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A Tocquevillean Analysis of the Democratic Peace Research Program and Modern Liberal Foreign Policy

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A Tocquevillean Analysis of the Democratic Peace Research Program and Modern Liberal Foreign Policy

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Abstract

A Tocquevillean Analysis of the Democratic Peace Research Program and Modern Liberal Foreign Policy

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Alexis de Tocqueville is widely hailed as one of the most insightful students of democracy and as one of the most perceptive observers of America. While this high praise is fully deserved, Tocqueville was more than simply the author of *Democracy in America*. Indeed, he completed the journey that inspired his seminal work before he was out of his twenties. The remainder of his life was devoted to the practice of politics. Both as an involved citizen and as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, Tocqueville researched and wrote extensively on French foreign policy. His most notable works are several reports endorsing French colonial projects in Algeria and articles advocating for the emancipation of slavery in the French Caribbean colonies. In this essay I argue that one cannot truly understand Tocqueville the student without analyzing Tocqueville the politician. Approaching his career as a consistent whole, rather than two distinct and incongruous parts, opens new avenues of investigation into his works. First, his incisive examination and critique of the distinct mildness engendered by equality of conditions in America helps fill several theoretical gaps in the democratic peace research program. Second, his arguments in support of both French imperial enterprises as well as the emancipation of slaves reveals that his diplomatic career was animated above all by the desire to forestall the further proliferation of this democratic mildness, which he viewed as one of democracy's most dangerous vices. Examining his foreign policy positions in light of the lessons he learned in writing *Democracy in America* is the only way to discover the consistent goal of his life—namely, to educate and guide the future generations of democracy—and thus to understand Tocqueville as he understood himself.

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Introduction

In 1798 the German Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant, offered the following forecast of the future trajectory of world history: “Gradually violence on the part of the powers will diminish and obedience to the laws will increase.” There will arise within each country more charity and trustworthiness, he explained, “and eventually this will also extend to nations in their external relations toward one another up to the realization of the cosmopolitan society, without the moral foundation in mankind having to be enlarged in the least.”[1] This vision of the future put forward by Kant is at the core of two contemporary topics, or themes, in international relations scholarship—the democratic peace research program and modern liberal foreign policy. In this paper I will examine these two legacies Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) from the perspective of the writings and diplomatic career of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). Although I will focus on these two Kantian traditions as they have appeared to us since World War I (i.e., well after the death of Tocqueville), I will demonstrate that the works of Tocqueville, insofar as they were animated by an ardent desire to understand and guide “the great democratic revolution”[2] of his time, offer a unique perspective on Kant’s profound effect on both the practice of, as well as the theorizing about, politics in the modern era.

In the first half of this essay I will demonstrate how Tocqueville’s analysis of the effects of equality help fill the theoretical gap in the current literature regarding the causal mechanism of the empirical finding that “democracies are significantly unlikely to fight

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[1] Immanuel Kant, “An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?” in *Immanuel Kant: The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Book, Inc., 1979), 165-6.

[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2010), 6. Hereafter cited as *Democracy*.

one another."[3] Tocqueville explains, in his seminal work, *Democracy in America*, that equality of conditions causes mores to become milder and, by destroying all aristocratic boundaries, directs man's natural feeling of sympathy to extend beyond one's borders to "the human species [now seen] as a single whole."[4] I will begin this section by conducting a survey of the leading international relations literature on the democratic peace, focusing especially on the debate over the causal mechanisms. Because this paper is not an independent, original study of the philosophy of Kant, but rather an examination of his legacy, in the literature review I will make note where appropriate of the principal similarities and differences between the contemporary democratic peace research program and the theories of the man often identified as its founder. The literature review will end with a close analysis of John M. Owen's *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*,[5] in which Owen, despite providing a compelling theory of the democratic peace, ultimately leaves unexplained the theoretical connections between liberalism's account of human nature, its theoretical appreciation and respect for a variety of notions of the good life, and its tendency in practice to value only "the ordinary life." It is precisely this ambiguity that, with the help of Tocqueville, I will help clarify, thereby illuminating how the liberal principles of peace and self-determination exercise their pacifying effect in the anarchic realm of international relations.

The second half of this paper consists in an examination of Tocqueville's diplomatic record in order to reveal some of the implications and problematic features of the second Kantian legacy, modern liberal foreign policy and its guiding ideology of "liberal internationalism." Although not purely Kantian, liberal internationalism, has at its core and as its defining feature a U.S. president who was profoundly influenced by the Kant's thought: Woodrow Wilson. In this section I will explain that, in stark contrast to

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[3] John M. Owen, "Democratic Peace Research: Whence and Whither?" *International Politics* 41 (2004), 605.
[4] *Democracy*, 838.
[5] John M. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997).

Wilson's Kantian-inspired foreign policy, Tocqueville did *not* believe the highest and most urgent task of the statesman to be the attempt to "discover means of moving toward and eventually bringing about 'perpetual peace' in a global 'kingdom of ends' that would reflect, if it does not instantiate, the universality of the moral law."[6] Instead, as his writings and speeches in support of the colonization of Algeria and the emancipation of slaves in the French West Indies demonstrate, Tocqueville saw foreign policy as remedy against the democratic vices that he believed to be developing within France.

[6] Thomas L. Pangle and Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1999), 196.

Section 1: Tocqueville and the Democratic Peace

Literature Review

At its core the democratic peace research program is a dialogue amongst scholars and foreign policy makers alike concerning the proposition that democratic states are significantly unlikely to go to war with one another. I use the term “research program”—an admittedly vague notion that could mean several different things—for good reason: it is impossible to categorize as a single theory, or capture in a unified paradigm, the various debates, studies, and policy decisions that have proceeded from this single proposition. There is not even consensus on the name: while some call it a *democratic* peace, others talk about the *liberal* peace. For this reason, it is helpful to begin a brief sketch of some theoretical and historical context.

We call the contemporary democratic peace research program a “legacy” of Immanuel Kant thanks to Michael Doyle and his unique approach to investigating the notion that democratic states are peaceful only in relations with other democratic states. In order to understand the observable peace among democracies, Doyle argued, one must look back to a thinker who lived when liberal democracies were the exception rather than the rule. For Doyle, Kant offers the best guidance:

> “Perpetual Peace,” written in 1795, predicts the ever-widening pacification of the liberal pacific union, explains that pacification, and at the same time suggests why liberal states are not pacific in their relations with nonliberal states. Kant argues that Perpetual Peace will be guaranteed by the ever-widening acceptance of three “definitive articles” of peace.[7]

[7] Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12:3 (Summer, 1983), 225.

The first of these articles, Doyle continues, holds that the civil constitution of all states in the pacific union must be republican. Kant himself offers the following explanation of his proposition the proliferation of representative government will facilitate the spread of peace: if "the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide whether there should be war or not, nothing is more natural than that those who would have to decide to undergo all the deprivations of war will very much hesitate to start such an evil game."[8] But, in Kant's mind, is the government that derives its power and authority from the consent of the people the same as democracy in the strict sense, i.e., the rule of the *demos* or people?

For Doyle and many others approaching this question from today's perspective, the answer is yes: in his seminal essay Doyle asserts that Kant's principle of republican government *requires* "democratic participation or representation."[9] However, this reading of Kant does not adequately take into account many somber subtleties that darken the otherwise relatively rosy picture of the German philosopher. On this point a single example will suffice: in the same essay, "Perpetual Peace," Kant stresses that "democracy is necessarily a despotism," because of its ineradicable vulnerability to majority tyranny, and therefore excluded from his definition of a republic.[10] How then are we to reconcile this condemnation of democracy with Kant's emphatic confidence in the pacifying effects of "representative government"?

Pangle and Ahrensdorf (1999) offer a compelling answer. They argue that Kant was referring not to *all* republican regimes "but only to those large, modern, representative republics animated by the commercial spirit, where political participation is minimal and

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[8] Immanuel Kant, "Eternal Peace," in *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), 438. Note Friedrich's alternate translation of the title of the essay. In the text I will refer to it as "Perpetual Peace."

[9] Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," 207.

[10] Kant, "Eternal Peace," trans. Friedrich, 439.

most people's lives are focused on individual prosperity, family life, culture, and private association."[11] The political society depicted here is much closer to the subject of analysis of most democratic peace research and resembles John M. Owen's (1997) account of "the ordinary life" that naturally emerges from liberal theory. Why then is it called the *democratic* peace? Put differently, what accounts for the shift from Kant's explicitly anti-democratic vision for peace—undoubtedly animated by the historical lessons taught by such militaristic or imperialistic republics as Athens, Sparta, and Rome wherein rule by the *demos* allowed manipulative demagogues to lead the masses to destructive wars—and the contemporary debate over the premise that democratic states are significantly unlikely to go to war with one another?

There are two principal components to answering this question, each of which forms a distinctive feature of democracy as it has emerged and spread across the world after being revived by the French Revolution. First, notwithstanding certain exceptions, the modern democratic trend has been decidedly *liberal*, meaning that popular sovereignty is necessary, but not sufficient, to classify a regime as democratic: the government must also place fixed limits on itself and its exercise of power. These limits, most often established through a constitution, are designed to protect individuals and their personal liberties. (This predominance of liberalism and its unique combination with democracy helps us understand why certain scholars talk about the *liberal* peace.) Second, unlike the ancient republics mentioned above, modern democracies are rooted firmly in the principle of universal equality, or the notion that the circumstances into which an individual is born ought not determine his place in society. This universal leveling of the formerly rigid hierarchy of society is what Tocqueville famously calls "equality of conditions" and is at the center of his understanding of democracy in America. On account of both its novelty as well as its strength in shaping the direction of democracy, this principle of comprehensive equality was the single most striking feature that Tocqueville witnessed during his journey. Equality of conditions was, he stressed, a

[11] Pangle and Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations*, 205.

"primary fact" that exercised a "prodigious influence" on the "march of society; it gives a certain direction to the public mind, a certain turn to the laws; to those governing, new maxims, and particular habits to the governed." It is this particular kind of democracy, unknown to the world for most of history, that the contemporary democratic peace research program

Having thus clarified some of the basic theoretical underpinnings of the contemporary democratic research program, we can now turn to the "lively debate" over the premise that "democracies are significantly unlikely to fight one another." For despite a general consensus on this proposition, what exactly causes the peace has remained in dispute: "The democratic peace remains a putative fact in want of a theory."[12]

What then are the competing theories put forward to explain this "fact"? In his 2004 article Owen helpfully arranges democratic peace scholarship along three research dimensions: (1) testing the empirical validity of the central premise that democratic states are less likely to fight each other; (2) searching for the fundamental causal mechanisms of the observed peace; and (3) proposing and testing new hypotheses regarding the distinctive character of the way in which democracies behave in international relations. For the present purposes I am concerned only with the second of these three topics. That is, it is beyond the scope of this study to sufficiently account for or investigate other relevant topics that are undeniably crucial to any comprehensive understanding of the democratic peace research program; for instance, the hegemonic stability theory and those studies that investigate the particularly volatile nature of democratizing states.

Traditionally, the dominant way to conceptualize research on the causes of the observed peace between democracies is the normative-structural typology proposed by Maoz and Russett (1993). The search for causes was largely framed and directed by these two models: democratic states do not fight each other *either* because their shared norms

[12] Owen, "Democratic Peace Research," 605-6.

of compromise and cooperation preclude any conflicts that do arise from escalating into violence *or* because their unique domestic political institutions constrain the leaders such that violent conflict is unfeasible.

In a direct challenge to this scheme, Owen (1997) argues that norms and institutions are not independent variables, but rather intervening variables that work in tandem to produce the democratic peace. He thus offers an alternative typology that distinguishes between rationalist and constructivist explanations. What Owen calls the rationalist approach is to "take subjects' ends as given and explain behavior via the external incentives they face, incentives that can supposedly be measured objectively" and are conceived as "structures, virtually material constraints whose meanings are self-evident."[13] Put differently, rationalist explanations argue that war is irrational and that, as a consequence, in order to explain a war one must give an account of what prevented the two sides from rationally reaching a settlement to their dispute. In the case of peaceful relations between democracies, rationalism suggests that democratic states have particular features that enable them to negotiate or bargain relatively effectively. Common features cited in this tradition are Fearon's (1994) notion of "audience costs,"[14] the high degree of transparency of democratic regimes, and the domestic vulnerability of democratic governments because of the ability of the public to hold elected officials accountable through regular elections (cf. Bueno de Mesquita, 1999).

Another way in which the contemporary democratic peace literature departs from (and is in tension with) Kant's philosophy can be seen in some of the constructivist theories, most of which presuppose that democratic states have, or acquire over time, a distinctive interest in peace with each other that may lead them to develop psychological prejudices in one another's favor. For example, following Hurrell (1990) and Huntley (1996), Lars-Erik Cederman argues that the Kantian perpetual peace will be achieved

[13] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 18.

[14] J.D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88:3 (1994), 577-592.

through a process of learning or moral improvement. Peace “will emanate,” Cederman says, “from individuals’ realization that war is both destructive and immoral.”[15] Yet as Pangle and Ahrensdorf emphasize, Kant himself was clearly doubtful about a promise of progress toward peace that rested primarily on a change in human intentions, through education, historical learning or otherwise. Rather than stressing what human beings may do to hasten the arrival of any future perpetual peace, Kant indicates that we are powerless to affect the “hidden plan of nature.” Moreover, the unfolding of this plan “seems to require so much time that from the small distance which man has so far traversed one can judge only uncertainly the shape of the revolution’s course and the relation of the parts to the whole.”[16]

This Kantian vision can be seen more clearly in the relatively new breed of democratic peace analysis that adopts a systemic orientation. Ewan Harrison (2010) explains the expository contributions of this literature: departing from the traditional dyadic orientation that understands the democratic peace as the “product of the internal properties of liberal states,” the systemic studies instead hypothesize that “the effects of the pacific union vary over time and with the strength of the democratic community.”[17] One such contribution is gained through the concept of the “spillover effect,” a process through which “the pacific union influences states that are not mature democracies.”[18] This theory holds that the pacifying effects of democracy are not static, monolithic, or derivative only of a state’s domestic political institutions, but rather depend largely on the strength of the democratic community at any given time. After a certain stage, or once a

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[15] Lars-Erik Cederman, “Back to Kant: Reinterpreting the Democratic Peace as a Macrohistorical Learning Process,” *American Political Science Review* 95:1 (March, 2001), 16.
[16] Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent,” in *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant’s Moral and Political Writings*, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), 127.
[17] Ewan Harrison, “The democratic peace research program and system-level analysis,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47:2 (March, 2010), 155.
[18] *Ibid*., 158.

sufficient number of countries are democratic, the pacific impact of democracy "spills over" beyond the boundaries of relations among liberal democratic states.

If democratic spillover does occur—and it seems at least plausible that it does, especially if Harrison is correct that a democratic critical mass presently exists—it would tell us something about the causal mechanisms of the democratic peace, at least with respect to the normative-institutional debate. That is, setting aside the material benefits of an increasingly democratic global system that fledgling democracies may enjoy, it stands to reason that only norms, not domestic political institutions, could "spill over" from one country to the next. Notwithstanding any explanatory power gained by the theory of the spillover effect, it leaves unanswered the crucial (and logically antecedent) question: what exactly is spilling over and causing the observed outcome of increasing peaceful relations? Yet we must go further still: the spillover theory depends on the existence of a critical threshold of democratic states in the international system, a situation that has been the historical exception, not the rule. The question then becomes, before any "spilling over" was even possible, what was causing the relatively peaceful relations between liberal democracies?

In his book, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, John M. Owen provides a sound and persuasive theory to try to answer this question. Rooted in the familiar idea of "favoritism," Owen emphasizes the way in which states' perceptions of each other, even prior to any consequential engagement, predispose them to interact in a generally benign or a generally hostile manner. The power of perceptions is at the core of favoritism, i.e., the notion that people tend to approve of foreign states that have their preferred system of government, and to discriminate against those states that have a system of government that they consider to be dangerous in their own state. Consequently, one can predict fairly accurately a person's attitude toward a foreign state based on whether or not that state matches the individual's political vision for his own country.

Although human beings exhibit a general tendency to favor their own type across various dimensions—e.g., religious, ethnic, geographic, lingual—Owen argues that for the past two hundred years of Western history, starting from the French Revolution, loyalty to political systems has trumped all other identities. This loyalty is what he calls "institutional identity," or identification with states according to their domestic political institutions.[19] This form of favoritism, Owen correctly points out, is by no means a novel concept unique to modern political science or sociology. Although not the oldest expression of this idea, Tocqueville offers a particularly stirring articulation of the strength and tenacity of one's institutional identity:

> When each nation has its separate opinions, beliefs, laws and customs, it considers itself as forming by itself the whole of humanity, and feels touched only by its own sufferings. If war comes to break out between two peoples so inclined, it cannot fail to be conducted with barbarism.
>
> At the time of their greatest enlightenment, the Romans cut the throats of enemy generals, after dragging them in triumph behind a chariot, and delivered prisoners to the beasts for the amusement of the people. Cicero, who raises such loud cries at the idea of a citizen crucified, finds nothing to say about these atrocious abuses of victory. It is clear that in his eyes a foreigner is not of the same human species as a Roman.[20]

In terms of how this type of favoritism actually functions, Owen explains that it is predominantly a phenomenon among elites within states. Following James Rosenau, he calls these elites *opinion leaders*, or people "who occupy positions which enable them to regularly transmit, either locally or nationally, opinions about any issue."[21] In practice, not all elites within a country are led primarily by their institutional identity: the favoritism based on a country's domestic political institutions then is a phenomenon among a particular subset of elites. And while various nation-states can join together to form leagues, institutional identities must be "based on one or another central

[19] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 24.
[20] *Democracy*, 994.
[21] James Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: An Operational Formulation* (New York: Random House, 1961), 35-39.

institutional criterion," which is defined or chosen largely according to "the opposite of that institution thought to pose the biggest threat" to an individual's, and thus to the nation's, interests.[22] That an individual, state, or group's institutional identity is tied to a particular institutional criterion is critical to Owen's theory, for he argues that variations in perceptions of foreign states proceed from variations in institutions. For example, if liberals in state A view state B as illiberal, they will reclassify B as liberal under one of two situations: "(1) state B's institutions change to match the a priori criteria of the liberals in state A; or (2) state A's liberals change their criteria—i.e., the institutions they want for their own state—such that B meets the new criteria."[23] The opposite is true if liberals in state A regard state B as liberal. The exact institutions with which Owen is concerned are those that instantiate the liberal principles of individualism and consent. He focuses on two such institutions: freedom of discussion and regular competitive elections.

Although each case of bilateral state interaction is unique, Owen elaborates briefly on the ways in which actors will judge each other's institutions as liberal or illiberal. Determining whether elections are competitive and regular is relatively straightforward. Ascertaining whether discussion is free, on the other hand, is more complicated. To measure this liberal institution then he examines the existence and strength of "constitutional rights that protect citizens from persecution for their opinions," which include "freedoms of speech, the press, assembly, and religion, as well as equality before the law, no arrest without formal charges (habeas corpus), the right to a fair trial, prohibition of unreasonable search and seizure, and the right to petition the state for redress of grievances" (42).

At this point in his account, one could reasonably ask the following question: if it is true that people are predisposed to favor a foreign state if it has their preferred system

[22] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 39.
[23] *Ibid*., 50.

of government, why do we see consistently peaceful relations between only liberal democratic states and not some other ideology? For Owen the answer lies in the peculiar *content* of liberalism. He defines liberalism as a “system of thought that seeks to uphold individual autonomy (i.e., self-legislation or self-government),” which theoretically could employ a number of different strategies to secure individual autonomy, for instance laissez-faire economics or an interventionist government like that of the New Deal programs (32). Whatever the particular shape, Owen stresses, liberals eschew violence in favor of peace and self-determination. Thus, unlike communism, fascism, Islamism, or any other ideology, liberalism cherishes above all else the principle of self-government while condemning intolerance and coercion. It is on account of these concurrent attachments to peace and individual autonomy that liberal favoritism enjoys a unique durability. In addition to the effects of the unique *ideas* of liberalism, Owen argues that its *institutions* also contribute to this tenacity of liberal favoritism.

His institutional hypothesis is relatively straightforward: “During crises, the stronger liberal institutions are within a state, the more constrained its decision makers will be to follow policies advocated by its liberal elites” (59). Responding to the realist critique that the clever statesman will use rhetoric to manipulate the public into support for a war regardless of the adversary’s regime type, Owen here posits that the institutions of free discussion and elections will limit the government’s leverage and ability to control public opinion. By contrast, his ideological hypothesis, which constitutes *the* theoretical crux of his argument, is more complex. Using ideology as his independent variable, he proposes that “institutional identity motivates liberals to favor fellow liberal states and be hostile to illiberal states” (57). That is, a state’s domestic political institutions function as a signal of a particular ideology: state A’s perception of state B amounts to a judgment or interpretation of the particular ideology that state A associates with the domestic political institutions of state B.

Owen views this as a direct challenge to the traditional realist theories that give pride of place to the power of anarchy: without a system-wide authority capable of maintaining peaceful order over sovereign states with competing interests, realism argues that state behavior is driven primarily by the interminable process of threat and power assessments between states. According to Owen, anarchy is underdetermining when it comes to explaining state behavior; explanations that rely on the effect of the anarchic system do not adequately account for the power of perceptions based on ideology. To the extent that realists acknowledge any effect of ideology on state behavior, they claim that it is merely invoked as a rhetorical tool to justify whatever action had already been chosen based purely on power and threat calculations. In addressing these shortcomings of realism, Owen unites ideology and threat assessment, arguing that states (or elites within states) view the actions of other states through "ideological prisms." Thus, "liberal states are biased to interpret as friendly the actions of states they consider liberal, and unfriendly the actions of those they consider illiberal" (52). But what are the exact grounds of this liberal bias or assumption?

To answer this question Owen begins by addressing a fundamental contradiction inherent in liberalism. Insofar as liberalism extols the self-governing individual, it is theoretically neutral on the question of ends—that is, it does not value any particular notion(s) of the good life at the exclusion of any others: "Individuals may choose the lives of heroism or hedonism, charity or acquisitiveness, so long as they respect others' decision" (33). Yet, as Owen rightly observes, liberalism does in fact make normative judgments regarding the ends toward which human beings aspire. Intolerance and coercion, for example, are explicitly condemned in liberal societies. In explicating this apparent logical inconsistency, Owen appeals to the authority of Charles Taylor, who says that all worldviews (including liberalism) proceed from an account of human nature, which, at least implicitly, prescribes a particular vision of proper human ends. According to Owen's explanation, the core of the liberal account of human nature is that all men are "potentially autonomous and are thus equal in a fundamental and significant sense."

From this fundamental equality emerges the essence of the liberal vision of the proper human ends: each individual is free to choose and pursue his own notion of the good life *so long as* it respects the autonomy of others and their ability to make their own choice regarding the kind of life they will lead. Thus, liberalism calls for "self-government that respects the self-government of others [and therefore] rules out a coercive or violent life" (33-5). Yet, Owen hastens to add, liberal societies have tended in practice to posit a much more limited vision of the good life. Again following Charles Taylor, Owen calls the human end that predominates in liberal society "the ordinary life":

> Many civilizations have seen labor, household management, and even commerce as necessary evils, to be endured or foisted on inferior persons for the sake of higher goods such as heroism or spirituality. But from the seventeenth century onward Westerners have tended to see these everyday activities as intrinsically worthy. The importance of this modern end is seen when it is contrasted with alternative notions of ends. In Homer's ancient Greece, for example, a 'warrior ethic' dominated (33-4).

At this point two questions arise. First, why exactly does the liberal's account of human nature, which describes man as fundamentally and equally autonomous, produce as the criteria for the good life the particular sort of personal autonomy that respects the independence of others and eschews violence? Second, if liberals can theoretically value lives devoted to a wide range of nonviolent ends—religious contemplation or self-sacrifice among them—why has "the ordinary life" dominated so categorically in liberal societies?

To the second question Owen offers no satisfactory explanation. Beyond noting briefly that history shows a significant and positive correlation between liberalism and the pursuit of material prosperity, his answer amounts to observing the difference between the theory and the practice of liberalism. With respect to the first question Owen provides the following answer. According to liberal theory, the fundamental equality shared by all human beings is at bottom an equality of the mind: all men are endowed

with the same rational faculties through which they all will, "if properly educated and uncoerced," conclude that *the* criteria of the good life is individual self-determination and respect for the autonomy of others. "Liberalism values voluntarism," as Owen puts it, "but it can do so [precisely] because it *assumes* that free choice will yield not chaos or self-destruction but peace" (35, emphasis added).

Yet the precise logic of this answer remains opaque. Owen does not tell us on what grounds, or for what reasons, the "Enlightenment thinkers who produced the liberal tradition" *assumed* that uncoerced "universal rationality" would necessarily result in societies that value peace and respect the autonomy of others (35). This ambiguity is by no means of little consequence to the strength of Owen's theory. For if "the core of liberal peace … is liberalism itself," and if "liberal persons highly value both peace and individual autonomy," then the feature of liberalism on account of which individual autonomy yields peaceful outcomes would appear to be *the* critical causal mechanism of the pacifying effects of liberalism (5, 32). Put differently, Owen's entire theory rests on the premise that liberals view foreign states with a preconceived notion of how liberal states behave: "Prima facie, they believe that, irrespective of physical capability, liberal states are safe and illiberal states potentially dangerous" (38). He makes this argument by projecting onto the relations between foreign states the liberal *assumption* that all human beings, on account of our natural equality of the mind, will choose a life of peace and mutual respect for all others who are also tolerant. However, without first clarifying the precise theoretical grounds of this liberal bias or assumption, the core of Owen's theory will remain ambiguous. In the absence of a clear articulation of how liberalism functions within a state, Owen's theory fails to explain adequately how exactly the liberal principles of peace and self-determination exercise their pacifying effect specifically in the anarchic realm of international relations.

Now perhaps Owen would ultimately accept this critique, conceding that it was not his intention to address these sorts of detailed theoretical questions. He did, after all,

admit that his task was not the same as that of a "political philosopher" (32). Despite, or rather because, of this caveat, in order to understand the most fundamental causal mechanisms of the democratic peace, we will now turn to seek the guidance of Alexis de Tocqueville: a man who, if not a political philosopher, at least was animated throughout his life by his fervent desire to "discern clearly [democracy's] natural consequences … its tendencies, its character, its prejudices, its passions … if only to know at least what we must hope or fear from it."[24]

A Tocquevillean Perspective on the Causal Mechanisms of the Democratic Peace

Before we look closely at the writings and thought of Alexis de Tocqueville, it behooves me to offer a brief defense of my unique method of investigation and explain to the would-be critic the benefits of studying a man whose observations and experiences were limited to the nineteenth century when the object of inquiry is the *contemporary* democratic peace research program. Perhaps by present-day academic standards Tocqueville is considered "old" and his masterpiece, *Democracy in America*, is grouped among "the classics"; however, for two principle reasons, Tocqueville's analysis of democracy as he witnessed it in America remains one of the most incisive and illustrative guides to understanding democracy and its effects, regardless of the specific topic.

First, the democracy that he observed in America in 1831-32 was not only of the same modern, "enlightened" variety as that which emerged from the French Revolution, but it also existed under an inimitable set of circumstances that allowed it to develop with little resistance and in a way that revealed clearly the subtleties of its character. Collectively known as its "point of departure," Tocqueville distills the distinctive character of America's beginning into two primary facts: among the emigrants who first arrived on the continent, the idea of the inequality of men was virtually nonexistent, and

[24] *Democracy*, 28.

even in the rare cases that a hierarchy of ranks was imported from Europe, "the American soil absolutely rejected territorial aristocracy."[25] Forced to tame, and enticed to explore, the intractable frontier that made up the entire North American continent, the early settlers abandoned as a matter of practical necessity the inheritance of landed property based on the right of primogeniture.[26] It is difficult to overstate the exceptional import Tocqueville ascribes to this fact: he devotes nearly his entire treatment of the social state of the Americans to explicating its consequences, which can be summed up in a single phrase, the equality of conditions.

When property is not handed down wholly intact from one generation to the next, large estates cannot survive. After the death of the original landowner, the property is split up, a division that increases exponentially with the passage of each successive generation. Moreover, to the extent that the fortunes of individuals and families were tied directly to the possession of property, the equal division of land forces men to pursue wealth by other means: it is not that the rich cease to exist, but wealth begins to circulate "with incredible rapidity, and experience teaches that it is rare to see two generations reap the rewards of wealth" (85). As Tocqueville makes clear, however, far more important than these material consequences were the effects on the family. Laws based on primogeniture cause the "spirit" of a family—its "name, origin, glory, power and virtues"—to be embodied in, and perpetuated by, the land (81). Once inheritance is based on equal division, the land, inevitably divided, can no longer represent the family: the "family spirit," and therewith the most powerful source of influence over an individual, necessarily erodes. The kind of society that results—what Tocqueville sees as the

[25] *Ibid*., 50.

[26] Tocqueville is here referring to the traditions and laws implemented by the first settlers in the northeastern part of the country. Later in the book, he acknowledges that slavery allowed a kind of aristocracy to emerge in the south (77), and admits that it was not until the Revolution that "English legislation on the transmission of property was [in fact] abolished" (84). These finer details, however, do not undermine his broad point about the profound effect of the continent's unique physical conditions on the development of democracy in the American colonies.

archetypal democratic social state—is defined by equality of conditions: the absence of an aristocracy of birth, and the weakening of individual influence.

If equality of conditions defines the social state of America, the key feature of its political regime is the principle of the sovereignty of the people. Indeed, the latter is a consequence of the former. But, as Tocqueville makes clear, the causal relationship is not a necessary one: "Now I know only two ways to have equality rule in the political world: rights must either be given to each citizen or given to no one." For those with a social state based on equality of conditions, in other words, it is difficult to find "a middle course between the sovereignty of all and the absolute power of one man" (89). In Tocqueville's view, the sovereignty of the people, and *not* the authority of a king, reigned supreme in America because of its point of departure: having renounced and left behind the kingships of Europe, the first emigrants held from the beginning the sovereignty of the people as a generative principle of their colonies.

For Tocqueville, the essence of American democracy was embodied by these two principles: equality of conditions and the absolute sovereignty of the people. Insofar as the latter could not exist without the former, he saw the equality of conditions as preeminently influential: prevailing over civil society as well as government, "it creates opinions, gives birth to sentiments, suggests customs and modifies all that it does not produce" (4). Nevertheless, he considered both to be generative facts. Thus, the democracy that he studied, and from which he learned the lessons that will help guide the present study, resembled not the ancient militaristic and imperialistic democracies excluded from Kant's pacific union, but instead the large commercial republics investigated by the contemporary democratic peace research program.

The preceding discussion shows that Tocqueville had good reason to say that his account of America's point of departure contained "the key to *nearly* the whole book" (4, emphasis added). Yet with this statement Tocqueville also tells us, more quietly, that the

distinctive character of America's origins do not constitute the key to the *entire* book. This subtle hint leads us to the second reason that Tocqueville provides a useful perspective even on the contemporary democratic peace research program: above all else, Tocqueville was interested in understanding the nature of democracy and its effects *independent* of place. If this was his object of study, the ultimate purpose of his examination was to take back to France what he had learned from the American experience with democracy. Tocqueville observing democracy in America was akin to a scientist watching an experiment in a laboratory: separated from Europe by an ocean, and inhabiting a virtually unoccupied continent, America was the "only country" whose circumstances allowed the world to "witness the natural and tranquil development of a society" (47). Yet no matter how transfixed Tocqueville may have become by this great spectacle, he never lost sight of his mission. France, and the question of how best to avoid the vices and maximize the virtues of democracy, formed the lens through which he observed America. As he wrote from Connecticut in 1831 to a friend, the "greatest obstacle" to learning about America was "not knowing … what exists in France," for "without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed."[27] Because Tocqueville conceived of his "principle subject" not as *America*, but rather as "the *influence of democracy on America*," we ought to expect to find in it lessons on democracy that will be useful even today.[28]

If Tocqueville's two-volume tome truly is "at once the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written on America,"[29] what does it teach us about the specific topic of the causal mechanisms of the democratic peace? Recall that, for Owen, the fundamental causal mechanism of the democratic peace amounts to the unique

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[27] Tocqueville to Ernest de Chabrol, Hartford, 7 October 1831, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 59.
[28] *Democracy*, 689.
[29] Mansfield, Harvey C., and Delba Winthrop, introduction to *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xvii.

content, or guiding principles, of liberalism. Despite a general human tendency to prefer those who are similar to oneself, Owen contends, we see consistently peaceful relations only between liberal democratic states precisely because liberalism is rooted in self-determination and respect for the autonomy of others, and because it tends to value only those conceptions of the good life that conform to what he calls "the ordinary life." Notwithstanding the impressive book that Owen develops from this basic thesis, he leaves unexplained several key theoretical connections whose ambiguity weakens the explanatory power of his theory. I argue that one cannot truly understand the causal mechanisms of the democratic peace without clarifying these theoretical obscurities. Thus, I will use Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to answer two broad questions. First, on what grounds does liberalism assume that all human beings, if uncoerced, will choose a life rooted in non-violence, self-determination, and respect for the independence of others? Moreover, how do these basic liberal principles, given the fact of anarchy, transcend political boundaries and affect the relations between autonomous states? Second, if liberalism theoretically assents to any life devoted to non-violent ends, why has "the ordinary life" tended to prevail in most liberal societies?

As I will demonstrate below, the precise theoretical line of reasoning was left obscure in Owen's theory for one key reason: he did not adequately account for and investigate the effects of equality, not on laws or political institutions, but on *mores*, i.e., "the ensemble of ideas from which the habits of the mind are formed."[30] It is precisely the examination of the effects of equality of conditions on mores that forms the subject of the second volume of *Democracy in America*. Although he acknowledges the existence and power of several other variables that have shaped the American social state, Tocqueville makes clear the precise subject of his inquiry: "I have not undertaken to show the reason for all our inclinations and all our ideas; I have only wanted to show to what extent equality had modified both" (692-3). In doing so, Tocqueville intends to reveal "how

[30] *Democracy*, 466.

democracy looks with respect to its end or aim."[31] This project must begin, he indicates with the topic of his first chapter, with an examination of the manner of operation of the American mind, or what he calls the "philosophical method" of the Americans.

Tocqueville begins by declaring the existence of a particular philosophical method that is pervasive in America. Despite having no philosophical school of their own, nearly all the inhabitants of America, Tocqueville observed, display the same manner of thinking or set of presuppositions that inform and guide their thought. The single feature that defines this method is that, "in most operations of the mind, each American appeals only to the individual effort of his reason": the Americans are Cartesian without knowing it.[32] Yet it is the Americans' ignorance of this fact, not the fact itself, that makes this method peculiarly American. This same manner of thinking exists, and is even more rigorously followed, in France and elsewhere in Europe. Setting aside the historical details that account for the differences in rigor of application across countries, how does equality produce this philosophical method?

Having destroyed the strict limitations that confined men to a particular class and precluded them from seeking to change their station, equality imbues democratic society with the tumultuous movement of individuals constantly changing rank—ascending and descending the social ladder, striking it rich and losing it all—that weakens or breaks the generational bond that formerly united families and tied them to the same social position. A closely-knit family that spanned generations, beyond simply defining one's status in society, provided people with particular maxims, habits, opinions, and prejudices that informed their thinking and instilled in them the belief that all men are not equally capable of judging all matters. This same volatility induced by equality of conditions, it almost goes without saying, prevents individuals from drawing "their beliefs from the

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[31] Harvey C. Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58.
[32] *Democracy*, 699.

opinions of the class to which they belong, for there are so to speak no longer any classes" (700).

Not even can the intelligence of one man, no matter how extraordinarily impressive, have much effect on shaking each individual from faith in their own reason. For without visible and permanent symbols of superiority of one man or class over another, all people become more or less similar and intermingle with each other at a relatively close range. Under such leveled conditions, insofar as people do not see in any one individual "the signs of incontestable greatness and superiority, they are constantly brought back to their own reason as the most visible and nearest source of truth" (700-1). Tocqueville's discussion of this distinctively *democratic* method of thinking thus helps spell out more clearly why Owen, in his account of the unique content of liberalism, emphasized the principle of universal rationality that is at the core of the liberal's conception of human nature.

Noting that this reliance on one's own reason is most intense at the end of democratic revolutions, Tocqueville concludes the chapter with a somber picture of the democratic philosophical method at its worst: when each person tries to rely only on his own enlightenment and revels in having beliefs that are his own, men are "no longer tied together except by interests and not by ideas, and you would say that human opinions no longer form anything other than a kind of intellectual dust that swirls on all sides, powerless to come together and settle" (708-9). Yet this depiction of a hyper-cartelized society does not accord with the reality of most modern democracies, nor is it consistent with the age-old critique of the rule of the *demos*. What then accounts for this difference? What is the most common consequence of this ubiquitous faith in universal rationality among men?

As if anticipating these questions, Tocqueville dedicates the second chapter of the volume to advancing an answer. First, however, he sharpens our challenge to the

excessively grim picture with which he concluded the first chapter. Although equality of conditions engenders a society in which each individual withdraws into himself and professes to judge all things according only to his reason, no community of human beings can exist, let alone prosper, without all citizens being held together by some principal ideas. And some of these shared ideas, or "dogmatic beliefs," must emanate from a single source, perhaps the clearest example being a common religion. No matter what the circumstances, Tocqueville declares, one can always find some sort of authority when it comes to intellectual and moral questions. Thus, the question is not to know *if* an intellectual authority exists in democratic societies, but rather to know *where* it is and to understand its character and the extent of its influence.

In our own time, in which public opinion polls dominate the news and drive politics, the answer seems obvious. That common opinion was the "sole guide" remaining for "individual reason among democratic peoples" was equally evident to Tocqueville (718). For if all people are endowed with similar enlightenment, truth on any given subject is of course "found on the side of the greatest number." That is, while it is true that the laws in America "are such that the majority governs society as a sovereign," Tocqueville makes clear that *the* cause of this weighty authority of public opinion is not political institutions, but rather equality itself (718-23). Captivated as we are by the increasing sophistication and complexity of the tools used by political scientists and professional polling firms to gauge the opinion of the public, we are apt to lose sight of the immense power given to common opinion in today's democratic society. The description provided by Tocqueville, who remembered when men took as their guide the superior reason of a single individual or class, is thus particularly clear-sighted and discerning. In his view, public opinion in democracies "does not persuade, it imposes its beliefs and makes them penetrate souls by a kind if immense pressure of the mind of all on the intelligence of each." Even religion, he asserts, reigns "much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion" (719-20).

In explicating the profound influence of public opinion in democratic centuries, Tocqueville brings out a consequence of equality that is critical to his conception of democracy. Since all men are held to be equal with respect to their rational faculties, each individual, when he compares himself with those around him, feels proud and independent; but, as soon as he envisions the entire citizenry and places himself next to the great public mass, he becomes overwhelmed by his relative weakness and insignificance. The same equality that makes a person "independent of each one of his fellow citizens in particular," Tocqueville observes, at the same time "delivers him isolated and defenseless to the action of the greatest number" (719).

Tocqueville's account of the way in which equality engenders this tension within the individual living in a democratic society helps clarify Owen's argument that the standard embedded in the liberal's notion of the good life is the peculiar "sort of autonomy that respects others' autonomy."[33] Independent from the authority of family and class, free to seek by himself and in himself alone answers to all questions, the democratic man is bold and proudly asserts his autonomy. This freedom, however, is always crippled by a sense of weakness: vulnerable without the security and guidance of family or class, infinitesimally small and defenseless compared to the rest of society that forms an unstratified mass, rejecting violence appears to him as a matter of self-interest. And in embracing his own independence, since it derives from the equality he shares with his fellow citizens, the democratic man is compelled to respect the autonomy of all others in his community: rejecting the equality of his neighbor would require him to question the very source of his own independence and pride.

Having thus clarified the liberal assumption that, because of the fundamental equality of mind among men, all people will choose to live their life according to the principles of self-determination and respect for the autonomy of others, we can now turn to examine how these liberal principles exercise their pacifying effects amongst sovereign states

[33] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 33.

acting in an anarchic environment. To take this critical step in identifying the causal mechanisms of the democratic peace, we will seek guidance in Tocqueville's chapter on individualism and his discussion of the peculiar sort of sympathy engendered by equality.

For Tocqueville, there is a clear link between the unique philosophical method of Americans and his concept of "individualism": just as equality leads each man to look for his *beliefs* within himself, it just as powerfully directs the individual to turn "all his *sentiments* toward himself alone."[34] Although a continuation of the withdrawal into one's own affairs, this democratic trait is not yet self-centeredness. Whereas "egoism" is a kind of inflated love of oneself that causes individuals to be concerned with nothing other than themselves and their own personal good, Tocqueville observes that individualism is a "considered and peaceful sentiment" that leads each citizen to isolate himself from society and to withdraw into his family and close friends (882). Without clearly defined duties to the public mass comprised entirely of his equals, the individualistic man abandons society to itself, resigning from active participation in, or great concern for, his community. We need not look far to find examples of this democratic trait of individualism in our own day: consistently low voter turnout rates, for instance, aptly capture this image of the apathetic democratic citizen. Yet how exactly does equality cause this isolation and erosion of public spiritedness? As he often does, Tocqueville explains this causal relationship by comparing democratic society to that of an aristocracy.

By ordaining and institutionalizing the inequality of man through a fixed social hierarchy, aristocratic conventions have the counterintuitive effect of strengthening the bonds between individual citizens, both within and across classes. Each class, since it shares common customs, habits, opinions, beliefs, and experiences, forms for each individual who is a part of it "a kind of small country, more visible and dearer than the large one." Moreover, these conventional restrictions that kept all people in fixed

[34] *Democracy*, 881, emphasis added.

positions at the same time enshrined and made very visible a variety of mutual obligations *between* classes: “each citizen always sees above him a man whose protection he needs, and below he finds another whose help he can claim” (883). All the classes of society were thus tied together, from the peasant all the way up to the king, like a chain, each group forming its own distinctive link upon whose existence the entire chain depended. When the doctrine of the equality of man washed away these conventional bonds, the classes intermingled and moved closer to one another, causing its members, isolated and weak amid the great mass of society, to “become indifferent and like strangers to each other” (884).

Yet the individualistic democrat is not, Tocqueville adds in an interesting turn in his account, completely bereft of any interest in, or sense of kinship toward, other human beings. Neither is he, as we have learned, egoistic or entirely self-centered. Indeed, the same sense of obligation or duty to one’s fellow man is present in democratic centuries, but the object changes. Equality among human beings, Tocqueville says, makes “the duties of each individual toward the species […] much clearer; devotion toward one man (or one class) becomes more rare; the bond of human affections expands and relaxes” (884). Thus, implicit in Tocqueville’s account of “individualism” is a particular conception of human nature that presupposes that human beings are by nature, if not political animals, at least social animals. No matter how great the tendency for the democratic man to be interested only in those closest to him, Tocqueville notes that his sociability is not enclosed entirely within himself; unlike those driven by “egoism”—a vice as old as the world—he is not animated exclusively by an exaggerated love of himself. The individualistic, democratic man still has a sense of duty to, and a desire to cultivate affections with, other human beings. What is distinctively democratic, however, is the change in the object of those affections and sense of duty. Tocqueville explains this shift in his treatment of the peculiar form of sympathy inspired by equality, perhaps the quintessential democratic sentiment in his examination of how mores become *milder* as conditions become equal. This softening effect of equality, which constitutes the thematic

core of the third part of the second volume of *Democracy in America*, will finally clarify how the pacific liberal principles can eclipse the power of anarchy and international border to induce peaceful relations between democratic states.

Tocqueville opens his discussion of the "Influence of Democracy on Mores Properly So Called" by asserting that "equality of conditions and mores becoming mild"—two trends that have been developing for "several centuries"—are "not only contemporaneous events, but also correlative facts" (988). The former causes the latter directly and indirectly. He explains the direct effects of equality on mores as follows: leveling the ranks of society and thereby engendering a common way of thinking and feeling among the people, equality enables each individual to form in his mind a clear picture of the experiences of all his fellow citizens, their joys and especially their sufferings. With little creative effort he can visualize the miseries of those around him: everyone being equals, he easily imagines himself in their position and thereby understands what it must be like to undergo such an episode. This imaginative process, occurring immediately and unwittingly, "mingles something personal in his pity, and makes him suffer as the body of his fellow man is torn apart" (993). Here Tocqueville again brings to the fore the weakness and isolation felt by the democratic individual. Just as it is in the democrat's interest to reject violence and coercion, his pity becomes personal when witnessing or hearing about someone's suffering; he can so easily imagine himself going through the same hardship in the future that part of him believes it to be in his interest to sympathize with, if not lend aid to, his fellow citizen. Equality of conditions "makes men feel their independence," but at the same time it exposes them to "a thousand accidents, and experience does not take long to teach them that, although they do not habitually need the help of others, some moment almost always occurs when they cannot do without that help" (1006).

To be sure, Tocqueville does not believe that sympathy thus conceived is a psychological phenomenon unique only to democracies. Elaborating his earlier remark

that each aristocratic class is like its own small, separate country, he explains that the members of each class "experience for each other a continual and active sympathy that can never be found to the same degree among the citizens of a democracy" (989-90). For when all individuals are arranged immutably according to their occupation, property, and birth, the members of each class see themselves like the progeny of the same family, all habituated through similar experiences and to common mores. These conventional boundaries facilitate the strengthening of the natural bonds between men: although "the general notion of *fellow* is obscure," and consequently one rarely thinks to lay down his life for "the cause of humanity," it is more common to sacrifice oneself for "certain men" (883). What is uniquely democratic, by contrast, is that those for whom an individual is inclined to feel sympathy expands from certain men, or a particular class, to all of society.

Yet if Tocqueville said in his discussion of individualism that equality of conditions leads man to see more clearly his sense of duty to the entire human race, why is the uniquely democratic sympathy confined within the boundaries of a particular political community? The answer is that the softening effect of equality on mores cannot completely uproot the natural human tendency to prefer those who are similar to oneself. Put differently, the mild mores engendered by equality must coexist with the fact of "favoritism," or as Owen put it, the general tendency for human beings "to favor their own type, be that type racial, ethnic, religious, or something else."[35] The individualistic democrat does *not*, according to Tocqueville, feel genuine sympathy for every other human being on earth. And this, Tocqueville explains, is perfectly understandable. For "there are real sympathies only between similar people," and the most influential similarity between two people is derived *not* from the theoretical equality of mankind, but rather from the sharing of common opinions, sentiments, rights, and mores.[36] People who

[35] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 24.
[36] *Democracy*, 991.

share in these things, Tocqueville proclaims, constitute a "separate existence."[37] Thus, the sharing of "real sympathies" between *all* people in a society was unknown in aristocratic centuries, for the members in each class are not similar to those in any of the others: "they do not have the same way of thinking or of feeling, and they scarcely believe that they are part of the same humanity" (990).

By contrast, in a society defined by the equality of conditions, all individuals, precisely because they share similar sentiments and a common way of thinking, are capable of feeling sympathy for one another. Yet at the same time those particular opinions, sentiments, rights and mores constitute the boundary of the society's sympathies. That is, for the democratic man there are certain opinions, habits, or ideas that would exclude an individual or group of people from his feelings of sympathy; and he (or the society of which he is a member) gets to delineate, however imprecisely, the principles that constitute that boundary. In the time when Tocqueville journeyed through America, the slaveholder most conspicuously exemplified this phenomenon of democratic sympathy. In the same man Tocqueville saw two distinct characters: one "who is full of humanity for his fellows when the latter are at the same time his equals," and the other who "becomes insensitive to their sufferings from the moment when equality ceases" (994). The duality of the slave master thus elucidates that the fundamental source of his mildness is not his education or his level of civilization, but rather the equality that permeates and guides his society.

Notwithstanding the singularly restricted view of the slaveholder—a figure Tocqueville saw as a kind of aristocratic relic what appeared incongruous with the majority of American society—it is this same equality that suggests to the imagination of the democratic citizen a fundamental equality between himself and all other human beings on earth. The leveling of ranks within a political society animates an inherent human awareness, dimmed under aristocratic institutions, of a basic similarity shared by

[37] *Ibid*., 990.

all human beings. The experience of being able to "judge in a moment the sensations of all" one's fellow citizens, the unintentional mixing of one's own feelings with one's pity for others, provokes the individual's attachment to equality to transcend his own political community (993). And as Tocqueville indicated earlier, this sympathy must be understood as decisively *mild*, because as one's sentiments and affections expand, it is inevitable that they will also relax. In a moment of reflection on the influence this new era of equality exercises on his own life, Tocqueville finds that his generation is not necessarily more sensitive than that of his aristocratic forbearers, but that "certainly our sensibility falls on more things" (*ibid*.). Attesting to the power that equality of conditions exercises over the imagination of human beings, Tocqueville notes how even the sources of poetry change in democratic centuries:

> …it is not only the members of the same nation who become similar; nations themselves assimilate, and all together form in the eye of the beholder nothing more than a vast democracy in which each citizen is a people. That brings to light for the first time the figure of the human species (837-8).

What Tocqueville here casts as the creative musings of the democratic poet, he later indicates could prove to be a realistic vision of the future. So powerful is the softening influence of democracy that nothing, not even the relations between foreign countries, will be exempt from its force: as "peoples become more similar to each other," Tocqueville affirms, "the law of nations becomes milder" (994). This brief and enigmatic statement, his last word in the chapter on the effect of equality on mores, is the closest Tocqueville comes in *Democracy* to conceiving of a Kantian-like perpetual peace. It aptly concludes his chapter on the way in which equality causes mores to become milder, for his account of how the unique features of democratic sympathy elucidate the liberal principles of self-determination and respect for others' autonomy exert their pacifying influence amongst sovereign states acting in an anarchic environment. Whereas Owen's causal mechanism depended on the imprecise notion of "ideological prisms,"[38]

[38] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 52.

Tocqueville reveals that the distinctive *mildness*, and its attendant sympathy, provoked by equality of conditions, insofar as it draws man's sight beyond his own country and illuminates the human race in a way never experienced before in history, must be understood as the key means by which the pacific liberal principles expand from the domestic polity to the international system. As we will see below, Tocqueville was perfectly aware of the anarchic character of the international system, but he nevertheless envisioned that the softening influence of equality had the capacity to overcome anarchy and thereby determine and define the relations between democratic states.

Recall that at the outset of his discussion of the effects of equality of conditions on mores Tocqueville stated that equality acted on the American ideas and opinions in both direct and indirect ways. If the preceding arguments, derived only from the direct effects, help clarify the assumption inherent in liberalism that "free choice will yield not chaos or self-destruction but peace,"[39] and demonstrate how the liberal principle of uncoerced self-determination exerts its pacifying effects in the international realm, how do the *indirect* effects of equality on mores help us understand the causal mechanisms of the democratic peace?

Tocqueville devotes little attention to the indirect effects, perhaps because the argument is relatively straightforward: By opening to all people the possibility of advancing one's position in society, and by destroying all symbols of distinction besides wealth and property, equality of conditions "leads men toward industrial and commercial professions, which need peace in order for men to devote themselves to those professions."[40] This meaning of mildness is a self-conscious and self-interested desire for peace and opposition to war that results from individuals responding to a change in the incentive structure of society. However, if we look elsewhere in *Democracy* we quickly discover that the implications of this democratic penchant for industrial and commercial

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[39] *Ibid*., 35.
[40] *Democracy*, 988.

professions and the attendant desire for material wellbeing are critically important for Tocqueville's understanding of democracy. The picture that he sketches of this indirect effect of equality of conditions closely resembles what Owen calls "the ordinary life" and can therefore help explain why, according to Owen, the liberal predilection to value as "intrinsically worthy" "labor, household management, and even commerce" contributes to liberalism's pacifying effect on international relations.[41]

According to Tocqueville, the ardent and insatiable love of material wellbeing is at once the most striking and the most comprehensible feature of American society. This "concern to satisfy the slightest needs of the body and to provide for the smallest conveniences of life" is the "national and dominant taste"; equality of conditions destined it to be *the* direction toward which the "great current of human passions leads," sweeping "everything along in its wake."[42] As Tocqueville makes clear, once equality of conditions is introduced in a society, the people cannot turn out any other way. This necessary causal relationship rests on the notion that the taste for material wellbeing is an inherent human passion: equality did not introduce, but rather only modified, the desire for wealth and material comforts—a desire that emanates from the soul. Indeed, this is one of the key attributes that sets us apart from the beasts: "What makes us superior in this to animals is that we use our soul to find the material goods toward which their instinct alone leads them."[43]

In aristocratic societies, neither the rich nor the poor were concerned with material goods. By guaranteeing that the rich man's material desires will be satisfied without difficulty or fear, the conventional class hierarchy allows his soul to proceed elsewhere and [attach] itself to some more difficult and greater enterprise that animates it and carries it away." Similarly, the lower classes despair of acquiring great quantities of

[41] Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, 33-4.
[42] *Democracy*, 931, 934.
[43] *Ibid*., 963.

material goods: having learned from generations of experience that his position in society is fixed, "the imagination of the poor [man] is pushed toward the other world," escaping the miseries of life it "goes to find its enjoyments beyond" (932-3). These transcendent ends toward which both the rich and the poor man's soul and imagination aspire are precisely the goals that Owen explains are *de facto* precluded by those of "the ordinary life." That is, when material wellbeing is prevented from being the goal of life, individuals are freed to devote their lives to religious contemplation or self-sacrifice, societies value heroism or spirituality, lives are aimed at the immaterial, be it military glory or worship of the divine. Common to all of these notions of ends is their compatibility with, or inclination toward, what Tocqueville calls "warrior passions." Under equality of conditions, on the other hand, lives directed toward these goals and the warrior passions themselves will become more rare and less intense:

> The ever-increasing number of property owners friendly to peace, the development of personal wealth, which war so rapidly devours, this leniency of morals, this softness of heart, this predisposition toward pity that equality inspires, this coldness of reason that makes men hardly sensitive to the poetic and violent emotions which arise among arms, all these causes join together to extinguish military spirit (1154).

By abolishing the conventional constraints imposed on human beings, equality of conditions releases and nourishes the natural human desire for wealth and material comforts. For without any privileges of birth or wealth, all professions are theoretically open to everyone, the summit of each appearing within reach by means of one's own unaided, individual efforts. Freed from any formal, immovable limit on one's future, each person easily imagines "that they are called to great destinies" (945). Yet just as equality of conditions renders each citizen independent and weak at the same instant, so too does it cripple this grand ambition by exposing each person to the competition of all, ultimately leaving them individually powerless. "When men are more or less similar and follow the same road," Tocqueville notes, "it is very difficult for any one of them to march quickly and cut through the uniform crowd that surrounds and crushes him" (*ibid.*)

In spite of his impotence, the democratic man is unable to renounce the pursuit of wealth; he cannot avoid participating in the ubiquitous competition with all of society. For strength can be acquired only through material success, and his taste for wellbeing grows ever stronger "as it is being satisfied" (460). Of course, because everyone is compelled to play at the same game, it is a mathematical certainty that the majority of fortunes, and therefore of ambitions, will end in mediocrity. The average democrat's desire for material wellbeing consists not in the achievement of any "great destinies," but in "small goals": he seeks not to build "vast palaces" or vanquish nature, but rather to add "a few feet to his fields," plant an orchard, enlarge his house, make life "easier and more comfortable each moment," avoid discomfort and satisfy the "slightest needs effortlessly and almost without cost" (937).

The result of this unique combination of equality of opportunity and weakness is summed up in Tocqueville's chapter, "Why Americans Appear So Restless Amid Their Well-Being." With money as his only fixed point, the democratic man comes to believe that he will find complete happiness in material goods. He is continually spurred on by both the fear of losing his fortune and the availability of acquiring all those goods that he does not already possess. This perpetual pursuit of material wellbeing, though it "torments and fatigues the soul," makes war and the "warrior passions" appear as mere distractions that ought to be avoided so long as the implications of peace do not threaten a society's acquisitive capacity (946).

Tocqueville's depiction of the democratic individual who is tirelessly and exclusively devoted to "small goals" clarifies what Owen means by "the ordinary life" and demonstrates why the tendency to favor this kind of life contributes to liberalism's pacifying effect on the relations between democratic states. Taken on its own, this account of "the ordinary life" might be perceived as an "monadic theory" of the democratic peace, i.e., an explanation that starts from the premise that democratic states are in general more peaceful than other regime types. But in light of Tocqueville's

observation that “true sympathies” exist only between people with shared mores, it becomes clear that the ordinary life cannot, on its own, cause democracies to be more peaceful with all other states.

Section 2: Tocqueville and Modern Liberal Foreign Policy

Having thus concluded my Tocquevillean analysis of the democratic peace and its most fundamental causal mechanisms, a question arises: if Tocqueville understood democracies to be trending toward pacific international relations, at least with each other, would he have been in favor of such an outcome? How would he have viewed a "milder" law of nations, or a "vast democracy" into which all democratic states assimilated?[44] Tocqueville never provides an explicit answer to these questions. The little attention he devotes to foreign affairs in *Democracy* is focused on particularities of American foreign policy or the effects of equality on democratic militaries. Nor is an explicit answer given in his later writings on empire and slavery: composed as candidate for, and later as a member of, the Chamber of Deputies for the purpose of evaluating specific French policies and programs, they contain little theorizing about international relations. Nevertheless, insofar as these essays and letters constitute key accomplishments of his career as an elected official, it stands to reason that collectively they can illustrate, even if only as a kind of blueprint, his conception of foreign affairs and of the ideal conduct and goals of a statesman. In order to discern more clearly whatever we can discover in these writings of Tocqueville's judgment of a future "milder" law of nations, in what follows below I will compare his diplomatic record to that of a statesman who made explicit his opinion on the pacifying effects of democracy: Woodrow Wilson. That is, Wilson's foreign policy ideology—which, rooted in Kantian internationalism, sought explicitly to bring about a "perpetual peace" among nations—will serve as an archetype in light of which I will examine Tocqueville's writings on empire and slavery.

As I will demonstrate below, the key differences between Tocqueville and Wilson's conceptions of the ideal statesman are at bottom rooted in divergent conceptions of morality. That is, the foreign policy of each man proceeded from his particular

[44] *Democracy*, 994, 837.

understanding of equality, liberty, and the duties and obligations—of individuals and of governments—that arise from each. Wilson's foreign policy ideology was defined and directed above all by his conviction that all human beings are not only fundamentally equal in their capacity for self-determination, but also universally united in that they all share the ardent desire for, and interest in, peace as their highest goal. Since Wilson "did not conceive of a unification of men achieved at the expense of their variety or autonomy," he understood this view of humanity to entail a moral duty of the statesman to attempt to implement peace among nations; in Wilson's mind, such universal peace required first and foremost that all sovereign states no longer regard their national interest as something distinct from, and potentially opposed to, the interest and benefit of mankind.[45]

By contrast, Tocqueville conceived of the equality of human beings in more limited terms: while all men universally share in the right to self-government, he maintained that "the autonomous strivings and self-directed development of various groups of men" will inevitably produce "conflicting aspirations, postures, and demands."[46] That is, Tocqueville did *not* consider all human beings, let alone all independent nations, to view peace as the most urgent and necessary goal. This was a truth for Tocqueville not simply in theory: speaking for himself, he writes in a letter to John Stuart Mill in March 1841 that the most "dangerous" political arguments in France are those posited not by the "partisans of war," but rather by the "party [that] would sacrifice everything for peace." For such policies would, in Tocqueville's view, simply aggravate "the greatest malady" threatening France: namely, "the gradual softening of mores, the abasement of the mind, [and] the mediocrity of tastes" that collectively make

[45] Harry M. Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," in *American Political Thought: The Philosophic Dimension of American Statesmanship*, 2nd edition, eds. Morton J. Frisch and Richard G. Stevens (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1983), 291.
[46] *Ibid*., 291.

up “the natural vices” of democracy.[47] Tocqueville understood his diplomatic career above all as an opportunity to assist in forestalling the further development of this democratic pathology in France.

Connecting Immanuel Kant to Woodrow Wilson

The foreign policy of Woodrow Wilson is the linchpin that connects Kant’s philosophy and what I have called the second “legacy” of Kant, i.e., modern liberal foreign policy. In reviving the key principles of Kant’s international idealist philosophy, Wilson’s foreign policy has served as the predominant precedent for the practice of foreign policy by most Western democratic states since World War I. But the tenets of Wilsonianism form only one of two parts that together constitute “liberal internationalism,” or the guiding ideology of modern liberal foreign policy. Liberal internationalism is best understood as a compact, originating in the United States, that blends two traditions in American foreign policy—power and cooperation. It first emerged successfully as a unified whole under the leadership of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. However, it is the cooperative element that is of particular interest here. For the tradition of power in foreign relations, typified by Theodore Roosevelt, is not distinctively American. The commitment to exercise one’s national power and strength through “multilateral partnership rather than unilateral initiative,” on the other hand, is unmistakably American and it can be traced directly to Woodrow Wilson.[48] Moreover, this cooperative component of liberal internationalism epitomized by Wilson’s unique merging of power and cooperation has, according to most scholars, remained “the bedrock” of American foreign policy since the end of World War I.[49] If “Wilsonianism”

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[47] Tocqueville to John Stuart Mill, 18 March 1841, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 150-1.
[48] Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, “Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States,” *International Security* 32:2 (Fall, 2007), 8.
[49] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 52.

has had the most direct and significant effect on American, if not all Western liberal, foreign policy in the twentieth century, the most profound influence on Wilson himself and on his foreign policies was the thought of Immanuel Kant.

It is not my purpose to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Wilson's foreign policy.[50] Nor do I offer an original examination of Kant. Rather, I will limit my treatment of the ties between the two men to explicating the following statement made by Pangle and Ahrensdorf (1999), and in doing so I will rely primarily on their reading of Kant's philosophical works: Woodrow Wilson, in "setting the aspirations if not the goals of American foreign policy in the twentieth century," can be said "to have been formed more by Kant than by any other master."[51] To the Wilsonian scholar, this asseveration must be particularly striking: despite being a scholar and professor of government long before becoming a politician and the president of the United States, there is little, if any, evidence that Wilson ever read or thought about Kant. How then are we to understand the proposition that Wilson was formed and molded by a philosopher virtually unknown to him? What is the content and character of the lessons that Wilson unwittingly absorbed from Kant?

The Kantian philosophic project is best understood as an effort to reestablish "ethics as the central human concern."[52] Kant was driven above all by his unyielding resolve to set morality in a firm theoretical foundation, a transformative project intended to overcome the key defect at the heart of all previous philosophic accounts of morality. Guided by the thought of Rousseau, Kant saw all earlier moral thinkers to have erroneously conceived of virtue, not as an end in itself, but in terms of its contribution to the higher goal of happiness. This subordination of morality not only debases virtue, but

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[50] In examining the presidency of Wilson I will rely primarily on: Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 267-294.
[51] Pangle and Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations*, 216.
[52] Carl J. Friedrich, introduction to *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), xxiii.

it also implies an inaccurate view of moral action. For in our "concrete experience of the moral in ourselves and in others," Kant contends, what we ultimately admire is good will exercised "strictly for its own sake." It is the "uncontingent and unconditioned" will that freely chooses to obey the obligations and duties of morality, understood as unqualified ends in themselves, that constitutes the essence of moral action.[53]

In illuminating and explicating the groundwork of the moral experience that had heretofore remained implicit, Kant argues that all moral principles must meet two standards: they must be understood as thoroughly distinct from all other guidelines that are followed merely as means to some greater good, and they must be equally binding on all human beings. These two standards are enshrined in Kant's notion of the "categorical imperative," i.e., the one and only standard by which a principle is judged to be truly a moral principle. Pangle and Ahrensdorf (1999) aptly summarize Kant's categorical imperative by constructing a hypothetical test to which one would have to submit every moral decision he makes:

> Do I will the maxim of my action not only as a means to my own and others' happiness, but also, and more important to me as a moral person, can I will it as a *universal law*—that is, can I conceive it as valid permanently, and not only for me and those I feel attached to, with our particular characteristics and wants, and in my present unique circumstances, but as something valid universally, to be willed by every rational agent confronted with roughly similar options?[54]

Implicit in Kant's account of the primary features of morality, of what all human beings understand to be entailed in moral duty, are particular notions of equality and of liberty. Equality of human beings is universal, and is defined most fundamentally by equal potential and longings for righteous action. To be a human being means to share in a common capacity for moral action; and all human beings, when acting morally, believe to be doing what is equally required of and willed by all other human beings faced with

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[53] Pangle and Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations*, 191.
[54] *Pangle and Ahrensdorf, Justice Among Nations,* 192-3.

similar circumstances. Human freedom is the exercise of one's moral will. True autonomy is achieved only when one acts morally: the man who does what is right, in accordance with the test of universality, transcends all other motives or principles of action that serve personal, non-universal ends, and thereby obeys only the law he has given himself—a law that he shares equally with all mankind.

For Kant, this inner freedom, or self-legislation according to universal principles, is *the* defining feature of human dignity. So inviolable is this individual liberty that it is, in his view, superior to the authority of the state. Since the moral will, if it is to emanate strictly from one's sovereign choice, requires that all individuals be free from coercion or persuasion to act morally, the proper role of government cannot include any kind of moral education. Rather, the function of the ideal Kantian state is limited to securing the external freedom for its citizens, i.e., eliminating any obstacles to the individual's pursuit of happiness and ability to discover, through the influence of public opinion, the self-directed moral will. Equally limited, according to Kant, are the demands of justice. Whereas the universalized moral law entails just action, "justice cannot demand of men that they be moral, or even that they be just in the sense of acting for the sake of justice, or out of respect for others' freedom."[55] Therefore, a state can maintain perfect freedom among its citizens even if no two individuals are moved by a genuine concern for, or interest in, each other's freedom, so long as each man "act externally in such a way that the free use of [his] will is compatible with the freedom of everyone according to a universal law."[56]

While the categorical imperative's demand of a strictly self-originating moral will limits the government from forcing its citizens to act morally, it imposes no such restriction on the state's interactions with other sovereign states. Suddenly, the statesman

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[55] *Ibid.*, 195.
[56] Immanuel Kant, "The Metaphysical Elements of Justice," in *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice: Part I of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. John Ladd (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), 35.

qua statesman, in his conduct of foreign policy, is bound by the concern with the freedom and dignity of all human beings that was previously an implied moral duty only of individuals. Yet, to remain logically consistent, Kant contends that the grounds of the state's concern are not identical to those of the individual. States are the product of a conventional contract, and therefore are not, strictly speaking, moral entities like individuals. Thus, states are not morally obligated to exercise their coercive power for moral ends in foreign affairs, however, the insuperable anarchy that reigns supreme over the relations of autonomous states compels governments to follow whatever course maximizes the external freedom and security of all actors. The extreme harshness that prevails in the Kantian state of nature among nations is the crux of his conception of international relations. Without a formal compact, there is nothing that constrains an individual from infringing on the rights or property of anyone else:

> Therefore, he need not wait until he finds out through bitter experience about the hostile attitude of the other man. There is nothing binding him to wait to become prudent until after he has suffered a loss. Because he can quite adequately observe within himself the inclination of mankind in general to play the master over others (that is, man's inclination not to respect the rights of others when he feels superior to them in might or cleverness), it is unnecessary to wait for actual hostilities. A man is authorized to use his coercion against anyone who by his very nature threatens him.[57]

When one considers the great degree to which participation in, and even preparation for, armed conflict defy and oppose the sacred freedom of each state's citizens, "the greatest and most pressing of all moral tasks of politics," according to Kant, becomes clear: "The effort to discover means of moving toward and eventually bringing about 'perpetual peace' in a global 'kingdom of ends' that would reflect, if it does not instantiate, the universality of the moral law."[58] While Kant's conception of the exemplary activity of the statesman certainly evokes Woodrow Wilson's post-World War I vision for a new world order, embodied in his "Fourteen Points" and effort to establish a

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[57] Kant, "The Metaphysical Elements of Justice," trans. Ladd, 71-2.

[58] Pangle and Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations*, 196.

League of Nations, in what follows below I will demonstrate that Wilson's personification of Kantian statesmanship is due less to particular policy positions than to his view of equality and liberty.

Following what was revealed in Kant's account of the psychological groundwork of morality, Woodrow Wilson understands equality and liberty to be inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. Although he does not speak of the "moral will" or offer any philosophic analysis of morality, Wilson conceives of equality as universal in that all human beings share the same interests and values of peace, freedom, and justice. Freedom is the exercise of one's uncoerced will, the actualization of the universal capacity for self-determination; and, because all human beings uniformly conceive their greatest need and highest interest to be peace and universal harmony with their neighbor as much as with a foreign people, no individual's power of self-determination is ever truly in tension with what unites him with all of mankind, i.e., his desire for and interest in concord and goodwill. In other words, Wilson conceived of a unity of mankind that did not threaten, but rather is completely compatible with, the natural variety and autonomy of the human race.

Here Wilson goes beyond even Kant's faith in the human moral will. No longer is the universally shared law of morality something that must be discovered or encouraged by society, as it was for Kant; rather, it is the inherent predilection of human beings to follow the common rule of mankind, that is, to act always on "that maxim as you can will to become a general law."[59] Moral action thus appears less admirable than Kant presented it; the pursuit of virtue no longer entails any great sacrifice. For if it is the natural human condition to strive toward moral action, happiness must be compatible with, if it does not consist in, morality. Moreover, if human beings are inherently predisposed to favor moral

[59] Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysical Foundations of Morals," in *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), 185.

deeds, the inner freedom of self-legislation that Kant held sacred loses some of its splendor; human freedom, understood as the exercise of one's autonomous will in accordance with universalized principles, becomes less radical. It follows that Wilson would not share Kant's hostility toward the expansive use of a government's coercive power to elevate society's moral awareness or to force moral action. Yet if "the basic interests as well as the basic values of individuals and peoples are in ultimate harmony," this "coercive" or positive power of the state need not exceed the removal of whatever obstacles impede the full and ineluctable expression of a people's powers of self-determination.[60]

While the preceding analysis makes clear that the ideology of Wilson departs from the teachings of Kant in critical respects, this fact should not be surprising, nor should it weaken the link between Kant, the philosopher, and Wilson, the statesman. For Wilson's notions of the natural human condition, Clor notes, are best understood as "first principles": "He did not subject them to any systematic questioning or philosophic inquiry." Put differently, he believed in them in the context of making political decisions, not contemplating the human psychological experience of morality. Despite the absence of theoretical engagement on these principles, Wilson's foreign policy clearly evinces the distinctive "moral sentiment" at the core of liberal democracy that finds, Pierre Hassner argues, its "theoretical support" from Kant more than any other modern philosopher.[61]

If we can trace the roots of this liberal democratic "moral sentiment" back to Kant, Wilson is the figure responsible for its complete flourishing. His conception of human nature, his "first principles," formed *the* lens through which he viewed the world and his duties as a statesman. He did not believe human or political conflicts to be "natural or inevitable," but rather "the result of wrongs and injustices that temporarily obscure our

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[60] Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 291.

[61] Pierre Hassner, "Immanuel Kant," in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd Edition, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 585.

underlying agreement."[62] There is no barbaric state of nature, in Wilson's mind; states, like individuals, are moral beings. The truth of this position becomes self-evident, Wilson maintains, when one casts one's sight beyond any national boundaries and gazes upon "the emerging common will and concerted judgment of an aroused mankind demanding the subordination of self-centered nationalism."[63] From this perspective, Wilson appears simply as a spokesman for this unanimous world opinion. He shares equally with all the citizens of the world the concern with the freedom and dignity of mankind, but his position of power provides him an exceptionally meaningful and effective vehicle through which he can give expression to, as well as act on, these cosmopolitan concerns. For in unfettering the previously restricted positive power of the Kantian state, Wilson significantly broadens the scope and duties of justice. Whereas the Kant's vision of the liberal state confined justice to "the principles by which men, as citizens, use the coercive apparatus of the state to secure their freedom from external threat and oppression,"[64] Wilson conceives of a comprehensive justice consisting in the universal maxims that govern and organize all human enterprise, including of course foreign affairs. The primary obligation of justice is to recognize and respect "the equality of all nations in their rights," in particular the right of self-determination, and in their "moral claims."[65]

The permanent establishment of this Wilsonian justice is *the* remedy for all international conflict. While his "Fourteen Points" and plan for a League of Nations lay out the specific provisions through which a community of states would implement and sustain this basic, but universal, respect among nations, he summarized the essence of his vision as follows: "What we seek is the reign of law based upon the consent of the

[62] Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 291-2.
[63] *Ibid*., 291.
[64] Pangle and Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nation*, 195.
[65] Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 288.

governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind."[66] At the same time that the president acknowledged such an undertaking would "involve and require a radical transformation of world politics," as we have already seen, he regarded the necessary uprooting of the international system to be a restoration of the natural human condition.[67] The Wilsonian project promises that it will finally and comprehensively eradicate the unnatural inequities that have veiled the fundamental agreement among the entire human race. Wilson saw no contradiction or tension between these two premises—that universal justice requires a thorough upending of the international system and that such a process would in fact bring human beings back to their natural situation—because he understood the transformation itself to be a part of the inevitable course of history. The true and impartial reign of justice was not, for Wilson, "a mere alternative that statesmen are free to choose or reject," but rather "a conclusion imposed upon us by stubborn political realities and historical events—a mandate of History." Again, Wilson's proof of the authenticity and authority of this decree was the alleged "emerging world opinion" inevitably aroused by "the grievances and pointless sufferings" of war, which has steadily become "more conscious, coherent, and demanding."[68]

This transnational public opinion was, in Wilson's mind, a tangible reality. As the leader of the only country in the world that was, as he put it, "founded for the benefit of humanity," Wilson believed it his *duty* to institute whatever mechanisms necessary to ensure that the relations of independent nations reflect the equally shared interests of mankind.[69] This project rested on his doctrine that "it is a very perilous thing to determine the foreign policy of a nation in the terms of material interest."[70] Indeed, peace among nations required above all that each state renounce all particular interests that benefit only

[66] Woodrow Wilson, "The Four-Point Speech," in *The Public Paper of Woodrow Wilson*, eds. Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd, 6 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1926), V, 234.
[67] Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 286.
[68] Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 286-7.
[69] Wilson, "Too Proud to Fight," eds. Baker and Dodd, III, 318.
[70] Wilson, "A New Latin-American Policy," eds. Baker and Dodd, III, 67.

the people within its borders, and instead conceive of its “national” interest as contributing to and improving the common good of all mankind. This notion of assimilating the formerly parochial interests of all autonomous states into one cosmopolitan interest of the human race, presided over and governed by the impartial judge of universal justice, was Wilson’s key contribution to modern liberal foreign policy. As Pangle and Ahrensdorf (1999) observe, since Wilson it has become “evermore difficult for ‘progressive’ statesmen to defend their policies in terms of simple patriotism or national interest, let alone empire building.” Instead, it is now common, if not expected, that diplomats and national leaders justify all their actions—from economic expansion to military interventions or security alliances—in terms of a “contribution to some ultimately pacific evolutionary or revolutionary world transformation that will in the long run lessen the spiritual as well as the political differences among peoples and diminish the sovereign power of states.”[71]

With this Wilsonian legacy in mind, I will now turn to examine the diplomatic record and writings of Alexis de Tocqueville. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to conclude definitively that Tocqueville would have unconditionally disapproved of a “milder” law of nations, like the one envisioned and sought by Wilson, what we can say with certainty is that Tocqueville did not believe the interests of France to be always in accord with any other autonomous nation, let alone a trans-political, trans-historical common good of mankind. What animated Tocqueville’s diplomatic career and foreign policy writings above all was his desire to combat the mildness developing in French society. Thus, in order to understand his career after *Democracy in America*, one must first return to his seminal text to discern clearly his criticism of this vice intrinsic to democracy.

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[71] Pangle and Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations*, 216-7.

Tocqueville's View of Democratic Mildness

Perhaps Tocqueville's most incisive assessments of the softening effects of equality of conditions are found in his discussions, at the end of the second volume, of the development of democracy in generations to come. Just as he continually looked back to the aristocratic past in order to understand the democratic present, so too did he peer into the future, trying to discern the ways in which the supremacy of equality would spread and continue to exert its influence on all mankind. Certain though he was that the "irresistible revolution" would continue "advancing amid the ruins that it has made," he avoided making precise predictions about the fate of democracy.[72] In the closing chapter of *Democracy*, however, he outlines a few principal features that will define the future character of democratic society as such. What unites these features, and what is most troubling for Tocqueville, is their mildness: "Nearly all the extremes become softer and are blunted; nearly all the salient points are worn away to make way for something middling, which is at the very same time less high and less low, less brilliant and less obscure than what was seen in the world."[73] To be sure, Tocqueville does not unconditionally lament this middling—how could there be nothing to praise of a providential fact? For instance, while equality may be less elevated, he makes clear that "it is more just, and its justice makes its grandeur and its beauty" (1282). What then is the exact content of Tocqueville's criticism of democratic mildness? If it truly is more just, what precisely is there to fear about the universal middling that inevitably accompanies equality of conditions?

Tocqueville's greatest concern for the future development of democracy is that this kind of mildness will prepare a society to submit to, if not regard as a benefit, what he calls "democratic despotism." That is, an "immense and tutelary" central government that, by attending to all of society's needs and administering all common affairs, ends by

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[72] *Democracy*, 14.
[73] *Ibid*., 1281.

reducing the people "to being nothing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd" (1250-2). In volume one of *Democracy* Tocqueville explains that a society can hasten the arrival of this extreme form of custodial government by centralizing the power to *administer* the laws in the hands of the state. Although Tocqueville discusses administrative centralization separately from mild mores, by the end of *Democracy* he regards the two as complementary means of reaching the same bleak end.

How then do mild mores prepare individuals to submit to democratic despotism? The answer is that, if left unchecked, each of the separate elements that together lead to and constitute Tocqueville's conception of mildness—excessive faith in the authority of public opinion, individualism, the insatiable desire for material wellbeing—tend to drive each individual to lose interest in anything but his own affairs. Withdrawn into his own private life, he loses the taste for participating in, and eventually becomes indifferent to, public matters. This is not to say that the democratic man has no interest in the fate of common affairs—indeed, it is of great concern to him that a certain order is maintained so to guarantee his peaceful pursuit of his own wellbeing. But he is naturally inclined, by both his apathy and the demands of private life, "to abandon the care of these affairs to the sole visible and permanent representative of collective interests, which is the State" (1201).

Magnifying this democratic disposition is the fact that the principle of equality, not simply the material reality of equal conditions, leads men to favor the concentration of authority in one single and centralized power. For if the central body represents and derives its authority from the mass of equal citizens, it alone is perceived to be the proper agent to hold the greatest amount of power. By contrast, any secondary powers—e.g., those that prevailed in aristocratic societies, e.g., wealthy families or influential individuals—would represent an unfair privilege, an affront to the very notion of equality. When all citizens are held equal to each other, it follows that each person will be

subject to the same uniform laws and habituation. As a consequence, "individuals appear smaller and society seems larger": no one doubts that "the power that represents the society possesses much more enlightenment and wisdom than any one of the men who compose it, and that its duty, as well as its right, is to take each citizen by the hand and to lead him" (1196).

In following these twin inclinations of his sentiments and his ideas, the democratic man becomes concerned only with the maintenance of public order and tranquility. At the same time that he cedes control over public matters, he grows increasingly reliant on the state; and it is this dependence that Tocqueville most fears in the scenario of democratic despotism looming on the horizon. Existing in such a state of neediness is antithetical to Tocqueville's republican conception of liberty, which proscribes the entrusting of great powers to any one authority. That is, liberty—understood most fundamentally as freedom not from coercion or interference but from dependence—is *the* decisive ingredient for a prosperous society, and it is precisely what democratic despotism promises to replace with a new, mild kind of servitude.

A closer look at Tocqueville's account of how democratic despotism can unfold and develop will provide a clearer understanding of his particular conception of liberty. We can begin by noting that the common affairs delivered to the state are not those that interest the country broadly, such as the formation of general laws, but rather everyday, local, administrative matters—establishing schools, building roads, maintaining parks—that together form the wellbeing of a community. But it is the relinquishing of control of precisely these "small details of social order that make life pleasant and easy" that Tocqueville finds so troubling (155). For the participation in and accomplishment of small communal affairs not only gives the practice required for the free exercise of one's will in larger, more urgent matters, but also draws citizens out of themselves and closer together, showing them in a practical way the tight bond that unites them. Equally important to this practice in liberty is the tendency for collective civic action to foster

among the citizens a kind of energy and vitality that, while sometimes unruly and imperfect in its efforts, is, in Tocqueville's view, a necessary ingredient for the health and prosperity of a people. When the central government does not administer these small affairs, the only way that they are carried out is through the "free participation of wills," which Tocqueville views as the only "true power" of a people (159). For compared to the "somnolence" that settles in the social body when control over public matters is ceded to the state, cooperative civic action creates an enterprising, resourceful, and self-motivated society, and instills in the people a patriotic sense of loyalty and attachment to their community (154). However, since each small affair on its own does not profoundly affect the strength of public virtue in a community, the spirit of citizenship disappears gradually; control over these seemingly petty matters is given away almost without notice.

As if to imitate the slow and subtle descent of a society toward democratic despotism, Tocqueville quietly and only intermittently discloses how each constitutive element of democratic mildness can, over time, deprive society of the power of self-determination and thereby enervate its citizens. Somewhere in each account of the different components of mildness Tocqueville reveals his deepest fear about the possibility that the particular democratic tendency could develop into a lamentable vice. What unites and animates these concerns is Tocqueville's vision of the conditions required for a flourishing democratic society, the most important of which are the solicitude for the common good and the energetic, rugged spirit engendered by a robust tradition of liberty.

One of the first clear glimpses of these concerns is at the end of the discussion of the principal source of beliefs in America. Tocqueville asserts that the ubiquitous authority of public opinion has the capacity eventually to "extinguish" intellectual liberty. Creating a "new face of servitude," he admits that the intellectual authority of the majority may become "too great" that it would "finally enclose the action of individual reason within more narrow limits than are suitable for the grandeur and happiness of the human

species" (724). Of course, the expanding supremacy of public opinion does not directly cause citizens to resign care of small, local matters. But it does accelerate the process. Since the federal government is the clearest and most visible expression of the will of the majority, the greater the dominion of public opinion, the more the state will appear as the rightful bearer of all civic responsibilities. Yet the source and legitimacy of the central government's power does not alleviate Tocqueville's dismay: when he feels "the hand of power" threatening the freedom of his mind, "knowing who is oppressing" him matters little, and he is "no more inclined to put [his] head in the yoke, because a million arms present it" to him (725).

Equally detrimental, Tocqueville fears, is the unchecked love of material goods. In one of the shortest chapters of the book, Tocqueville quietly discloses what can be lost as a society increasingly seeks the acquisition of material things. The ironic title sums up his point: "How the Excessive Love of Well-Being Can Harm Well-Being." That is, the pleasure derived from material goods is merely a subset of the broader category of human satisfaction or happiness; when pursued without restraint the desire for the former threatens to impede the attainment of the latter. Implicit in this argument is a ranking of human goods and of human passions that lead to the pursuit of those goods. Tocqueville makes clear how he understands the basic sequence: "there are no material passions that we do not have in common with [the animals] and whose germ is not found in a dog as well as in ourselves" (963). Superior in rank are those pursuits that transcend, and perhaps even scorn, the goods of the body. These include all those aforementioned activities that are *de facto* excluded from the liberal "ordinary life"—among them the worship of the divine and the self-sacrifice demanded by the "warrior ethic"—as well as all those enterprises, however small, that serve the public good. Yet as we have already seen, human beings are unique in that we are guided in our pursuits, even the material, by our soul: "With man, the angel teaches the brute the art of satisfying himself" (*ibid.*). We seek the same thing—namely, happiness—in both the lower and the higher human goods,

but only the latter provide the rich, durable satisfaction that Tocqueville means by the general category of "wellbeing."

Moreover, whereas the pursuit of immaterial goods "elevates, enlarges, [and] expands the soul," the inherently unsatisfying quest for material pleasures enervates and weakens the soul "for *all things*, the principal ones as well as the least ones, and threatens to make it almost as powerless for the first as for the second" (964). An enfeebled soul not only lacks the vigor to engage in those enterprises that seek satisfaction beyond the body, but it also can impede the pursuit of the bodily goods. Foreshadowing his cryptic characterization of a citizenry reduced to a timid flock of animals, Tocqueville says that people who reach this nadir, wherein they enjoy "without discernment and without progress" only material goods, lose access to the higher human goods, without which they are "like the animals" (964). A society dedicated to the acquisition of wealth sacrifices precisely what liberty aims to protect: an energetic spirit of citizenship and the ability to unite with one's neighbors in order to undertake projects that, in transcending the wellbeing of any one individual, contribute to the common interest of society.

It is not altogether clear if Tocqueville truly believed that human beings are capable of sinking to this final, dark endpoint of democratic despotism, this extreme debasement of society that resembles all too closely Nietzsche's last-men. Yet the strength of his conviction is of little import. For in Tocqueville's mind the different stages of democratic despotism vary only by the degree to which public liberty is sacrificed for tranquility and private prosperity. There is no doubt that even in his own age Tocqueville saw this alternative as matter of urgency and was conscious that his deep-seated desire to encourage the former and to forestall the latter determined his outlook on political matters. As he wrote to a friend, Sophie Swetchine, in January 1856: "I regard liberty as the prime good, as I always have; I have always seen in it one of the most fertile sources

of manly virtues and of great actions. Neither tranquility nor well-being can take its place."[74]

Since Tocqueville presents many of the most threatening consequences of equality of conditions as having the potential, if left unchecked, to lead by way of an excessive love of public order to this democratic despotism, one can understand the alternative between liberty and tranquility as proceeding from a more fundamental tension between liberty and equality. To be sure, this tension is not between two mutually exclusive principles: favoring liberty does not make Tocqueville an enemy of equality. We have already seen that his reverence for political liberty does not preclude him from regarding equality as a benefit to society, for example, in its capacity as the most stable source of justice. However, this tension between liberty and equality seen at the core of Tocqueville's thought does raise the question of how the two principles ought to coexist in a society. What, if any, should be the limits to the implementation of each? What does Tocqueville understand to be the moral obligations that proceed from his conceptions of liberty and equality, and how might they be at odds with one another?

Because Tocqueville never provides a clear answer to any of these questions, we are forced to extract various pieces of evidence and try to fit them together. Perhaps the most illustrative clues on the question of the proper relationship between liberty and equality in a society can be found in two letters from his personal correspondence. Writing to John Stuart Mill in June of 1835, Tocqueville declares, "I love liberty by taste, equality by instinct and reason."[75] He sees and feels that there is some inherent and universal equality amongst human beings; we are drawn unconsciously, by our "instinct," to love and value that fundamental similarity we share with all individuals of our species. Yet there is something impressive and admirable in liberty that he has grown to love only through

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[74] Tocqueville to Sophie Swetchine, 7 January 1856, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 326.
[75] Tocqueville to John Stuart Mill, June 1835, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 100.

experience. In another letter written nearly twenty years later, again to Sophie Swetchine, Tocqueville affirms Ms. Swetchine's conviction that an equitable allotment of goods and rights is "the greatest aim" of those who "conduct human affairs." But he adds the following crucial qualification: "I would only wish that equality in politics consisted of everyone being equally free and not, as one hears so often in our days, of everyone being subjugated to the same master."[76] This passage illuminates Tocqueville's view of equality that is at the heart of his republican notion of liberty: all human beings are equal in their claim to self-government, that is, to be free from dependence and from oppression.

Yet as Pierre Manent explains, by codifying this natural equality, democracy "in no way theoretically dismisses natural inequalities." Rather, it only "requires that they do not issue into individual influences that subject the weakest to the power of one who is more endowed by nature." Manent helpfully brings to the fore the reality that "nature does not cease furnishing instances of inequality."[77] He thereby reminds us that, in order to understand Tocqueville's conception of equality, one must consider his views of these man's natural inequalities. Most powerful and evident for Tocqueville is intellectual inequality, which man can never completely eradicate since it "comes directly from God."[78] Thus, precisely because democracy is rooted in a fundamental, albeit limited, equality of human beings, it must continually veil or divert attention away from all the "sentiments, qualities, and actions," springing out of nature, "that tend to contradict this equality."[79]

Tocqueville's vision of the proper orientation of society provides for and respects both facts of human nature—that is, both our natural equality and our natural inequalities. Yet he understood clearly that history is always biased: in each century "a singular and

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[76] Tocqueville to Sophie Swetchine, 10 September 1856, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 337.
[77] Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, trans. John Waggoner (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 78-9.
[78] *Democracy*, 88.
[79] Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, 79.

dominant fact is found to which the other facts are related." He knew that the foreseeable future would be dominated by equality of conditions; the "principal passion" that will agitate men in the coming centuries will be "love of this equality."[80] Seeing the natural direction toward which most modern societies were bound to incline, and recognizing the inherent dangers of equality, Tocqueville was convinced that politics in his time must seek to combat the latent vices of democracy. Not surprisingly, he viewed the maintenance and strengthening of liberty as the essential antidote. For when a democratic people has the opportunity and the initiative to engage in local matters and political affairs, each individual becomes attached to the community at the same time that all people come to discern in a practical way the common interest that unites them. Engaging even in small matters revives the social bonds, the sense of mutual obligation between individuals, that equality of conditions erased. Tocqueville regarded these ties between citizens as among the necessary preconditions for a society to undertake the sort of great and sustained enterprises that provide a theater not only for society to act cooperatively and in unison, but also for individuals to exercise their natural merits and talents. Tocqueville's conception of liberty thus served above all as the most effective means of enabling the most impressive natural inequalities among men to flourish. Refusing to bow to fatalism, he instead turned to foreign affairs as the best possible vehicle by which to accomplish his domestic goals. And in doing so, he believed the stakes to be even higher than reinvigorating a somnolent society: when a people no longer concern themselves with public matters, but only enjoy the benefits like a "usufructuary, without a sense of ownership and without ideas of any improvement whatsoever," they are "prepared for conquest." If such nations, populated not by citizens but by subject, "do not vanish from the world stage, it is because they are surrounded by similar or inferior nations."[81]

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[80] *Democracy*, 875.
[81] *Ibid.*, 157.

Tocqueville's Writings on Empire and Slavery

In the summer of 1837, two years after he published the first volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville ran unsuccessfully for a position in the French Chamber of Deputies.[82] This first attempt at elected office was not, however, completely unproductive: in his effort to win a seat in the Chamber, he published two essays on the French colonial project in Algeria that catalyzed a decade-long engagement with this topic. Between 1837 and 1847 Tocqueville visited Algeria twice, wrote a careful study (not intended for publication) of the past and future of French policy in Algeria, and published two official reports to the Chamber (he won office in 1839). In the midst of his preoccupation with Algeria, he also wrote an article, published in 1843, calling for the emancipation of slaves in all French Caribbean colonies. In this section I will examine these writings in order to demonstrate how Tocqueville's support for empire in Algeria and the emancipation of slaves in the French West Indies was rooted fundamentally in his conviction that these two projects would assist in combating the democratic vice of mildness that he saw developing in France.

My general approach is not a novel one: there have been many scholarly works attempting to explain Tocqueville's diplomatic career in terms of his hopes for improving the domestic condition of French society (cf. Richter, 1963; and Todorov, 1993). The central puzzle that most of this research seeks to clarify is the apparent tension running through Tocqueville's diplomatic works between an ardent and patriotic support for harsh and violent tactics required by French imperial projects on the one hand, and the apparent moral tone, if not aim, of his arguments for the abolition of slavery on the other hand. Indeed, most scholars argue that Tocqueville's ambivalence can be seen even within his writings on Algeria, claiming, for instance, that his essay on Algeria written in 1843, "the

[82] Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information will be from: "Appendix B" in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 390-7.

most uncompromising of Tocqueville's writings" on the subject, advocates for exceptionally cruel tactics that do not find support in his other reports.[83]

I will take my bearings by the most compelling of these studies, Jennifer Pitts' book, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (2005). In doing so I will clarify as well as disagree with her central claim that the "ambivalence of Tocqueville's writings" reflect his "anxieties about the difficulty of maintaining political engagement in France in an age of democratization," which led him to support "the exercise of French power in Algeria" and to "ignore the claims of those France sought to dominate."[84] While this is a helpful starting point, Pitts' thesis ultimately falls short for two key reasons. First, her explanation of the connection between Tocqueville's foreign policy and his longings to improve the condition of the French social state goes no further than stating that Tocqueville regarded large-scale empires, and in particular the "glorious military conquest and prosperous settlement" they entailed, as among the only "arenas for grand political gestures in his day."[85] Second, Pitts' claim that Tocqueville's indifference toward the native inhabitants of Algeria contradicts his "deeply moral understanding of politics" rests on the dubious assumption that Tocqueville, in all his writings, including *Democracy in America*, and throughout his diplomatic career, was guided at various times by some objective other than the French national interest.[86] In what follows below, I will address sequentially both of these weaknesses, demonstrating that they arise from the same source: namely, an inadequate consideration of the primacy of liberty in Tocqueville's political views, ambitions, and hopes for French society.

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[83] Jennifer Pitts, introduction to *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, by Alexis de Tocqueville. Edited and translated by Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xxiv.
[84] Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 207.
[85] *Ibid*., 234.
[86] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 233.

There is no doubt that Tocqueville was greatly concerned with, and moved by, the status of French reputation among other leading international powers, especially Britain. Yet it is an exaggeration to say that this was Tocqueville's only, or even primary, consideration. Moreover, Pitts never explicates how, according to Tocqueville, engaging in "grand political gestures" abroad would combat the pervasive apathy at home in France. For the colonial projects in Algeria did not require the kind of mass mobilization of troops that would jolt awake an enervated people with the threat of defeat at the hands of a larger, and more powerful enemy. Compared to a military engagement with another leading state, one could say that the material risks of colonial failure were relatively low. How then did Tocqueville believe colonial projects in Algeria would be an effective remedy against the domestic maladies developing in France?

The answer is two-fold: first, establishing and maintaining colonies abroad provided the French government, and the public that elects them, the occasion to exercise a "definite and sustained will" on a long-term endeavor that, insofar as it symbolizes French prowess and strength, would encourage, or revive, a patriotic pride.[87] In *Democracy* Tocqueville identified both of these potential effects of colonization as key antidotes to democratic despotism. Second, managing the affairs involved in directing a foreign colony necessarily educates the policymakers at home in good governance. Put differently, by attempting to found and preserve a new political community in Algeria, the government of France was able to conduct a kind of "experiment" to test different governmental arrangements and methods while observing the results from afar. Tocqueville considered it essential for a democratic government, like France, to have access to such a venue, for a group of people all held equal "can only gain the truth by experience," and, as was true for the Native Americans, "many peoples cannot wait for the results of their errors without perishing." Algeria thus represented in Tocqueville's

[87] *Democracy*, 149.

mind the expansive frontier of America, which proved to be the "great privilege of the Americans" in that granted them "the ability to make mistakes that can be corrected."[88]

The first of these two benefits of colonization evinces Tocqueville's awareness that the answer to the problem of democracy, in order to be effective, must occur on the level of democracy. "Tocqueville accepts equality," Martin Zetterbaum notes, "and, with it, the individualism which is its inevitable accompaniment." Knowing that any effort to struggle against the democratic revolution would be futile and foolish, Tocqueville understands that the "problem of democracy is to re-create a sense of public morality on the basis of equality and individualism."[89] During his travels to America, the most promising resolution was seen in the Americans' application of what he called "doctrine of interest well understood," i.e., the notion that, "out of an enlightened regard for themselves," the citizens of a democracy "need constantly assist one another and sacrifice a portion of their time and wealth to the welfare of the state or community."[90] The doctrine of interest well understood can be thought of as a kind of enlightened selfishness, insofar as it "turns personal interest back against itself and, to direct the passions, uses the incentive that excites them. However, it is not the same as pure selfishness—it is not identical to the attitude that each individual serves his compatriots best in serving himself.[91] The key difference is that out of "interest well understood" emerges a love of country and community:

> The common man in the United States has understood the influence that general prosperity exercises over his own happiness, an idea so simple and yet so little known by the people. He has, *moreover*, become accustomed to regarding this prosperity as

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[88] *Ibid*., 365.
[89] Marvin Zetterbaum, "Alexis de Tocqueville," in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd Edition, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 778.
[90] *Ibid*., 776.
[91] *Democracy*, 921.

> *his work*. So, in public fortune, he sees his own, and he works for the good of the State, not only by duty or by pride, but I would almost dare to say by cupidity.[92]

Despite Tocqueville's high esteem for this American habit of energetic work toward the common interest that emerges out of their liberty in small affairs, he was skeptical that such a remedy could arise organically in French society. However, during his first visit to Algeria, Tocqueville observed that the colonization project had had a similar effect. The ambition of the generals stationed permanently in Algeria, he notes, was "more enlightened and more contained than that of the generals who arrive from France only for a certain period." Those in latter group, representing the society from which they came, were "more concerned with [their] personal glory than with the desire to do things most useful for the country."[93]

In the "Second Letter on Algeria," written four years prior to his first visit, Tocqueville makes clear that the French goal of *governing* over its colonial possessions will require a sustained effort from the home country. "The sole object of our present concern should be to live in peace with those Arabs whom we cannot hope to govern at present, and to organize them in the manner least dangerous for our future progress." That organization, Tocqueville emphasizes, does not entail the Arab population governing themselves. Even at this early stage of his involvement with the question of empire, Tocqueville asserts that the Algerian inhabitants, recently liberated by the French from Ottoman rule, do *not* have "an incontestable right to govern."[94] Moreover, Tocqueville implies in these remarks that the peaceful cohabitation with the Arabs is sought not for its own sake or out of sympathy for the native populations, but rather as a temporary means to the ultimate goal of French success. Tocqueville regarded pacific

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[92] *Ibid*., 387, emphasis added.

[93] Alexis de Tocqueville, "Essay on Algeria," in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Pitts, 80.

[94] Alexis de Tocqueville, "Second Letter on Algeria," in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Pitts, 21.

relations with the Arabs as a necessary component of the broader strategy to deplete the territory and populations under control of the Abd-el-Kader, the chief rival to French domination of Algeria and a "puny young man" hailing from a family that "descended from Muhammad himself."[95] Indeed, Tocqueville took into consideration cohabitation with the Arab population only because they, unlike the Kabyles, the other native Algerian tribe, were sedentary and agricultural. While he never have reasonably expected the effects of colonization to influence every facet of French society, there is no doubt that the kind of prolonged and steady support, if not concerted effort, required to engage in such a long-term project would help combat the restlessness and shortsightedness of French legislators, citizens, and soldiers.

If his early writings on Algeria display his emphasis on the need for an enduring colonial effort, Tocqueville's later reports, published in 1847, demonstrate the way in which the French government can learn from the mistakes of its colonization "experiments." In his "Second Report on Algeria" Tocqueville crafted a document that allowed the Chamber of Deputies to reflect on the previous decade of their endeavors so that that they "focus on the question of which method of colonization [they] should follow."[96] In his examination of several different colonial settlements, Tocqueville spotlights above all the grave dangers of administrative centralization. The single consistent cause of ruin in Algeria was the "daily influence" of the "inert and meddlesome" centralized administrative power that sought to intervene in and direct all the small affairs for the colonists. In these abandoned towns the French government had given the settlers "houses and fields," but not "the means to live": the colonists "languished and in the end would have died out, their hands still full of all the tools of prosperity they had been given free."[97] While these failed settlements certainly troubled Tocqueville, he hoped that they would demonstrate concretely to the Chamber of

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[95] Tocqueville, "Second Letter on Algeria," ed. and trans. Pitts, 18.
[96] Alexis de Tocqueville, "Second Report on Algeria," in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Pitts, 177.
[97] *Ibid*., 181-2.

Deputies the vices of a custodial administrative power. Having little faith that the people of France, who were "destitute of true passions," would be able to apprehend the grim social consequences of administrative centralization, Tocqueville sought to reveal the material effects of such a government in order to arouse "a sincere taste for working for the general good."[98]

Perhaps the most striking example of Tocqueville's effort to reawaken and reinvigorate the apolitical and individualistic social state of France can be seen in his essay, "The Emancipation of Slaves." This work is also perhaps the most misunderstood of Tocqueville's diplomatic career. Exemplifying this misinterpretation, Pitts adduces Tocqueville's slavery articles as the only evidence necessary to substantiate her bold claim that he believed that "some universal moral standards should govern states' international conduct."[99] At first sight, it is reasonable to expect that an article in support of the abolition of slavery would correspond with the belief in a cosmopolitan moral standard, as well as obligation, that binds the actions of sovereign states. Yet if one looks closely at Tocqueville's exact arguments, it is far from clear that they implied such a belief. He summarizes his support for the "emancipation plan" proposed for the French Caribbean colonies as follows: "It would be difficult, it seems, to attain a greater goal at smaller cost, and to bring together any better the requirements of humanity and France's interest with the commands of prudence."[100] While he certainly refers to the "requirements of humanity," one must wonder if he held such requirements (however he defines them) to be more important than the other two concerns mentioned: French national interest and prudence. Insofar as he regarded the benefits of the French Caribbean colonies to be equal or similar to those of the Algerian colonial project, Tocqueville leaves us little room to doubt that, on the question of emancipation, his

[98] Tocqueville to Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard, 15 August 1840, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 146.
[99] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 230.
[100] Alexis de Tocqueville, "The Emancipation of Slaves," in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Pitts, 224.

primary interest was anything other than what was best for the future of France. For he understood that maintaining the status quo in the Caribbean colonies will most certainly cause their ruin: “if there is a way for France to keep [its colonies], it will come only from the abolition of slavery.”[101]

Of course Tocqueville’s advocacy of emancipation contains more than a passing reference to humanity. Indeed, unlike any of his other works on foreign affairs, this essay is imbued with a moral, humanitarian tone. He speaks passionately of France reassuming its rightful place as the leading advocate of the “notions of freedom and equality that are weakening or destroying servitude everywhere.” Yet it is important to note that, for Tocqueville, this crusade is not wholly, or even primarily, moral. Above all he seeks to arouse the “glory” and “strength” of France that they first acquired not by originating the “Principles of 1789,” but rather by reawakening the work of the Christians and bringing “it into battle as an auxiliary.”[102] It was precisely in this way that Tocqueville sought to make use of the emancipation of slavery: abolition was the only means by which to save the French colonies, which he regarded as necessary in the effort to combat the apathy and lassitude of French society. While he accepted the fact that democratic nations are condemned to remain outside “the great theater of human affairs,” because their fervent and shortsighted dedication to the acquisition of wealth precludes them from executing “vast plans,” Tocqueville insists that France must preserve the means of rising to these heights again in the future. “If we do not acquire remote new positions that would allow us easily to take a principal part in the approaching events,” Tocqueville exhorts his countrymen, “let us at least try to preserve those that we have prudently acquired.”[103] Tocqueville’s support for the abolition of slavery is thus rooted not in humanitarian concerns for the fate of the slave population, but rather in his conviction that

[101] *Ibid*., 200.
[102] *Ibid*., 207.
[103] *Ibid*., 206.

emancipation was an essential precondition for the future strength, power, and grandeur of France.

This kind of misinterpretation of Tocqueville's morality can be seen in studies of all of his works. For instance, Pitts argues that, in his "Essay on Algeria," Tocqueville suggests that "French imperial activities must be governed by a concern for rights and international law."[104] In making this claim, Pitts refers to Tocqueville's remark advocating the use of "all means" to desolate the native tribes in Algeria, excluding only "those condemned by humanity and by the law of nations."[105] Taken on its own, this asseveration certainly invites pause: how can Tocqueville at once speak so coldly about destroying the inhabitants of Algeria and invoke the sanctity of some transnational law that binds all sovereign states? Moreover, what actions exactly does this cosmopolitan law proscribe? Without claiming to know the precise limits of this law, Pitts argues that Tocqueville's remark indicates that he "did believe that natural individual rights establish moral obligations and define the scope and requirements of international justice."[106] While this interpretation appropriately captures the ideology of a statesman like Woodrow Wilson, or a philosopher like Immanuel Kant, it does not accurately reflect Tocqueville's understanding of equality, liberty, and the moral obligations that arise from each. Only a few lines below the brief statement cited by Pitts, Tocqueville clarifies the ambiguity of his statement. Far from establishing obligations or imposing limits, the "right of nations," by which Tocqueville means the "right of war," grants extensive license. It "authorizes us to ravage the country," a tactic Tocqueville explicitly endorses, "either by destroying harvests during the harvest season, or year-round by making those rapid incursions called razzias, whose purpose is to seize men or herds."[107] The great puzzle of Tocqueville's career thus appears as superimposed by contemporary scholars, rather than as a paradox that he himself would have seen. That is, many studies are forced

[104] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 231.
[105] Tocqueville, "Essay on Algeria," ed. and trans. Pitts, 71.
[106] Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 231.
[107] Tocqueville, "Essay on Algeria," ed. and trans. Pitts, 71.

to conclude that Tocqueville's diplomatic career suffered from an intractable tension precisely because they insist on attempting to categorize him according to present-day academic standards and criteria. Rather than relentlessly asking ourselves how Tocqueville's "liberalism" could ever be compatible with his "imperialism," we are better off striving to understand the man as he would have understood himself: an observer as well as a practitioner of politics who sought to apprehend the world not only for the sake of acquiring knowledge, but more importantly in order to achieve particular goals.

Conclusions and Implications

There is yet another reason that Tocqueville's foreign policy is so often misunderstood. The true line of reasoning that wove together his support for emancipation with his endorsement of obliterating entire tribes eludes our grasp not only because our twenty-first century academic jargon clashes with all subject matter deemed to be "classic." Rather, seeking an equilibrium that unites Tocqueville's works in a comprehensive and comprehendible whole can seem like a vain endeavor because he approached what we understand to be familiar topics—democracy, international relations, the abolition of slavery—from a perspective that is alien to our modern democratic minds. This Tocquevillean perspective is so unfamiliar to us that it escapes our notice; we do not know how to begin accounting for it because we do not recognize it. What makes it so foreign is its particular orientation toward life and toward politics, and its unique ranking of the various ends and means available to human beings.

Tocqueville disparaged those who trade patriotism and citizenship for public order and private prosperity. He feared those who sought peace for the sake of peace more than those who dreamt of conquest and loved war. He longed for "great events" and was perennially tired of "our little democratic and bourgeois pot of soup."[108] He sanctified the French national interest above all else; he assuredly would have resisted Woodrow Wilson's exhortation that all "self-governing states must be willing at all times to act on the principle that 'the peace of the world' takes precedence over any national concerns, ends, or values of their own."[109] Yet Tocqueville's resolute patriotism did not make him coldly indifferent to everyone but his fellow Francophiles. Indeed, he viewed his life and career largely in philanthropic terms. But he understood the word "philanthropy" in its strict sense. That is, he criticized the "childishness" of those who

[108] Tocqueville to Gustave de Beaumont, 9 August 1840, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 143.
[109] Clor, "Woodrow Wilson," eds. Frisch and Stevens, 290.

call themselves "philanthropists" but instead "make almost ridiculous" the "sincere love of humanity."[110] For Tocqueville, philanthropy consists in leading "modern societies by degrees" to the point that "the majority of citizens [are] in a fit state for governing." It was to this enterprise, "the only way to save them from barbarism or slavery," that Tocqueville dedicated all of his "energy and will."[111]

Tocqueville began this project by writing *Democracy in America*. Above all else, he intended his seminal book to instruct the future democrats regarding the "fatal circle" that "Providence" has circumscribed around them. Equality of conditions cannot be reversed, but, Tocqueville encourages, "it depends on them whether equality leads them to servitude or liberty, to enlightenment or barbarism, to prosperity or misery."[112] His dedication to this philanthropic cause also shaped his diplomatic career. Employed by the French Chamber of Deputies, but writing for all future generations of democrats, he used the lessons learned in Algeria to teach us that, although the military "from time to time undoubtedly uses quite a brutal measure of violence," by far the "most oppressive and injurious power" was "the civil government."[113] For Tocqueville, violent conflict, which entails at least the possibility of death, is not the greatest evil to fear. If war and death are not the greatest evils, it follows that peace is not the greatest good. That this Tocquevillean ranking and perspective is alien to our contemporary sensibilities becomes evident when one considers the central tenets of modern liberal foreign policy. President Obama's first major foreign policy speech, delivered in Cairo in 2009, accurately embodies this Kantian legacy. Speaking, as Wilson did, on behalf of a universal public opinion, President Obama enumerated the key commonalities shared by all human beings: "all of us share common aspirations to live in peace and security." Moreover, there is global consensus regarding the purposes of that peace: "to get an education and to

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[110] Pitts, *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, 260*n*.
[111] Tocqueville to John Stuart Mill, June 1835, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 100-2.
[112] *Democracy*, 1285.
[113] Tocqueville, "Essay on Algeria," trans. and ed. Pitts, 99.

work with dignity, to love our families, our communities, and our God." And it is precisely these shared aspirations and goals that constitute "the hope of all humanity."[114]

As we have already seen, Tocqueville differed greatly from Kant's idealism, but that does not make him a jingoist. Rather, he insisted on holding humanity to a standard fit for the exercise of man's highest and most impressive faculties. Eschewing "the ordinary life" that has dominated Western liberal societies, and accepting the disappearance of the "warrior passion," Tocqueville's enterprise aimed at maintaining an elevated middle ground. His goal was simple: to guide and inspire the future generations of democrats never to "relinquish the use of their free will" and always to employ whatever means necessary in its defense. For without liberty, one will fall "gradually below the level of humanity."[115]

If Tocqueville's project is not puzzling, perhaps it seems anachronistic. Studying the past always runs the risk of eliciting this reaction. Yet we must consider the unique timing of Tocqueville's life. Writing in 1837 to a friend, he describes having come "into the world at the end of a long Revolution, which, after having destroyed the old state, had created nothing durable." He was born with neither aristocratic nor democratic prejudices. He had only the single passion of "the love of liberty and human dignity."[116] These remarks reveal a critical feature of his life and of his time: an important place in political life and debate was occupied by questions regarding the definition of equality and its implications for governmental action, for liberal democracy was new to the world and its future uncertain. The rare timing of Tocqueville's life, and his keen awareness of this fact, affords him an advantage of perspective unavailable today. Born in between the demise of one era and the birth of another, suspended over a turning point of the course of history, Tocqueville was able to view the sentiments and opinions of the societies

[114] Daily Comp. Pres. Docs., 2009 DCPD No. 00436, p. 3.
[115] *Democracy*, 1259.
[116] Tocqueville to Harry Reeve, 22 March 1837, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche, 115.

behind and in front of him more clearly than we can see either. Aristocracy is too foreign to understand and too ancient to remember. Democracy is too commonplace to see clearly; our complete immersion prevents us from achieving a critical distance necessary to understand objectively our prejudices. We therefore ought to leave open the possibility that he saw something we can no longer see clearly.

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