent use of the suffrage, are not, in this country, nor probably anywhere save in the Northern United States, accessible to the whole people, nor does there exist any trustworthy machinery for ascertaining whether they have been acquired or not.' In other words, Mill, in true Utilitarian fashion, lamented the inadequacy of the contemporary system of schooling and examination. See *CW XIX*, p.471.

thought. The Englishman's views on education were 'complex', Ryan contended, but the main point was simple. 'Since the progressiveness of the age largely depended on the progress of opinion, he was anxious to see a high level of intellectual attainment'.⁹⁵²

Mill's views on this subject changed substantially in the 13 years between his writing the *Principles* and the *Considerations*. In the former, Mill suggested an educational experience that was considerably more limited. Oddly placed, in a wide-ranging discussion on some remedies for low wages in the second book on 'Distribution', Mill argued that 'it may be asserted without scruple, that the aim of all intellectual training for the mass of the people, should be to cultivate common sense; to qualify them for forming a sound practical judgment of the circumstances by which they are surrounded.' Somewhat surprisingly, considering his declaration in 1861, Mill maintained that 'Whatever, in the intellectual department, can be superadded to this, is chiefly ornamental'.⁹⁵³ By the time he came to write his *Considerations*, Mill's commitment to education rested as much on the grounds of humanism as political utility. It was unjust to deny instruction to the multitude. 'Justice demands,' Mill declared, 'that the means of attaining these elementary acquirements should be within the reach of every person, either gratuitously, or at an expense not exceeding what the poorest, who can earn their own living, can afford.'⁹⁵⁴

Mill highlighted one final problem held out to society by a lack of popular education. Other than the horrors it implied for political management and individual justice, Mill thought it equivalent to *liberticide*. 'There cannot be a combination of circumstances more dangerous to human welfare,' he argued in the *Principles*, 'than that in which intelligence and talent are

⁹⁵² Ryan, *Mill*, p.177.

⁹⁵³ *CW II*, p.375.

⁹⁵⁴ *CW XIX*, p.470.

maintained at a high standard within a governing corporation, but starved and discouraged outside the pale. Such a system, more completely than any other, embodies the idea of despotism, by arming with intellectual superiority as an additional weapon, those who have already legal power.⁹⁵⁵ There was only one 'security', Mill thought, against this outcome: 'the diffusion of intelligence, activity, and public spirit among the governed.'⁹⁵⁶

Carlyle's understanding of the place of education within the polity was little different to that of Mill's. The Scotsman revered wisdom to an extraordinary degree. In his inaugural address to students at the University of Edinburgh, on being elected Rector, he told them: 'Great is wisdom; infinite is the value of wisdom. It cannot be exaggerated; it is the highest achievement of Man'.⁹⁵⁷ In 1840, lecturing on *The Hero as Man of Letters*, which focused on the lives of Samuel Johnson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Robert Burns, Carlyle wrote that 'Light is the one thing wanted for the world. Put wisdom in the head of the world, the world will fight its battle victoriously, and be the best world man can make it.'⁹⁵⁸ His esteem for wisdom was nothing new, nor was his thought on the subject burdened by elitism.

Carlyle thought that it was the duty of government to impart wisdom to those without it. In 1839, in writing about the problems afflicting the working-classes, Carlyle announced: 'To impart the gift of thinking to those who cannot think, and yet who could in that case think; this, one would imagine, was the first function a government had to set about discharging.'⁹⁵⁹ Only a few years later Carlyle made a similar point in *Past and Present* with even greater urgency. One 'Bill', he noted, 'lies yet unenacted, a right Education Bill'. This in itself would

⁹⁵⁵ *CW III*, p.943.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp.943-944.

⁹⁵⁷ *CE XXIX*, p.466.

⁹⁵⁸ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.145.

⁹⁵⁹ *CE XXIX*, p.192.

be 'the sure parent of innumerable wise Bills, – wise regulations, practical methods and proposals, gradually ripening towards the state of Bills'.⁹⁶⁰ Education was synonymous with Carlyle's preferred political end, the objective that underscored all of his musings on politics: order. 'To irradiate with intelligence,' Carlyle argued, 'that is to say, with order, arrangement and all blessedness, the Chaotic, Unintelligent: how, except by educating, *can* you accomplish this?'⁹⁶¹ Carlyle sought to deepen his reader's appreciation for education by demonstrating its political and social utility.

That thought, reflection, articulate utterance and understanding be awakened in these individual million heads, which are the atoms of your Chaos: there is no other way of illuminating any Chaos! The sum-total of intelligence that is found in it, determines the extent of order that is possible for your Chaos,—the feasibility and rationality of what your Chaos will dimly demand from you, and will gladly obey when proposed by you! It is an exact equation; the one accurately measures the other. – If the whole English People, during these 'twenty years of respite,' be not educated, with at least schoolmaster's educating, a tremendous responsibility, before God and men, will rest somewhere!⁹⁶²

Carlyle's experiences as a tutor and a student percolated through his mind early in his consideration of political and social questions. His notion of the contours of contemporary education was reinforced by the very same debate on national education that Mill was involved in. Responding to Mill's insistence that he read Roebuck's article on *National Education* in April 1833, Carlyle told him that he agreed in principle with the suggestions

⁹⁶⁰ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp.275-276.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.276.

⁹⁶² *Ibid*.

offered there but disputed the detail. 'Roebuck has a conviction, a true one, but alm[ost] hopelessly mechanical and narrow'. Carlyle thought Roebuck was possessed of 'a lean, perseverant, unappeasable nature', which reminded him 'somewhat of Robespierre'. This meant, Carlyle told Mill, that Roebuck 'wins respect from me but not love, almost the reverse.'⁹⁶³

Nonetheless, Carlyle was determined to be involved in a scheme whose purpose was to further education. At the beginning of June 1835 he told his mother that it was the sort of useful work of which 'my conscience greatly approves'.⁹⁶⁴ In another letter to his mother at the end of the same month, he wrote that it was the activity 'I ought perhaps to covet more than any other in the world.'⁹⁶⁵ Finally, he wrote to Mill to solicit his help in gaining a place on Roebuck's Education Committee, which was just taking shape.

You are not ignorant I think of my individual views as to that matter; my great wish to be employed in such a business; my feeling that it is almost the only business I could with perfect heartiness and any considerable appliance of faculty employ myself on here.⁹⁶⁶

Carlyle's desire to play a role in the politics of contemporary educational reform was never realized. However, this did not prevent him from writing at length on the subject.

His most extensive commentary on education can be found in an unpublished 1835 tract on *National Education*. Here, Carlyle claimed that it was 'evident to all men that Education, in this country, both as to quantity and kind, is in the miserablest condition'. It was an

⁹⁶³ Carlyle Letter Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/6/1/lt-18330418-TC-JSM-01>

⁹⁶⁴ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/8/1/lt-18350604-TC-MAC-01>

⁹⁶⁵ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/8/1/lt-18350701-TC-MAC-01>

⁹⁶⁶ Carlyle Letters Online: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/8/1/lt-18350601-TC-JSM-01>

unfortunate truism that 'generation after generation' the 'great mass of the community grows up, and works out its existence, in a semi-barbarous state'.⁹⁶⁷ These men, that is *the majority*, were consistently 'shut out from participating in the common inheritance of mankind'. Carlyle could not have been clearer in this instance. Education was not a preserve of the few, to be extended with parsimony. Rather, 'the Skill and Wisdom accumulated from the Past and existing in the Present is the sole possession of the Family of Man'. At present, though the lights of intellect lit the path, most people were blind to its rays. The sun was shining, but they could gain no enlightenment from it. 'Such a state of matters,' Carlyle maintained, 'were we not used to see it daily, would fill us with sorrow and amazement. For each untaught individual is a tragedy. *His* life passes, and will not return, and he has never lived.' A more stunting *supplice* was difficult to imagine, for educational dearth curbed more than material prosperity; it hampered the growth of the spirit itself.

To mutilate his body, to annihilate half the strength of his body, were small matter:
but his soul has never opened her eyes; on him the spiritual life never dawned, no
faculty was unfolded but animal instincts and some mechanic ingenuity as of
beavers...⁹⁶⁸

Carlyle's humanist sensibilities were offended by more than merely the size of the problem – that is, the number of people who laboured in ignorance. He could not bear the harm done to the individual. Though literally 'millions' suffered this sort of torture, he thought, their faces hid 'from us what a suffering it is for the individual'.⁹⁶⁹

⁹⁶⁷ T. Carlyle, 'National Education', *Carlyle Letters Online*:
<http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/8/1/lt-18350203-TC-NE-01>

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid.

The educational stunting produced by the lack of contemporary instruction created a political nightmare out of individual tragedy. The problem posed by an uneducated mass was more pressing than ever. These men and women were becoming political creatures and 'can no longer grope darkly along as their fathers did'. With the rise of trades and political unions, not to mention other 'blind convulsive movements', the claims of the many were bodying themselves forth. But they were an ignorant many. The mass had discarded its former leaders, its 'old guides and commanders', because it felt increasingly 'that it can trust only to its own guidance, that all other guidances mistake the griefs it labours under...and refuse any answer but coercion.' The great 'Democratic force', Carlyle argued, had arisen and the degree to which it would act in a 'wise and beneficent' or an 'unwise, false and ruinous' manner would 'depend simply on what wisdom is in the people, or what want of wisdom.'⁹⁷⁰ Thus, Carlyle placed education at the centre of the community's prospects. He reinforced this sentiment in some of his major works in the following decades.

In *Past and Present*, Carlyle claimed that a 'People's electoral methods are, in the long-run, the express image of its electoral *talent*; tending and gravitating perpetually, irresistibly, to a conformity with that: and are, at all stages, very significant of the People.'⁹⁷¹ In *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, he fulminated against the dire political consequences of allowing a class to remain ignorant. His humanistic focus remained on both the collective and the individual. 'For empires *or* individuals there is but one class of men to be trembled at; and that is the Stupid Class, the class that cannot see'. 'Stupidity,' Carlyle continued, is 'the one enemy we have in

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁷¹ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p.80.

this Universe'. The tragedy for contemporary Britain was that 'Darkness of mind, in every kind and variety, does to a really tragic extent abound'.⁹⁷²

Moreover, intellect was synonymous with value in Carlyle's opinion. Increasing individual intellect would augment individual human value accordingly. A higher level of individual human value could not fail to have positive consequences for national government. 'To secure an increased supply of Human Intellect to Downing Street,' Carlyle wrote, 'there will evidently be no quite effectual 'method' but that of increasing the supply of Human Intellect, otherwise definable as Human Worth, in society generally; increasing the supply of sacred reverence for it, of loyalty to it, and of life-and-death desire and pursuit of it, among all classes'.⁹⁷³

Returning to Carlyle's tract on *National Education*, he determined that the universal corrective to the problems posed by modern democracy was to 'have such wisdom as exists universally imparted'. In other words, but still those of Carlyle, his earnest desire was 'to have the people taught and well taught'. This was presently 'the most important task of all.'⁹⁷⁴ The choice placed before his contemporaries was clear: either wisdom or absurdity would reign in the modern world.

This new time *will* be born: the just Thought or else the malignant Absurdity must and will embody itself into Reality, for great good, or for incalculable evil; there is no other alternative.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷² CE XX, p.98.

⁹⁷³ Ibid, p.113.

⁹⁷⁴ Carlyle, 'National Education'.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

But, government was not best-placed to originate a scheme of education, Carlyle thought, because it was beset by a sea of sectarian party political squabbles. It must be at least designed by 'unofficial exertions' and, 'once matured in the community at large...doubtless an honest government would thankfully sanction it, and set resolutely about executing it.'⁹⁷⁶

Carlyle had already set out, in accordance with Mill and Tocqueville, one of the main problems of democracy: the best people did not occupy the most important governmental positions. Part of the reason for this was systemic. But, another very clear reason for this was striking in its simplicity: there was a shortage of educated people in the contemporary period. Education, as Carlyle's words demonstrated, was crucial to the community's hopes and no serious commentator thought it preferable to deny enlightenment to a particular class or person.

It is not asserted by any reasonable person, in these days, that the poor should be kept ignorant in order to be governed by the rich: of that inhuman thesis (crueller than if we proposed to keep the poor always sickly that they might be governable) the world may consider itself delivered forever.⁹⁷⁷

At the heart of Carlyle's desire to democratize and pluralize knowledge lay his 1835 essay on *National Education*, which provided the reasoning. Enlightenment had to be shared if the politics of the day were to be stable and good as opposed to revolutionary and evil. Only in developing the individual's capacities could this end be attained.

Just how individual intellect was to be improved was the final pertinent question to which Carlyle addressed himself on this issue. At first, he approached it with evident irony in order

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid.

to emphasize the comicality of the present's tragic dearth of education. Certainly, any basic instruction should teach people to read and write. In 1839, he saw that the 'four-and-twenty letters of the Alphabet are still Runic enigmas' to the poor man.⁹⁷⁸ 'The miraculous art of reading and writing,' Carlyle averred, is 'the first corner-stone of whatever foundation soever could be laid for what edifice soever, in the teaching kind.'⁹⁷⁹ He added 'arithmetic' as an essential feature of this foundation in a subsequent letter.⁹⁸⁰ Carlyle recognized the value of religious education. In his pamphlet on *National Education* he wrote as much. 'To train up the child in devout submission to the Laws whereby its unseen Author has appointed it to live; in a word, to make the child religious: this surely is the essence of Education, the spirit in which all true Education must be conducted.'⁹⁸¹ Carlyle reinforced this message in *Chartism*. 'For, in very truth,' he wrote, 'how can religion be divorced from Education?'⁹⁸²

An irreverent knowledge is no knowledge; may be a development of the logical or other handicraft faculty inward or outward; but is not culture of the soul of a man.

A knowledge that ends in barren self-worship, comparative indifference or contempt for all God's Universe except one insignificant item thereof, what is it?⁹⁸³

Despite his commitment to some sort of religious education, Carlyle's attitude to this was ambiguous. He told H.R. Forrest in 1848 that he favoured a policy 'of excluding all religious teaching but what is unsectarian'.⁹⁸⁴ Such ambiguity in regard to religion was a staple of Carlyle's work. Contradictions like this led the Victorian poet Arthur Hugh Clough to remark

⁹⁷⁸ *CE XXIX*, p.193.

⁹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁰ *Carlyle Letters Online*: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/23/1/lt-18480728-TC-HRF-01#FN1>

⁹⁸¹ Carlyle, 'National Education'.

⁹⁸² *CE XXIX*, p.195.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁴ *Carlyle Letters Online*: <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/23/1/lt-18480728-TC-HRF-01#FN1>

to Ralph Waldo Emerson that in respect of religion 'Carlyle has led us all out into the desert, and he has left us there.'⁹⁸⁵

Tocqueville was quick to recognize the political importance of education. It provided a particular service in modern societies, which could not be delivered by anything else. Initially, the Frenchman relayed the opinions on education common to many Americans he had interviewed during his time in the United States in a letter to his friend Louis de Kergorlay. 'You know how often we in France (and we are far from being alone) have wracked our brains over the desirability or danger of educating every rank in society.' This, which was a 'matter so difficult of resolution' in France, had never even crossed the minds of the Americans. 'Enlightenment, they say, is the only safeguard we have against the waywardness of the multitude.'⁹⁸⁶

Tocqueville understood the political import of his American interlocutors' protestations, for included in the final text of his *Démocratie* is a warning that echoes their sentiments. In the first volume Tocqueville emphasized the importance of education in the United States to the maintenance of its institutions. He found it difficult to overestimate the effect 'the enlightenment and habits of the Americans exercised on maintaining their political institutions'.⁹⁸⁷ Certainly, Tocqueville continued, the United States was not defined by its 'notable writers', its 'great historians' or its unrivalled poets. It did not possess such luminaries. Literature, he observed, was greeted with a kind of 'disfavour' and any 'third-rank city in Europe publishes more literary works each year than the twenty-four states of the Union taken altogether.' Despite the fact that 'new laws are made constantly', no 'great

⁹⁸⁵ Cited in S. Heffer, *High Minds: The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain* (London, 2013), p.157.

⁹⁸⁶ A. de Tocqueville, F. Brown eds., *Letters from America*, (New Haven, 2010), p.87.

⁹⁸⁷ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, pp.488-489.

writers are...found to seek out the general principles of laws.' Inventors were almost unexampled in spite of the industriousness extant within the nation. Americans, Tocqueville noted, unlike Europeans, possessed 'none of those great intellectual centres from which fire and light burst forth at the same time'.⁹⁸⁸

Despite all of this, he noted that the value to be derived from education in the modern world did not rest on its extraordinariness but, rather, on its extensiveness. The United States demonstrated this aptly. Tocqueville expressed this sentiment via a juxtaposition, which illustrated a seminal distinction between Europe and America. If the American observer 'pays attention only to the learned, he will be astonished by their small number; and if he counts the ignorant, the American people will seem to him the most enlightened on earth.' The populace inhabited an intellectual space in between 'two extremes'. It displayed neither remarkable talent nor disgraceful ignorance. 'There scientific and literary genius is as rare as ability is common, and if you do not find great writers, everyone knows how to write.' What, in aristocratic countries, had been 'the state of a few minds', in American democracy, 'seems to have been divided equally among all'.⁹⁸⁹

Tocqueville allowed that in America enlightenment was imparted unevenly. Nevertheless, basic education was evident across the continent: in its towns, cities, and even its backwoods. In the wilderness of that vast continent, where everything 'is primitive and savage', the pioneer stands tall as 'the result of eighteen centuries of efforts and experience.' He was no savage, but the product of civilization in its finest guise. 'He wears city clothing, speaks the language of the city, knows the past, is curious about the future, argues about the present'.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid, p.489.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.490.

In short, he was an engaging character with a vivacious mind. The American was a 'civilised man...who plunges into the wilderness of the New World with the Bible, an axe and some newspapers.'⁹⁹⁰

Tocqueville argued that the verve and flexibility of the mind produced by the circulation of thought in the very heart of this continental wilderness was matched by no similar movement in France.⁹⁹¹ This was exemplified by the fact that in America the word 'peasant' did not form a part of common parlance. Any notion of 'the ignorance of the first ages, the simplicity of the fields, the rusticity of the village,' was alien to the American people because it had been civilized literally for ages. Throughout the continent, Tocqueville told his readers, 'you would seek in vain for a single district that was plunged into ignorance.'⁹⁹² The extent of education present in the United States, Tocqueville concluded, offered a distinct political advantage. 'You cannot doubt', he argued, 'that in the United States the instruction of the people serves powerfully to maintain the democratic republic.'⁹⁹³

Tocqueville reprised this theme in the second volume of his treatise on democracy. Here, education is cited in relation to the doctrine of self-interest well understood, one of the central planks of Tocqueville's prescription for his era. It was a concept he found imbedded in French literary tradition. Montaigne had proposed this doctrine centuries before and, in one of the few instances where Tocqueville named his source, the sixteenth-century *litterateur* was quoted here in order to illustrate the meaning of self-interest well understood. In his *Essais*, Tocqueville noted, Montaigne had stated: 'When I would not follow the right road because of rectitude, I would follow it because I found by experience that in the end it

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.492.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹⁹² Ibid, p.491.

⁹⁹³ Ibid, p.493.

is usually the happiest and most useful path.⁹⁹⁴ This was the principle that lay at the root of the doctrine of self-interest well understood. ‘The Americans,’ Tocqueville continued, ‘take pleasure in explaining almost all the actions of their life with the aid of interest well understood’. They had demonstrated at every opportunity ‘how enlightened love of themselves leads them constantly to help each other and disposes them willingly to sacrifice for the good of the State a portion of their time and their wealth.’

Tocqueville admitted that this was not a ‘very lofty’ doctrine, but it was ‘clear and sure.’ Its utility lay in the fact that it ‘turns personal interest back against itself’, thus counteracting the force of individualism.⁹⁹⁵ ‘Each American’, Tocqueville maintained, ‘knows how to sacrifice a portion of his particular interests in order to save the rest.’⁹⁹⁶ It was a modest, effective doctrine, perfectly attuned to the age. However, it could not work in the absence of civilization; in fact, it could only exist given a high state of civilization. ‘If citizens, while becoming equal, remained ignorant and coarse,’ Tocqueville averred, ‘it is difficult to say to what stupid excess their egoism could be led, and you cannot say in advance into what shameful miseries they would plunge themselves, out of fear of sacrificing something of their well-being to the prosperity of their fellows.’ But, he continued, ‘it is enough to enlighten men in order for them to see’ the truth of this doctrine.⁹⁹⁷ If popular education was required to facilitate the triumph of interest well understood, only one course of action seemed appropriate to Tocqueville:

...enlighten them at all cost, for the century of blind devotions and instinctive virtues is already fleeing far from us, and I see the time drawing near when liberty,

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid, p.920.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.921.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.922.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid, p.923.

the public peace and the social order itself will not be able to do without enlightenment.⁹⁹⁸

Tocqueville followed this statement with a qualification. Stability within a democratic republic could be maintained only if the superior intellectual ability of a people was matched by an equally advanced cultivation of its habits and conventions. In other words, a democracy could only be sustained where ‘the instruction that enlightens the mind is not separated from the education that regulates mores.’⁹⁹⁹

The question remained: how did Tocqueville propose to enlighten the multitude? What would he have them taught? As an absolute minimum, he thought, it was necessary that ‘each citizen receives the elementary notions of human knowledge’. He was less forthcoming on what these were, but probably meant basic literary and numerical skills. It was also important, in Tocqueville’s view, that the citizen ‘learns the doctrines and the proofs of his religion’ as well as ‘the history of his country and the principal features of the Constitution that governs it.’ He had seen all of these on display in the United States or, at least, in ‘Connecticut and Massachusetts,’ which he cited specifically.¹⁰⁰⁰

The development of human capacities, then, offered a means of assuaging the political problems that beset the modern era. For Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle this was a realization of fundamental significance. Enlightenment had to be dispersed as the people *en masse* assumed a greater role in the politics of the day. In the absence of such an educational process, society would be exposed to all of the dangers that result from the triumph of ignorance over wisdom. Moreover, it is clear, for Mill and Carlyle at least, that the necessity

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.493.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid, p.490.

of education went deeper than the purely political. For both, enlightenment was equated with justice: they felt it entirely unjust to keep any individual in the dark when the light beyond the confines of the cave was so near at hand.

AN EDUCATION IN INDEPENDENCE

At this point, the concerns of Tocqueville and Mill, on the one hand, and Carlyle, on the other, diverge. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, as outlined above, were convinced of the advantages education could offer in the contemporary world. It provided a means of individual human development that would facilitate the overall improvement of the people as a whole. The outcome of this process was political stability, for Carlyle, and political liberty, for Tocqueville and Mill. These were the primary consequences. There were, of course, a host of other outcomes that have already been discussed.

However, Tocqueville and Mill identified another means of educating citizens *en masse* in the democratic world that held little charm for Carlyle. Tocqueville and Mill divined mechanisms for increasing citizens' independence that would help them to behave appropriately in the new political society that was taking shape around them. Mill's suggestions addressed the individual in both the private and public sphere; Tocqueville's proposals concerned the individual in the public sphere alone. Both were interested in fostering habits that could counteract the problems inherent in the modern world. Through these habits, Tocqueville and Mill intended to provide the mass of the people with a moral education that was conducive to securing the best possible outcomes from democracy.

‘I am still far from believing, as a great number of people in Europe do,’ Tocqueville maintained, ‘that it is sufficient to teach men to read and write to make them citizens immediately.’¹⁰⁰¹ It was simply not enough for education to be restricted to formal instruction, to the mere recognition of alphabetic characters, grammatical rules and arithmetical processes. Tocqueville thought practical education necessary to the smooth functioning of modern democracies. His considerations on the sort of instruction required were more overtly political than those of Mill. ‘I do not consider elementary knowledge as the most potent means to educate the people’. This sort of understanding merely ‘facilitates the study of liberty’, Tocqueville argued, and not what was required: ‘the art of being free.’¹⁰⁰² At a relatively early stage in his two volume work on *Démocratie* he concluded that the Americans had achieved exactly what he sought.

True enlightenment arises principally from experience, and if the Americans had not been accustomed little by little to governing themselves, the book learning that they possess would not be a great help today in succeeding to do so.¹⁰⁰³

Democrats in the United States had been prepared incrementally for the practice of their republic. They had been trained in the practicalities of administrative and political life. Tocqueville admired this civic education. The ‘best corrective’, Tocqueville wrote, ‘is to make them concern themselves with it every day and in a practical way; then it will be very necessary for them to enter into details, and the details will make them see the weak aspects of the theory.’¹⁰⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid, p.493.

¹⁰⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid, p.739.

Tocqueville thought that it was for this reason that American legislators, during the founding moments of the Constitution of the United States, had multiplied and layered political institutions throughout the country. In giving a portion of political life to every part of the nation, he argued, these men had infinitely multiplied 'for citizens the occasions to act together, and to make the citizens feel every day that they depend on each other.' This provided a means of countering individualism, on the one hand, and the claims of an overweening central government on the other. Common action was a means of maintaining independence. But, this relied on the civic education decentralization provided.

Decentralization fostered public spirit amongst people at a local level by making them coordinate in order to attain the benefits of political society. Tocqueville declared that 'when it is a matter of having the particular affairs of a district regulated by the men who live there, the same individuals are always in contact, and they are in a way forced to know each other and to please each other.'¹⁰⁰⁵ 'So', the Frenchman told his readers, 'it is by charging citizens with the administration of small affairs, much more than by giving them the government of great ones, that you interest them in the public good and make them see the need that they constantly have for each other in order to produce that good.'¹⁰⁰⁶ As a means of maintaining sociability in modern communities and thus of combatting the impetus towards alienation through individualism, local political bodies were essential.

So local liberties, which make a great number of citizens put value on the affection of their neighbours and of those nearby, constantly bring men back towards each

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid, p.891.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid, pp.891-892.

other despite the instincts that separate them, and force them to help each other.¹⁰⁰⁷

This was one of the most important lessons he drew from the United States. In order to interest people in one another in modern societies it was necessary to multiply the instances in which they will come to regard their fellow citizens. Decentralization served this end and local institutions confirmed it.

If the experience derived from decentralization and local engagement enabled the Americans to assuage the problems posed by alienation and instability in modern countries, it taught them equally the habits of independence. One other institution confirmed this disposition. 'The jury', Tocqueville argued, 'is before all else a political institution'. In fact, 'it should be considered as a mode of sovereignty of the people' that 'must be entirely rejected when you rule out the sovereignty of the people, or must be put in harmony with the other laws that establish sovereignty.'¹⁰⁰⁸ The jury offered an education in politics. It 'teaches each man not to retreat from responsibility for his own actions'. This was 'a manly disposition,' Tocqueville thought, 'without which there is no political virtue.' It inculcated in every individual a notion of 'magistracy'; 'it makes all feel that they have duties to fulfil toward society and that they enter into its government.' This, much like local institutions, 'combats individual egoism'.¹⁰⁰⁹ More than for any other reason, though, the jury was valuable for the extent to which it formed the peoples' 'judgment' and augmented their 'natural enlightenment'.¹⁰¹⁰ Awestruck, Tocqueville declaimed that:

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid, p.892.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid, pp.446-447.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid, p.448.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid.

You must consider it as a free school, always open, where each juror comes to be instructed about his rights, where he enters into daily communication with the most learned and most enlightened members of the upper classes, where the laws are taught to him in a practical way, and are put within the reach of his intelligence by the efforts of the lawyers, the advice of the judge and the very passions of the parties.¹⁰¹¹

Tocqueville attributed the 'practical intelligence and good political sense' that he had seen among the Americans to this institution in particular. He maintained that it was the single 'most effective means that a society can use for the education of the people.'¹⁰¹² In his *Souvenirs*, written two decades later, Tocqueville highlighted the difference between the institutional arrangements the Americans made for the education of the multitude and those that had been repeatedly employed in France (though this comparison was not drawn directly, clearly the American example weighed on his mind). Where the jury in America taught its democratic people to govern moderately, inculcated a notion of rights and another of duties amongst the populace, and tutored them in the peculiarities of lawful conduct, the democracy in France had received its practical instruction from a very different national organisation: the army. The 'military education' that 'most of the common people have received', supplemented by their 'experience of insurrections', had shown the French a very different route to change. 'Half of the Parisian workers', Tocqueville lamented, 'have served in our armies, and they always gladly take to arms again. Plenty of old soldiers usually take part in riots.'¹⁰¹³ This was the gulf that existed between the world's two foremost democratic

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid.

¹⁰¹² Ibid.

¹⁰¹³ Tocqueville, *Recollections*, p.137.

nations. Tocqueville's conclusion in the *Démocratie* was clear and his words in the *Souvenirs* confirmed it. 'Thus the jury, which is the most energetic means to make the people rule, is also the most effective means to teach them to rule.'¹⁰¹⁴ It was *the* essential educational institution in a modern nation.

Mill drew the same contrast that Tocqueville's works implied: French military education was the equivalent of American civic training. In *On Liberty* he noted that in 'France, a large part of the people having been engaged in military service, many of whom have held at least the rank of non-commissioned officers, there are in every popular insurrection several persons competent to take the lead, and improvise some tolerable plan of action.'¹⁰¹⁵ The contrast with the United States could not have been starker.

What the French are in military affairs, the Americans are in every kind of civil business; let them be left without a government, every body of Americans is able to improvise one, and to carry on that or any other public business with sufficient amount of intelligence, order, and decision.¹⁰¹⁶

But, how could one foster the sort of practical intelligence required to avoid the French example and embrace that of America? Individuals had to become accustomed to managing their own affairs in both the private and public realms of life. In short, it was necessary to force them to embrace independence. Land ownership and participation in public affairs facilitated this end. Landowners were subject to the many vicissitudes attendant on property ownership. The cares and anxieties such proprietors faced were far from debasing; they were mentally uplifting. Continental European experience demonstrated this and Mill went to

¹⁰¹⁴ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.450.

¹⁰¹⁵ Mill, 'On Liberty', p.112.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid.

great pains to depict to his readers the significant advantages such an arrangement of landholding offered. He presented testimony from sources on peasant proprietorship in his *Principles*, which he drew from six different settings: Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Belgium, the Channel Islands, and France. Mill channelled the political economist and historian Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi in discussing the first of these countries.

Sismondi claimed that, despite the inconsistencies of the Swiss environment, of its harsh seasons and poor soil fertility, peasant proprietors were well-fed and lived in well-constructed, spacious houses. Agriculture was in a state of constant improvement. They were secure in their landholding and could easily defend against the vagaries of commercial downturns. What is more, these peasants worked with a far-sighted ardour for the long term and were a stimulant to commerce and industry because of their relative prosperity in comparison to other types of agricultural worker. Perhaps most important of all for Mill, Sismondi noted that over and above their wellbeing, Swiss peasant proprietors were possessed of a noticeable independence of character.¹⁰¹⁷

In summarising Sismondi's evidence on Switzerland, Mill claimed that since the dawn of the nineteenth century 'and concurrently with the subdivision of many great estates...there has been a striking and rapid improvement in almost every department of agriculture, as well as in the houses, the habits, and the food of the people.'¹⁰¹⁸ Evidence from the other European countries Mill presented applied this conclusion to the continent as a whole.¹⁰¹⁹ Based on this evidence, Mill surmised that the sorts of 'anxieties' felt by the peasant proprietor were nothing other than 'the ordinary vicissitudes of more or less'. He was only troubled to ensure

¹⁰¹⁷ *CW II*, pp.254-255.

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.256.

¹⁰¹⁹ For the particulars themselves, consult *CW II*, pp.259-262 (Norway); pp.262-267 (the German states); pp.267-271 (Belgium); pp.271-273 (the Channel Islands); pp.273-277 (France).

‘that he takes his fair share of the business of life’ and ‘that he is a free human being, and not perpetually a child’.¹⁰²⁰ In short, the peasant *as* proprietor was forced to take an active interest in his own life and that of the community (the Norwegian example suggested that the energy and activity displayed by peasant landholders extended to the common interest as well as their own¹⁰²¹) and he valued this more than any other consequence.

If there is a first principle in intellectual education, it is this – that the discipline which does good to the mind is that in which the mind is active, not that in which it is passive.¹⁰²²

By itself, this made such landholding valuable as ‘an instrument of popular education.’¹⁰²³ But, apart from the boon to the moral self, which resulted from the feeling of independence landholding bestowed, peasant proprietorship offered other related advantages. ‘It is no less propitious to the moral virtues of prudence, temperance, and self-control.’ Compared to day-labourers, who were often irresponsible with their wages, peasant proprietors gravitated towards the opposite extreme; they were parsimonious and tended to economize, saving as much as possible. This made them totally independent, a fact that Mill clearly appreciated. Self-dependence, he averred, is ‘a virtue which is one of the first conditions of excellence in the human character – the stock on which if the other virtues are not grafted, they have seldom any firm root’.¹⁰²⁴ The prudence and self-control that peasant landholding promoted resulted in one final consequence. It reduced the rate of expansion in the population and thus helped to solve the Malthusian riddle.¹⁰²⁵ Mill admitted that the ‘possession of property

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid, p.281.

¹⁰²¹ Ibid, pp.259-260.

¹⁰²² Ibid, p.281.

¹⁰²³ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid, p.282.

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid, pp.283-292.

will not prevent the peasant from being coarse, selfish, and narrow-minded.’ Things such as these, he thought, ‘depend on other influences, and other kinds of instruction.’¹⁰²⁶

The education of the citizen was related to but distinct from that of the individual. Government bore responsibility for ensuring the quality of the citizenry in Mill’s view. I outlined this above. But, how could any form of government practically foster citizens of quality other than through the education system? Mill’s answer was explicit. Governments could invite individuals to participate in the management of public affairs. Understanding the management of public affairs promoted independence in the public sphere equivalent to that which could be learned in the private sphere through land ownership.

Among the foremost benefits of free government is that education of the intelligence and of the sentiments which is carried down to the very lowest ranks of the people when they are called to take a part in acts which directly affect the great interests of their country.¹⁰²⁷

Mill cited Tocqueville in support of this notion and argued that the latter had demonstrated in his great work on America that political life could become an effective tool in a citizen’s education, were it only to be organized aright. It was, in essence, a school of government. ‘For political life is indeed in America a most valuable school,’ Mill wrote, though it was true that the ‘ablest teachers’ were often excluded from national representation.¹⁰²⁸ Participation in administrative functions was equally important to a citizen’s education. Citizens ought to be encouraged to take part ‘in the details of judicial and administrative business’. This included partaking in the exercise of a ‘jury-trial, admission to municipal offices, and, above

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid, p.281.

¹⁰²⁷ *CW XIX*, pp.467-468.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid, p.468.

all, by the utmost possible publicity and liberty of discussion, whereby...the whole public, are made, to a certain extent, participants in the government, and sharers in the instruction and mental exercise derived from it.¹⁰²⁹

The last of these three, free discussion, was the most important. Mill thought that it was only through 'political discussion that the manual labourer, whose employment is routine, and whose way on life brings him in contact with no variety of impressions, circumstances, or ideas, is taught that remote causes, and events...have a most sensible effect on his personal interests'. Other than extending the purview of the individual's gaze, or perhaps by dint of it, free discussion enabled him 'to feel for and with his fellow-citizens', and it was only through this act that he could become 'a member of a great community.'¹⁰³⁰ In other words, free discussion facilitated – on a popular level – the sort of aesthetic cultivation that Mill would later set out in his inaugural address as Rector to students at the University of St. Andrews.¹⁰³¹

The effect of practical engagement with the political life of the community was to train individuals in the art of citizenship. Empathy was clearly an important constituent in this but it was merely an aspect. Mill's approach to the education of citizens was holistic and it relied on a notion of balanced personal development. This was the only efficacious means of raising humans from the status of brutes to free men. Mill expressed this pointedly in his famous endorsement of freedom, *On Liberty*. The cultivation of human character was the sole means of confronting the debilitating tendencies of democracy, and Mill was clear about the sort of character that was necessary to achieve this object. 'The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used. The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid, p.436.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid, p.469.

¹⁰³¹ See *CE XXIX*, pp.449-483.

thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it.¹⁰³² An active character was required to meet that challenges of the age head on.

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision.¹⁰³³

Independence was the prime quality necessary to leading a good and happy life; it was essential to freedom; and relied on individual development for its attainment. No doubt, Mill thought, this sort of active and engaging character could be turned to 'bad uses', but an 'indolent and impassive one' could certainly not be turned toward the good.¹⁰³⁴

Education was an essential component of modern political training, according to Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Individual development was, of course, important to personal improvement as well, but it took on a political significance in the modern democratic era that was hitherto unknown.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle perceived in education the means by which particular democratic evils could be combated. If mass mediocrity was a contingent part of democratic life in Tocqueville's view, then education could, at the very least, provide broad, if basic, instruction to the people *en masse*. This would enable them to operate the levers of government

¹⁰³² Mill, 'On Liberty', p.59.

¹⁰³³ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid.

responsibly. In other words, it would facilitate stability. This was the principal benefit Carlyle saw in widespread education and it was equally apparent to Mill.

However, Tocqueville and Mill located other political benefits in education that Carlyle did not. Individualism, Tocqueville believed, was threatened by education, as individuals – through their enlightenment – became better able to look beyond their own navels. This was a boon to freedom. Freedom, Mill thought, was a by-product of mass education, as it prevented knowledge from being hoarded by a ruling elite. Both Tocqueville and Mill believed that the sort of moral development practical engagement with political and civic institutions provided could not be replicated in the classroom. This sort of educational experience was certainly unconventional. However, the civic humanist mentality it relied on fostered desirable individual qualities that had political consequences – namely independence and, with it, freedom.

In their views on education, we can see the fundamental concerns of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle in microcosm. Tocqueville and Mill were concerned with freedom principally, Carlyle with order and stability. Education could be used to foster one or both of these.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this thesis, it is important to address two principal questions that the above discussion has raised. Firstly, the comparison of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle in this thesis has emphasised those elements of each man's thought that relate to democracy. Clearly, this is the result of the nature of the exercise that is set out in the Introduction. Nevertheless, the views that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle held on democracy were clearly suggestive of dispositions within their broader political outlook. How does the present thesis, which, as I have said, focused on their views on democracy, influence the broader understanding of the political thought of these men?

Secondly, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were significant figures in their own right in the contemporary period. They were three of the most widely read authors in contemporary Britain – as well as in continental Europe. The present thesis has attempted to illustrate the cross-border influence of continental ideas on contemporary British political thought. It has done so by comparing the views of Mill and Carlyle on democracy with those of Tocqueville. But what, if anything, is the wider significance of this comparison? Was the cross-border influence of European ideas on Mill and Carlyle isolated from the broader stream of contemporary British political discourse? Were Mill and Carlyle mediators of continental European ideas or did authors like Tocqueville exert an impact on other British political commentators in their own right?

Prior to addressing these questions, I would like to summarize the broad elements of this thesis in order to inform the wider discussion below. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were profound analysts of the modern world's turn towards democracy. However, their analysis was not purely academic: they were interested in analysing the meaning, heritage and

problems of democracy in order to find a practical means of securing the modern era and exploiting the advantages it presented.

ANALYSING DEMOCRACY

As analysts of the modern democratic world that was emerging out of the struggles of the French revolutionary period in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were second to no other commentators in the depth of their understanding. The ructions of the contemporary era forced Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle to reassess their surroundings and reinterpret the history that had created them.

Jaume argued that Tocqueville's thought was 'curious' inasmuch as in it 'past and present came together and perhaps achieved a kind of reconciliation in the consciousness, as well as the unconsciousness, of the author'.¹⁰³⁵ In it, as in that of Mill and Carlyle, past, present and future were aligned. In their respective understandings, the contemporary era was an historical moment in which the transition from the *ancien régime* to democratic society was taking place. Past and future were juxtaposed in a revolutionary present.

Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle speculated about the historical processes that had brought democracy into being. European history had progressed through distinct periods, each of which was characterized by a dominant principle. For Tocqueville and Mill, democracy was the final end towards which history had been intractably moving; for Carlyle, it was another stage in human development, but would inevitably breakdown as all others had. Despite their differing views on the finality or otherwise of modern democracy, history itself lay at its

¹⁰³⁵ L. Jaume, *Tocqueville: The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty* (Paris, 2008), p.292.

foundation. This historical perspective was a constitutive feature of the political thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle.

The conceptions Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle generated regarding the historicity of the modern democratic age impinged on their political perspectives. Not only was democracy inevitable, it was desirable in some respects. Its utility was different for each of these men, but all three of them discovered in democracy something of value.

In broad terms, it would be no misunderstanding of their political ideas to see both a *negative* and a *positive* dimension to modern democracy's value. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle saw in the rise of democracy the end of a corrupt, outmoded and indefensible organization of politics and society. Democracy, in this sense, enabled modern Europeans to enjoy freedom from the untenable tyranny of an unshakeable caste politics that pre-revolutionary France had embodied. This achievement represented an important negative freedom and one that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle could all embrace.

The positive, or constructive, dimension to modern democracy lay in different places for Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Tocqueville drew attention to the justness of equality and described its consequences. Mill extolled the liberty it promoted, which enabled individual freedom of expression and personal development. Carlyle championed the freedom it provided for each to work diligently in order to attain the maximum his ability allowed for.

The positive features of democracy identified by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle cannot be erased by the problems each recognized in its triumph. Nonetheless, the democratic age was problematic for a variety of reasons. The criticisms each levelled at democracy were launched from the vantage point of concern for the individual for the most part. It was not the development or otherwise of the collective, *per se*, that attracted their gaze, but the agency,

sovereignty and growth of the individual. Of course, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle recognized that the overall state of the social body was important, but that was subordinate to their fear of the consequences democracy entailed for the individual. This reflects, in broad measure, the humanism implicit in their respective outlooks and approaches to politics.

It was, therefore, first and foremost, as analysts of the modern democratic world that Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle were united. Their political thought was built atop a recognition of the unavoidable existence of democracy in the contemporary era. This united them and made them stand out from their contemporaries. Others, like Guizot, were principally interested in the French Revolution and its historical causes. Still others, like Bentham, were committed to the reform of institutions along democratic lines, though their starting position did not recognize in the modern world the necessary victory of democracy. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, on the other hand, began their reflections on the basis of an extant democratic age and progressed from that point.

TEMPERING DEMOCRACY

For all of their insightful analysis, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle did not stop at analysing democracy, its causes and its challenges. They were ambitious enough to attempt to divine solutions that could be applied to the problems democracy posed. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle each looked to the past for guidance in the present. Tocqueville championed the values of aristocracy and attempted to transpose what he thought positive and useful in them onto the tapestry of democratic modernity. Mill, equally imbued with the literal meaning of *aristocracy* – the rule of the best – attempted to engineer a democratic political settlement that would facilitate the rise of those most able to govern in the modern world. Carlyle, for

his part, was a keen advocate of the same doctrine as Mill: he was a firm proponent of meritocracy. Certainly, he saw echoes of this in the past and eagerly demonstrated to his readers their value.

The principal difference between Carlyle, on the one hand, and Mill and Tocqueville, on the other, was that Carlyle saw no need to preserve a tumultuous, inefficient, outdated Parliament in the modern era where Mill and Tocqueville wanted to preserve and extend its importance. Carlyle thought that the press was the primary means of mass political engagement in the democratic world; representative bodies merely contained and promoted a multitude of vested interests. Mill and Tocqueville saw representative assemblies, as well as the mechanisms that determined their composition, as the principal means of mass political engagement in democratic countries. The goods that this offered could not be secured via another route.

Carlyle was primarily interested in regaining stability in the modern era where Tocqueville and Mill were eager to ensure the maintenance of freedom. Nowhere can these concerns be seen more clearly than in their differing conceptions of the state and the sort of leaders that were appropriate for the modern democratic world. Carlyle promoted an increasingly active state where Tocqueville and Mill sought to fragment its power. Carlyle wanted to develop a clear hierarchy that reflected the talents of those who aspired to govern. Mill, on the other hand, though elitist in many respects, possessed an attitude to leadership that can be described best as the doctrine of *first among equals*. Tocqueville's concept of leadership in democratic society was similar to that of Mill. His natural aristocrats emanated from the democratic body and were not placed in a defined hierarchy in the manner of Carlyle's Captains of Industry.

Material changes in the state of politics or the organization of society, though, could do only so much. Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle sought to supplement institutional and societal reform with individual moral improvement. This was two-sided. Education offered one avenue where religion presented another.

Education was a means by which each and every human being could be readied for modern democracy. The thoughts of Tocqueville and Mill extended further than those of Carlyle. They suggested that it was as important to train the individual in the art of citizenship as it was to make him a rational creature. Conversely, Carlyle believed that it was sufficient to give the individual a basic education in order for him to be able understand the world and thus contribute to its stability. Tocqueville and Mill wanted to ensure that the individual could actively pursue politics and, through such engagement, learn the art of being free. Nowhere better can the humanist tendencies inherent in the thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle be seen than in their desire to ensure the intellectual development of the individual. Carlyle's humanism, though, was more Christian; Tocqueville's and Mill's, civic.

The political thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle was not ontologically one-dimensional. That is to say, it was not concerned solely with one sphere of human being. This should be apparent already from what has been discussed. They were concerned for both the materiality of politics and the political implications of immaterial – intellectual, in the case already discussed – development. But, the political ontology of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle extended further, into the transcendental realm of human existence. A viable political settlement in the modern democratic world, Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle thought, had to satisfy each of these realms.

It is for this reason that religion and its utility was accorded a place in politics by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. However, this was perceived differently by each of them. Carlyle saw its principal social utility in its ability to regiment morality and order the social world through the inculcation of a notion of duty and virtuous behaviour. Carlyle thought that religion, in this sense, was one of the foundations of progress. Tocqueville and Mill approached religion's utility in a similar fashion, though in a manner far less pronounced. Certainly, religion could and had formerly provided the basis of a common morality that was useful for the maintenance of social order. However, it was at least as useful in maintaining sociability and encouraging an interest in the wellbeing of others. In this sense, religion promoted liberty because it encouraged interaction with the social body and individual development.

UNDERSTANDING TOCQUEVILLE, MILL AND CARLYLE

Incredibly diverse interpretations have arisen regarding the political thought of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle. Tocqueville's political thought has been the subject of a great deal of scrutiny in recent years. His work has been claimed by different political camps, which seems to confirm rather than deny Tocqueville's stated intention at the conclusion of the 'Introduction' to his *Démocratie*. He was, he claimed, uninterested in furthering the agenda of any political party.¹⁰³⁶ However, this has led to very real confusion about his position on the political spectrum. Was Tocqueville a liberal, democrat, or a conservative? Could it be that he managed to elide these distinctions and alloy what was best in all three of these positions? Lucien Jaume claimed that there has been and remains 'a Tocqueville enigma'.¹⁰³⁷ At times, Jaume asserted, Tocqueville was clearly in favour of democracy; at others, he found its

¹⁰³⁶ Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, p.32.

¹⁰³⁷ Jaume, *Tocqueville*, p.1.

consequences eminently worrying and was unhesitating in his criticism of it.¹⁰³⁸ ‘The problem is’, Sanford Lakoff contended, ‘that Tocqueville does not fit neatly into the conventional categories.’¹⁰³⁹ One possibility, according to Lakoff, can be definitively ruled out: Tocqueville was never for a single second a socialist.¹⁰⁴⁰ Lakoff placed Tocqueville alongside Edmund Burke as the progenitor of liberal conservatism.¹⁰⁴¹

Judith Shklar understood Tocqueville as a cautious, though upbeat, liberal.¹⁰⁴² Roger Boesche, on the other hand, thought the Frenchman a ‘strange liberal’, but a liberal nonetheless.¹⁰⁴³ Jaume, along with Kahan, suggested that Tocqueville approached democracy from the perspective of an aristocratic liberal.¹⁰⁴⁴ Annelien De Dijn asserted much the same. She found a certain ‘royalist bequest’ in Tocqueville’s writings that was a remnant of pre-1830 French society.¹⁰⁴⁵

Jean-Patrice Lacam saw a prominent monarchism in Tocqueville’s thought, particularly as it related to France. In his words, Tocqueville ‘dreamed of a constitutional monarchy associated to a parliamentary regime’ holding power in France.¹⁰⁴⁶ Sheldon Wolin offered the strongest argument in favour of this view in his assessment of Tocqueville’s political thought. He insisted that the Frenchman was ‘engaged in a lifelong task of retrieving a receding

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid, p.2.

¹⁰³⁹ S. Lakoff, ‘Tocqueville, Burke, and the Origins of Liberal Conservatism’, in *The Review of Politics* Vol. 60, No. 3 (Summer, 1998), p.437.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Lakoff, ‘Tocqueville, Burke, and the Origins of Liberal Conservatism’, p.437.

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid, pp.460-464.

¹⁰⁴² J. N. Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton, 1969), p.226.

¹⁰⁴³ R. Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York, 1987).

¹⁰⁴⁴ See Jaume, *Tocqueville and Kahan, Aristocratic Liberalism*.

¹⁰⁴⁵ A. de Dijn, ‘ARISTOCRATIC LIBERALISM IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE’, in *The Historical Journal*, 48, 3 (2005), p.680.

¹⁰⁴⁶ J.-P. Lacam, ‘Tocqueville, un monarchiste au secours de la République’, in *La revue Tocqueville*, Vol.30, No.1, 2009, p.186.

aristocratic past in order to counteract the new forms of despotism'.¹⁰⁴⁷ Subsequently, Seymour Drescher challenged this view of Tocqueville, asserting that a careful analysis of the aristocrat's works finds it to be unsustainable.¹⁰⁴⁸

Such claims suggest the existence of a conservatism in Tocqueville's thought that does not sit easily with his endorsement of American democracy. Tzvetan Todorov concluded that Tocqueville was primarily a conservative and, although he never gave way to such an urge, he was 'tempted by the return to aristocratic society'.¹⁰⁴⁹ Bruce Frohnen arrived at a very similar conclusion.¹⁰⁵⁰ These were the claims against which Mill defended Tocqueville in his review of the second volume of the *Démocratie*. Phrases such as the 'tyranny of the majority' had been adapted to the 'Conservative dialect,' Mill told his readers, 'and trumpeted by Sir Robert Peel in his Tamworth oration', in which he had urged the perusal of Tocqueville's book.¹⁰⁵¹ But, Mill was in no doubt. Tocqueville's theories were 'of an impartiality without example' and, what is more, his 'practical conclusions lean towards Radicalism'.¹⁰⁵² This was Mill's assessment and it has been reinforced by modern analysts like Hugh Brogan, who has asserted Tocqueville's status as the prophet of democracy.¹⁰⁵³

In the opinion of the present author, Tocqueville's political thought has been most persuasively understood by Philippe Nemo. Recently, Nemo placed Tocqueville in a similar

¹⁰⁴⁷ S.S. Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, 2001), p.9.

¹⁰⁴⁸ S. Drescher, 'Who Needs *Ancienneté*: Tocqueville on Aristocracy and Modernity', in *History of Political Thought*, Vol.XXIV, No.4 (Winter, 2003).

¹⁰⁴⁹ Todorov, *Imperfect Garden*, p.19. R. Kirk thought of Tocqueville in a similar vein in his work on *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Eliot Seventh Revised Edition* (Washington, DC, 2001), pp.204-216.

¹⁰⁵⁰ B. Frohnen, *Virtue, and the Promise of Conservatism: The Legacy of Burke and Tocqueville* (Lawrence, KS, 1993), p.9.

¹⁰⁵¹ *CW XVIII*, p.156.

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵³ Brogan, *Tocqueville*.

bracket to that which Kahan had earlier situated him: aristocratic liberalism.¹⁰⁵⁴ However, Nemo drew different conclusions to Kahan about the implications of this location for Tocqueville's overall political position, which, in my view, are supported by what has been set out above regarding Tocqueville's views on democracy. Nemo perceived in Tocqueville's aristocratic liberalism a current of thought that was fundamentally deleterious to democracy. When considered in the context of Tocqueville's opinion of the scale of the challenges presented by democracy and the solutions he offered to these problems, Nemo's view has considerable force. Democracy was a new form of leviathan in Tocqueville's view, not a release from it.

In the final analysis, Tocqueville struggled to outgrow the influences of his youth, which I set out in the Introduction above. These influences were long-lasting and gave him a natural disdain for democracy that became more pronounced as the experience of his American journey gradually receded from memory. What remained was a conservatism that feared democracy and its consequences for a still revolutionary France allied to a liberal endorsement of the sanctity of the law, the necessity of popular consent, religious toleration and limited government. In the most reductive terms, Tocqueville's liberal conservatism was the product of a clash between his aristocratic heritage and the democratic bequest of the French Revolution.

Mill's political thought and its reputation has been the subject of equally contentious treatment. Catherine Audard recently asked a pressing question: 'Pourquoi lire John Stuart Mill aujourd'hui?'¹⁰⁵⁵ Indeed, this question originated in the immediate aftermath of Mill's

¹⁰⁵⁴ P. Nemo, *Histoire des idées politiques aux temps modernes et contemporains* (Paris, 2013), pp.1105-1152.

¹⁰⁵⁵ C. Audard, 'John Stuart Mill Aujourd'hui', in *La Revue Tocqueville*, Vol.33, No.1, 2012, p.5.

death. Despite widespread recognition as a towering presence at the centre of mid-Victorian intellectual life, *post-mortem*, it seemed as if Mill's time, along with his opinions, had passed.¹⁰⁵⁶ This neglect continued throughout much of the twentieth century, in which Mill seemed irrelevant. His ideas were obscured by the ideological struggle between Western models of capitalism and Eastern state socialism.¹⁰⁵⁷

However, his re-emergence in the latter part of the twentieth-century was emphatic. As with Tocqueville the context was all-important. As the East/West divide collapsed issues associated with democratic capitalism came into view. Renewed interest in Mill led to diverse opinions about his political philosophy. Some claimed him for liberalism *tout court* whilst others presented an image of his work that bordered on totalitarianism.¹⁰⁵⁸ Still other commentators have seen in his ideas an Athenian turn that pointed in the direction of liberal democracy.¹⁰⁵⁹

Skorupski saw in Mill's work a liberal naturalism.¹⁰⁶⁰ Jonathan Riley decried those scholars who perceived in Mill's writings a justification of oligarchy, elitism or utopianism.¹⁰⁶¹ But, was he, as Gregory Claeys thinks, a paternalist?¹⁰⁶² Ryan rejected the idea out of hand.¹⁰⁶³ Many, like Reeves, have made great claims for his irrepressible democratic radicalism.¹⁰⁶⁴ In fact, at

¹⁰⁵⁶ G. Varouxakis & P. Kelly, 'John Stuart Mill's Thought and Legacy: A Timely Reappraisal', in G. Varouxakis and P. Kelly eds., *John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence: The Saint of Rationalism* (London, 2010), p.2.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Reeves, *Mill*, pp.7-8.

¹⁰⁵⁸ For the former, see W. Donner, *The Liberal Self: John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy* (New York, 1991). For the latter: M. Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1963) and J. Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (Princeton, 1999).

¹⁰⁵⁹ See J. Riley, 'Mill's Neo-Athenian Model of Liberal Democracy', in N. Urbinati and A. Zakaras eds., *J.S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2007), p.223.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Skorupski, 'Introduction', *Cambridge Companion*, pp.1-30.

¹⁰⁶¹ Riley, 'Mill's Neo-Athenian Model', p.221.

¹⁰⁶² G. Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism* (London, 2013).

¹⁰⁶³ 'Mill', Ryan states, 'is much more aggressively anti-paternalist than most of his successors'. See A. Ryan, *J.S. Mill* (London, 1974), p.146.

¹⁰⁶⁴ See, for example, Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy*.

one time or another, Mill has been claimed by representatives of ideologies as far apart as ethical socialism and *laissez-faire* libertarianism, not to mention every major British political party.¹⁰⁶⁵ Few accepted Mill's opinion that he remained a utilitarian, if in a different form.¹⁰⁶⁶

Mill shared with Tocqueville a number of important liberal concerns that mark him out, in the view of the present author, as a nineteenth-century liberal. Like Tocqueville, Mill was fundamentally committed to principally liberal ends: limited government; the rule of law; toleration, religious or otherwise; popular consent of government; and individual liberty.¹⁰⁶⁷

However, the question remains: what shade of liberalism were Mill's political ideas coloured by? In this, his early influences were crucial. Mill embraced equality of conditions where Tocqueville only recognized their onset; Mill campaigned for democracy where Tocqueville merely charted its rise and enunciated its consequences; and Mill attempted to endow democracy with a political culture that enhanced it where Tocqueville attempted little more than to chart a course that would enable his contemporaries to contain democracy's undesirable effects. This contrast is crucial to our understanding of Mill's wider ideological position. Mill's liberalism was democratic where Tocqueville's was aristocratic and this owed

¹⁰⁶⁵ Reeves, *Mill*, p.8.

¹⁰⁶⁶ In an 1833 letter, Carlyle asked Mill if he could tell him anything about the rising classical scholar George Grote. Mill's response is revealing in as much as it illustrates the fact that even after his mental crisis he still considered himself to be a utilitarian. 'I happen to be able to tell you more about him', Mill told Carlyle in relation to Grote, 'than almost any one, having been intimate with him almost from my boyhood, though less so than formerly in proportion as I have diverged from his opinions: he is a Utilitarian; in one sense I am so too, but *he* is so in rather a narrow sense; has therefore a belief, a firm one, in *him* most deep and conscientious, for which chiefly he lives and for which he would die.' See *CW XII*, p.170. John Robson took this assertion seriously. He relates all of Mill's political pronouncements to the criterion of utility. This reading of Mill is particularly prevalent in the seventh chapter – 'Mill's Views on Society and Politics' – of Robson's excellent work on *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto, 1969), pp.182-271. Jonathan Riley also argued in favour of Mill's Utilitarian approach, but gave it a liberal hew. See J. Riley, *Liberal Utilitarianism: Social Choice Theory and J.S. Mill's Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988).

¹⁰⁶⁷ J. Jennings, 'Early Nineteenth-Century Liberalism', in G. Klosko eds., *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 2011), p.331.

much to the influence of his youthful Utilitarianism, which continued to frame his thought – even in later life.

Where Tocqueville and Mill presented scholars with classificatory challenges, Carlyle offered a nightmare of this sort. The ambiguity surrounding the Scotsman's ideas on politics has resulted in a number of competing interpretations with regard to his ideological outlook. He has been accorded a variety of different, often contradictory labels, none of which adequately describe his thought.

An anonymous obituary written in the *Saturday Review*, for example, claimed that Carlyle had for a long time been a communist, though his political sympathies had 'become less and less revolutionary as he grew older.'¹⁰⁶⁸ Modern scholars, such as Claeys and Ryan, restated Carlyle's socialist leanings, labelling him – along with John Ruskin – an example of nineteenth-century *feudal socialism*.¹⁰⁶⁹ E.G.M. Hamilton ascribed to Carlyle the origins of the welfare state whilst Victor Basch claimed Carlyle was in favour of democratic liberty.¹⁰⁷⁰ An unknown reviewer of Carlyle's tract on *Chartism* argued that 'Mr. Carlyle's dogmas and opinions...seem those of a philosophic Ultra-Radical of a new type'. According to this reviewer, Carlyle was 'a Tory-Radical' who promoted 'a kind of Utopian Toryism'.¹⁰⁷¹

¹⁰⁶⁸ 'Obituary', *Saturday Review* (February, 1881), in J.P. Seigel eds., *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1971), p.469.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See G. Claeys, 'Neo-Marxian Socialism 1815-1914', in G. Stedman Jones & G. Claeys eds., *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), p.542 and A. Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought From Herodotus to the Present* (London, 2012), p.883.

¹⁰⁷⁰ E.G.M. Hamilton, *Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1926) & V.G. Basch, *Carlyle l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris, 1938), pp.271-272.

¹⁰⁷¹ This reviewer went even further. Carlyle's political theory was 'a kind of heroic Toryism, or intellectual and philosophic Feudalism...a system in which Heaven, the universal bestower, is the alone superior; and men of genius and goodness, the philosophers and the gifted, are the chiefs and chieftains, the leaders and ministers.' See 'Unsigned Review, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*', in Seigel eds., *Carlyle*, pp.164-165. Emerson highlighted Carlyle's radical inclinations in his review of *Past and Present*, though he also drew attention to the Scotsman's subtlety. 'Here', Emerson enthused, 'is a book as full of treason as an egg is full of meat, and every lordship and worship and high form and ceremony of English conservatism tossed like a football into the air, and kept in the air with merciless kicks and rebounds, and yet not a word is punishable by statute.' See Emerson, 'Unsigned

H.J.C. Grierson thought Carlyle a 'sansculotist'¹⁰⁷² whilst D.B. Coffey understood him as having been a bourgeois revolutionary.¹⁰⁷³ Eric Bentley attributes to Carlyle the position of aristocratic radicalism.¹⁰⁷⁴ Some thought Carlyle a bastion of traditional conservatism whilst others attributed to him a Romantic conservative inclination.¹⁰⁷⁵ H.S. Jones highlighted the problematic nature of claiming Carlyle for conservatism at all and suggested that he could be best understood as a one of two 'philosophical idealists' in contemporary Britain, the other being Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹⁰⁷⁶ After all, Chris Vanden Bossche noted, Carlyle was a man who sympathized with the Puritans of the English Revolution of 1640 and the French revolutionaries of 1789, both of whom 'committed regicide, the symbolic destruction of monarchy and the established order.'¹⁰⁷⁷ He was also the man who proposed a litany of heroes the vast majority of whom had either challenged established authority overtly or criticized it covertly.¹⁰⁷⁸ Hardly the credentials of an unabashed conservative.

Review', p.222. Joseph Mazzini, the liberal leader of the Young Italy Movement, perceived in Carlyle a similar radicalism as was evident to Emerson. Mazzini thought that he knew 'no English writer who has during the last ten years so vigorously attacked the half-gothic, half-pagan edifice which still imprisons the free flight of the spirit – no one who has thrown among a public much addicted to routine and formalism, so many bold negations, so many religious and social views, novel and contrary to all existing ones'. See J. Mazzini, 'On the Genius and Tendency of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle', in Seigel eds., *Carlyle*, p.252.

¹⁰⁷² H.J.C. Grierson, *Carlyle and Hitler* (Cambridge, 1933), p.11.

¹⁰⁷³ D.B. Coffey, *Saint Simonism in the Radicalism of Thomas Carlyle* (Austin, Tex., 1931).

¹⁰⁷⁴ E. Bentley, *A Century of Hero-Worship: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche* (Boston, 1957), pp.73-77. William Thomson held a similar position. In his highly critical review of Carlyle's *On Heroes*, Thomson held that the only trait common to all of the heroes identified by Carlyle was a 'radical pugnacity.' 'True heroism,' Thomson wrote of Carlyle's view, 'is a nearer relation to chartism, and corn-law-leaguerism, than most persons suspect.' Furthermore, Carlyle's radicalism was apparently within the contours of a well-established line of figures. Ordinarily, his 'Radicalism' had been 'made conceivable to most minds, either in the shape of the figures of Hume, the poetry of Wakley, or the sordid vulgarities of Corn-law Leaguers, or the torch-light meetings and broad pikeheads of Frost and O'Connor'. See W. Thomson, 'an unsigned review, *Christian Remembrancer*', in Seigel eds., *Carlyle*, p.185.

¹⁰⁷⁵ E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, 1945) purported Carlyle's conservative credentials. M. Löwy & R. Sayre, *Romanticism Against The Tide Of Modernity* (London, 2001), pp.90-91 also emphasized Carlyle's Romantic Conservatism.

¹⁰⁷⁶ H.S. Jones, *Victorian Political Thought* (London, 2000), p.20. H. Taine initiated this line of reasoning during Carlyle's lifetime in his little known study *L'Idéalisme Anglais: Etude sur Carlyle* (Paris, 1864).

¹⁰⁷⁷ Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p.12.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Indeed, Carlyle's *Oh Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* offers the reader heroic men such as Mahomet, Martin Luther and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, not to mention Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon Bonaparte. These men were hardly conservative stalwarts. Carlyle's admiration of heroic radicals reached a crescendo in

The comparative neglect of Carlyle's political thought in recent years is related less to its inconsistency or plasticity and more to the totalitarian implications many modern commentators have found latent in it. Jonathan Mendilow suggested Carlyle's political thought was a unique example of 'catch-all extremism'.¹⁰⁷⁹ Hugh Trevor-Roper referred to Carlyle's Nazi pedigree.¹⁰⁸⁰ Bertrand Russell situated him in an intellectual trajectory running from Fichte, through Byron, to Nietzsche and into Hitler.¹⁰⁸¹ This association continued the process of reputational assassination of Carlyle that Simon Heffer identified in his biography of the Scotsman.¹⁰⁸² John Rosenberg asserted that such a perception of Carlyle's thought represents nothing other than 'guilt by a-historical association.'¹⁰⁸³ Ernst Cassirer maintained that this charge against Carlyle amounted to the utter destruction of 'all the rules of historical objectivity.'¹⁰⁸⁴ Michael Goldberg agreed with Cassirer's sentiments.¹⁰⁸⁵ Recently, the Nazi stain on Carlyle's writings has been challenged by Jonathan McCollum, who claimed that though the Nazis attempted to assert the existence of a relationship between the Scotsman's thought and their own they ultimately failed and this failure was recognized by Nazi intellectuals.¹⁰⁸⁶

The neglect that Carlyle's works have laboured under as a result of the Nazi association is unwarranted. He had much to say on the politics of his day and a very real contribution to

his elegy to Cromwell, which was released in 1845. In this work, Carlyle's classical influences were clear. He referred to it as his '*Cromwelliad*' and compared it directly to the Greeks' '*Iliad*'. See *CE VI*, p.5.

¹⁰⁷⁹ J. Mendilow, 'The Political Philosophy of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): Towards a Theory of Catch-All Extremism', in J.A. Hall eds., *Rediscoveries* (Oxford, 1986).

¹⁰⁸⁰ H. Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment* (London, 2010), p.242.

¹⁰⁸¹ B. Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London, 1946), p.667

¹⁰⁸² Heffer, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.19.

¹⁰⁸³ J. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p.115.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Cassirer, *Myth of the State*, p.216.

¹⁰⁸⁵ M.K. Goldberg, 'Introduction', in T. Carlyle, *On heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History* (Berkeley, 1993), pp.lxxii-lxxvi

¹⁰⁸⁶ J. McCollum, 'The Nazi Appropriation of Thomas Carlyle: Or How *Frederick* Wound Up in the Bunker', in Kerry & Hill eds., *Thomas Carlyle Resartus*, pp.187-203.

make to the political thought of his era. Recent works by Morrow, Paul E. Kerry, and Marylu Hill have begun to redress the balance with regard to Carlyle's political thought, and have yielded some interesting results.¹⁰⁸⁷ Morrow, in his recent biography, alluded to Carlyle's 'progressive and radical inclinations'.¹⁰⁸⁸ Kerry and Hill contended that we can only begin to understand Carlyle's political pronouncements properly if we appreciate what he valued. 'His concern,' in their view, was 'not to create a blueprint for a fully articulated system of government, but instead to ask what is the best way to bring people together.'¹⁰⁸⁹

In the view of the present author, Carlyle's was a conservative voice in the contemporary period, but a conservative voice full of radicalism. Boyd Hilton describes contemporary British conservatism in dualistic terms. High Tories, Hilton claims, required constant government interference in the management of society and supported legislative measures to control particular industries or other concerns.¹⁰⁹⁰ Liberal Tories, on the other hand, wanted the state to operate neutrally but, nonetheless, supported a certain variety of moral paternalism, with, for example, legislation to encourage church-building and discourage vagrancy.¹⁰⁹¹ Carlyle could not have supported the sort of state-led moral activism championed by Liberal Tories, nor could he have condoned a broadly neutral state. Could Carlyle be described as having been a High Tory? High Tories were too inflexible, too committed to the contemporary social and political order to be attractive to Carlyle's reforming temperament. Certainly, the

¹⁰⁸⁷ See, for example, John Morrow's various works on Carlyle: *Thomas Carlyle* (London, 2006); 'Thomas Carlyle: Political Theory and the Problem of Modernity' in Mark Francis and John Morrow eds., *A History of English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1994); and J. Morrow, 'THOMAS CARLYLE, 'YOUNGIRELAND' AND THE 'CONDITION OF IRELAND QUESTION', in *The Historical Journal*, 51, 3 (2008), pp. 643–667.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.34.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Kerry & Hill, 'Introduction', in Kerry and Hill eds., *Thomas Carlyle Resartus*, p.15.

¹⁰⁹⁰ B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2008), pp.316-323.

¹⁰⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Scotsman would have supported the High Tories' legislative activism, but not their desire to maintain society in its contemporary mould.

Carlyle's conservatism was radical and abrogating as much as it was preservative. This seems contradictory. Morrow resolved this apparent incongruity in a recent contribution on Carlyle's thought. Carlyle's focus on the institutions and values of the past, Morrow claimed, 'was not a symptom of nostalgia, far less of reaction'. Rather, he continued, 'it reflected Carlyle's search for images from the past that were both inspiring and salutary because they gave vivid expression to universally significant ideas that were of particular importance in light of the social, political and spiritual crisis facing his contemporaries.'¹⁰⁹²

This is reflected in his views on modern democracy. Carlyle accepted the modern world as it was; in fact, as I have shown, he took great pains to understand how democracy had arisen and this led him to conclude that it was inexorable. For this reason, he did not desire a return to a lost past. However, Carlyle tempered his acceptance of the modern democratic world with an attempt to create a political culture that emphasised order, hierarchy, religiosity and rationality, which were universal to any political or social system in his view. Like Tocqueville and Mill, Carlyle's perspective owed much to his youthful influences. The contradictions in his political outlook, as Vanden Bossche recognized, resulted from the fact that the Scotsman was the heir to two traditions of reform – that of Protestantism and that of Scottish scepticism, which led him in contrary directions.¹⁰⁹³

The various lenses through which Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle have been interpreted – except, I would suggest, Carlyle's Nazi association – have uncovered aspects of their political

¹⁰⁹² Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, p.67.

¹⁰⁹³ C.R. Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Ohio, 1991), p.3.

thought and personal disposition that are important to a comprehensive understanding of their analysis of the modern democratic world. Some are particularly valuable inasmuch as they demonstrate the competing influences that weighed on the ideas these three men advocated.

Studies like those of Kahan, Rosen and Vanden Bossche showed readers a framework of competing ideas that percolated through the minds of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle and settled, finally, into a multi-layered, though still porous, sedimentary bedrock. Others, like those of Wolin, Cowling and Grierson revealed leanings in the works of Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle, but did not offer, in the view of the present author, persuasive explanations of their thought in all its diversity.

The present study of the understandings of democracy offered by Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle is more in line with those of Kahan, Rosen and Vanden Bossche than it is with those of Wolin, Cowling and Grierson. I have attempted throughout this thesis to widen the aperture of the lens applied by the former triumvirate and, in so doing, restrict the tendency present in the latter to understand Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle through a narrow political intention or perspective.

TOCQUEVILLE, MILL AND CARLYLE AND BRITISH POLITICAL THOUGHT

In this final section of the conclusion, I want to address what I believe the comparison between Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle tells us about contemporary British political discourse in relation to democracy. Clearly, it demonstrates that two of the most significant British political and social commentators benefitted from an engagement with European intellectual

currents. These currents helped to shape their understanding of democracy, which was subsequently shared with contemporaries through the many works Mill and Carlyle wrote.

The engagement of Mill and Carlyle with the political ideas of European thinkers, such as Tocqueville, was indicative of a wider trend. Other British political thinkers, subsequent to Mill and Carlyle, engaged with European political thought on the subject of democracy. The notions of democracy generated by political commentators throughout the course of the Victorian era were not shaped substantially by 'local circumstances', as Innes and Philp recently claimed, but by an expansive engagement with wider European discourses, which were very often accessed through the work of Tocqueville.¹⁰⁹⁴ Two examples of later political thinkers show how limited the impact of local events, like the Reform Act or Chartism, were in the promulgation of democratic thought in mid- to late-nineteenth century liberal and conservative circles.

James Bryce and Matthew Arnold were born a generation after Tocqueville, Mill and Carlyle and held different views about democracy, the democratic state and democratic man. And yet, their views on democracy bear the hallmarks of the sort of sophistication that European analysts like Tocqueville introduced into the reflections of British political commentators like Mill and Carlyle. The ideas of Bryce and Arnold on democracy do not, however, bear the imprint of local political events in any significant way.

Bryce's 1867 essay on *The Historical Aspect of Democracy* illustrates the primacy of continental European notions of democracy and its development. The opening lines of the essay cite a passage from Tocqueville's *Démocratie*. The quotation is followed by effusive praise of the Frenchman: Tocqueville is described as 'the founder of modern political

¹⁰⁹⁴ Innes & Philp, 'Introduction', *Re-Imagining Democracy*, p.7.

science'.¹⁰⁹⁵ Bryce makes use of an historical analysis remarkably similar to Tocqueville's in order to demonstrate the inapplicability of the examples of ancient Greece and Rome to modern conceptions of democracy.¹⁰⁹⁶ He defends Tocqueville's historical analysis of democracy from the charge of fatalism, a common criticism of the Frenchman's views.¹⁰⁹⁷ Bryce utilizes Tocqueville's teachings on the democratic history of France. He notes that 'France is a memorable and terrible example of political ruin. But the moral which her history teaches is, as De Tocqueville has so convincingly proved, not the evils of democracy, but the evils of a democratic state of society without a democratic government'.¹⁰⁹⁸ Bryce goes even further in asserting that the history of democracy is but the history of Christianity extended into the political sphere – an idea that was prevalent amongst French intellectuals of Tocqueville's era, including Tocqueville himself.¹⁰⁹⁹ 'Democracy in its true sense', Bryce argues, 'is the product of Christianity, whose principle, asserted from the first and asserted until now, has been the spiritual equality of all men before God.'¹¹⁰⁰

In his essay, Bryce presents a clear argument for democratic reform – the failure to enact which was becoming dangerous. He states that 'If there be anything which history declares to be dangerous, it is the failure to recognise a new phase of political growth'.¹¹⁰¹ Democracy was that new phase of political growth and, in his view, it required recognition. Bryce's understanding of democracy, its meaning, its history, its relation to Christianity and the signal event of the modern world – the French Revolution – was mediated through Tocqueville and, by extension, continental European political thought on democracy. Local British events

¹⁰⁹⁵ J. Bryce, 'The Historical Aspect of Democracy', in *Essays on Reform* (London, 1867), p.239.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Bryce, 'Historical Aspect' pp.242-258.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.272.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.258.

¹⁰⁹⁹ *Ibid*, pp.273-275.

¹¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.273.

¹¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.277.

counted for little in Bryce's understanding of what it meant to be democratic in the modern world.¹¹⁰²

Liberal Anglicans, like Matthew Arnold, were more ambivalent than Bryce about democracy and the prospects of a democratic world. And yet, in an 1861 essay on *Democracy* Arnold accepted the continental European historical trajectory that had been bequeathed to British political commentators by theorists like Tocqueville. Arnold argued that 'Ever since Europe emerged from barbarism, ever since the condition of the common people began a little to improve, ever since their minds began to stir, this effort of democracy has been gaining strength; and the more their condition improves, the more strength this effort gains.'¹¹⁰³

In fact, Arnold's notion of democracy itself bears the hallmark of continental, particularly French, influence. 'Social freedom, – equality, – that is rather the field of the conquests of democracy.'¹¹⁰⁴ Democracy in the modern world was not, for Arnold, political in essence, but social. It was grounded on the idea of social equality. It is no surprise, then, that over the course of the essay he cites Tocqueville on various occasions, labelling the Frenchman 'a philosophic observer'.¹¹⁰⁵ Tocqueville, as I have outlined above, believed democracy to be social, principally, and concerned, fundamentally, with social equality.

The examples of Bryce and Arnold indicate something significant about the development of British political thought on democracy in the wake of the early influence of continental European thinkers on commentators like Mill and Carlyle. More than local conditions, the cross-fertilization of ideas facilitated by intellectual transfers from continental European

¹¹⁰² For an extended analysis of Tocqueville's impact on Bryce's understanding of democracy, see Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, pp.96-121.

¹¹⁰³ M. Arnold, 'Democracy', in S. Collini eds., *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 2002), p.5.

¹¹⁰⁴ Arnold, 'Democracy', p.5.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.7.

thinkers, like Tocqueville, to British theorists, like Mill and Carlyle, decisively shaped British political discourse on the subject of democracy. This can be traced through other prominent mid- to late-Victorian writers, such as Walter Bagehot and Sir Henry Maine.¹¹⁰⁶

Mill and Carlyle may not have been the only British benefactors of continental European innovations in the field of democratic political thought. However, they were perhaps the first British thinkers to incorporate such ideas into their respective political outlooks. They were, therefore, important in the process of change that shifted contemporary British political thought on democracy, its meaning and its problems away from the expectations of characteristically eighteenth century thinkers, whose notion of these things was unspecific and rested on a mixture of classical associations and dogmatic ideas about the American and French Revolutions.

Mill and Carlyle, like Tocqueville and other European thinkers, were significant in as much as they gave the idea of modern democracy a richer content that was grounded on a comprehensive understanding of democracy's historical foundations, its political and social complexity, the challenges inherent within it and the possible solutions available to such difficulties in the modern democratic era. Mill and Carlyle were important figures in as much as their reflections on these themes – alongside Tocqueville's – wove a new ethical complexity into the fabric of British political thinking on democracy across the ideological spectrum. In future, British thinkers who favoured or feared democracy, be they from whatever ideological camp, operated within the context of this new and refined democratic idiom. The distinctive contribution of Mill and Carlyle in the British context was to change the democratic idiom

¹¹⁰⁶ Prochaska has attempted to show the influence of American democracy on the expectations of Bagehot and Maine. In fact, what he has demonstrated is the impact of continental European writers' perspectives of American democracy on them. See Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, pp.47-71 and 72-95.

definitively through their interaction with and reflection on European ideas about democracy. Heretofore, this important legacy has not been properly appreciated and, yet, it was significant to the development ideas about democracy in the British context by future theorists, such as Bryce and Arnold.

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