

Burke and Tocqueville: New Worlds, New Beings

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1. Revolutionaries

Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville agreed in their analyses of some of the causes of the French Revolution, most particularly on the role of the “men of letters,” and the prestige and influence they gained as the traditional political elites lost power. This new intellectual class became what Daniel Roche has called “a substitute government, at once omnipotent and powerless,”¹ the product of a state that was an unhappy mixture of modern and archaic elements, in which those who once had power lost legiti-

1. Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 422. In opposition to the Tocquevillean view of the enclosure of the literary intellectuals, see Keith Michael Baker, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12–27; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 300–304. Robert Darnton, in *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 194–97, both agrees and disagrees with Tocqueville about the “elaboration of a common culture” in the eighteenth century and the function of “literature, which had done so much to legitimize absolutism in the seventeenth century, [and] now became the principal agent of its delegitimation.”

macy, and those who gained legitimacy failed to win power. Burke famously contrasted this situation with that in England, where men of letters, particularly those who scoffed at traditional pieties and beliefs, were rewarded with little notice in their lifetimes and near oblivion thereafter. For Burke, this new grouping had the further disadvantage that it substituted the real world with the world of its imaginings, and then was shocked (or would have been so) to see these imaginings realized in actual practice. After the first year of the Revolution this charge was routinely leveled against the philosophes. They had indulged in visionary dreams that had become nightmarishly real.² This was a pathology that derived from a fundamentally corrupt position that began in the powerlessness of the literary clique and ended in Jacobin dictatorship. As with the colonial predators in India and the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, these new intellectuals and/or revolutionaries had come to regard themselves as the true representatives of the state and believed its interests were their own. Quarantined within the worlds they dominated, they became criminal or protocriminal formations who practiced violence and injustice and called it civilization. They represented a threat to the French or British states that foolishly nurtured them by policy or allowed them to flourish by default. Of the three groups, the intellectuals were the most serious threat, since they were the creators of the new modern spirit that was to topple France and threaten Europe; the colonists were unwitting conspirators in this process, since they disgraced the name and retarded the development of the institutions—the famous “British Constitution”—that made Britain the benign alternative to French modernity.

Tocqueville’s reading of the ancien régime as itself being the first revolution (and 1789 the second) initially makes a glaring contrast with Burke’s view of 1688, since Burke argued that the Glorious Revolution was as unrevolutionary as it was possible for a revolution to be. In France, the battle between the nobility and the centralization of administrative power by the Crown, the replacement of society by the state, constituted a revolution that began with Louis XIV rather than with Louis XVI.³ The absolutist state created a caste system in its readiness to exchange power for a commodified version of status without function; titles were sold like fake antiques, and

2. A well-known example would be Mallet du Pan, “Du Degré d’Influence qu’a eu la Philosophie Française sur la Révolution,” *Mercure Britannique*, no. 13 (February 25, 1799): 342–70.

3. This was recognized by both Mme. de Staël and Tocqueville. See Franco Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768–1776: The First Crisis*, trans. R. Burr Litchfield (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 280–81.

intellectual systems and opinions had the glamour of novelties traded in the salons and journals by writers innocent of the practicalities of political life. If the British ancien régime, ushered in by 1688, was, in Tocqueville's terms, wholly unlike the centralizing French system, it did nevertheless mark a real advance in the achievement of liberty, if not of equality.

Ireland, with its bad aristocracy and its peculiarly decayed version of society, was excepted from this benign analysis. In this respect, Tocqueville's views chimed with those of Burke, although there were important differences. Tocqueville did not contrast the emergent modern society with a venerable and traditional order that must, by every rhetorical resource available, be rendered sacrosanct and timeless. On the contrary, he claimed that the centralized administrative state had concealed its operations behind an increasingly venal facade of traditional codes. His famous disagreement with Burke's analysis of the Revolution is rooted in this. "Burke does not realize that what stands before his eyes is the revolution which will abolish the old common law of Europe; he does not understand that this is its sole purpose."⁴ Burke, in other words, believed the French system could be reformed, that the intermediate bodies, such as the *parlements*, could be revived, that a monarchy and nobility of the kind espoused by Montesquieu could be restored. He did not realize that the Revolution was already complete. The ancien régime had not been replaced by the Revolution; it had been the Revolution.⁵ The modern world had finally discarded the camouflage of the ancient European order Burke hastened to lament and defend.⁶

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), bk. 1, chap. 5, 107.

5. Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Knopf, 1989) develops this element of Tocqueville's argument "further than his account allows it to go" (xv).

6. See François Furet, "Tocqueville," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 1021–32. The most thorough extension and transformation of Tocqueville's claim that the Revolution completed rather than reversed the centralizing processes of the absolutist regime that preceded it is in Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730–1840s* (London: Academic Press, 1989), 52: "The transformation of the state structure was merely the continuation of a process that had been going on for two centuries. In this regard Tocqueville is correct. Thus, the French Revolution marked neither basic economic nor basic political transformation. Rather, the French Revolution was, in terms of the capitalist world-economy, the moment when the ideological superstructure finally caught up with the economic base. It was the consequence of the transition, not its cause nor the moment of its occurrence."

Besides the importance and political insulation of the men of letters and of the new moneyed interest, Tocqueville also followed Burke and others in emphasizing the importance of Paris; the historical parallel with the Reformation; the emergence of an unprecedented form of ruthlessness, manifest in the men of the new generation; and the connection between this and the antireligious character of the revolution. He followed in the steps of such commentators as Portalis, who claimed that Rousseau was right to declare that the principal objects of a society were liberty and equality, but that the consequences drawn from this by him and even more so by his followers had been catastrophic. Only in France, Portalis claimed, had writers become “une véritable puissance dans l’État” and had dared to assert that they, rather than the clergy, had the exclusive right to teach morality as a secular science.⁷ Such commentary was in part indebted to Burke, but it is also characteristic of the varied French Restoration analyses that attributed to militant anti-Christian ideologies a particular ferocity of temperament that was unprecedented in European, even human, history. Burke’s account of the arrival of this new species is resumed in that of Tocqueville and many of his liberal and conservative contemporaries; the French Revolution had created “new beings who . . . have since formed a race which has perpetuated itself, and spread among all civilized parts of the earth. . . . We found them in the world when we were born; they are still with us.”⁸ These revolutionaries had completely overthrown the limitations, even the idea of limitation, that religion imposed. The existence of people with such radical and destructive beliefs made the possibility of a European alternative to American democracy a frightening prospect.

2. Americans

In America, “while the law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving and forbids them to commit, what is rash or unjust.”⁹ America was not a secular country. It had reorga-

7. Jean-Etienne Marie Portalis, *De l’usage et de l’abus de l’Esprit philosophique pendant le dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Moutardier, 1827), 2:446, 336, 434.

8. Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, 208–9.

9. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley, 2 vols. (reprint, 1945; New York: Vintage, 1990), vol. 1, pt. 1, chap. 17, 305. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *DA*, followed by volume, book, part, chapter, and page numbers, where appropriate. On the idea of limitation in Tocqueville, see Marcel Gauchet, “Tocqueville,” in *New French Thought: Political Philosophy*, ed. Mark Lilla (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 91–111.

nized the spheres of religion and politics, but the autonomy granted to each did not rob religion of its presiding influence as a rebuke to human pride and as a system of belief that allowed the dream of an ultimate reconciliation of opposing forces within the social system to become an important feature of the country's ideology. Such a notion, according to Tocqueville, energizes citizens to achieve perfect equality, "a chimera that draws men on and retires before them." Hence the desire for equality "always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete." Americans remain close to their famous dream, always "near enough to see its charms, but too far off to enjoy them"; from this derives the melancholy that often haunts the inhabitants of democratic countries (*DA*, 2:2:13:138–39).¹⁰ Yet while Tocqueville may have had serious reservations about the virtual melancholy, the increasing social uniformity, and the dullness of the American system, he preferred these to the despotic opportunities offered by the European systems, to which the idea of an ultimate social harmony was quixotic.

Tocqueville's almost mystical belief in the principle of equality as the dynamic of all modern history allows him to indicate those features in the European and the American political systems that were in or out of tune with it and therefore to make his analyses inevitably assume the form of some contrast or conflict between modern and archaic elements. This becomes in his work a governing style of argument that is certainly discernible in Burke but has for him no comparably molding force. It also persuades Tocqueville to make the rather astonishing claim that America is the only country in the world to achieve democracy without a "democratic" revolution, that it was, so to say, born to equality and therefore did not have to undergo the long European struggle with feudal and neofeudal systems that inhibited the growth of equality there. "The great advantage of the Americans is that they have arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution, and that they are born equal instead of becoming so" (*DA*, 2:2:3:101). At the time of the American Revolution, Burke saw it not as a global event but as an internal British quarrel which, if anything, highlighted the dangers of a foolish policy that gave to the forces of religious

10. This compares interestingly with Mme. de Staël's claim that the English are more melancholy than the French because the achievement of political liberty and virtue requires reflection, and reflection leads one to dwell on serious matters. See Germaine de Staël, *De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (Paris: Maradan, 1800), and *Oeuvres* (Paris: F. Didot, 1836), 1:267. Notable among various anticipations of this view is J.-H. Meister, *Souvenirs d'un Voyage en Angleterre* (Paris: Didier, 1791), 167–68.

Dissent a political victory in America they would never have won at home. But it was their distinguishingly British combination of Protestantism and liberty that made them, in Burke's eyes, formidable rebels.¹¹ For him, at that stage, settler colonies were extensions of the national ethos, although in America the dissenters' influence (and memories) intensified the colonists' aggravation with the authoritarian attitudes of the government in London.¹²

Tocqueville agreed with the Burkean analysis, although he extended it further to enhance the well-known connection presumed to exist between the commercial spirit, the "spirit of religion" and the "spirit of liberty." The New England settlers sought "with almost equal eagerness material wealth and moral satisfaction; heaven in the world beyond, and well-being and liberty in this one"; they were "at the same time ardent sectarians and daring innovators" (*DA*, 1:2:43). For Tocqueville, what America had retained and the French had lost was the sense of limitation that accompanies religious belief. Thus, in the light of 1789 and after, the American Revolution was more and more frequently interpreted as an example of what a true revolution could be, and its status was accordingly upgraded. Tocqueville's comments on it have sometimes the apocalyptic nature of his comments on the French Revolution. He wants to see America as the culmination of an inevitable evolution while also believing that it was an unforeseeable and extraordinary innovation. "In that land the great experiment of the attempt to construct society upon a new basis was to be made by civilized man; and it was there, for the first time, that theories hitherto unknown, or deemed impracticable, were to exhibit a spectacle for which the world had not been prepared by the history of the past." Sometimes he forgets that he had claimed America had never had a feudal past. "A democracy more perfect than antiquity had dared to dream of started in full size and panoply from the midst of an ancient feudal society" (*DA*, 1:1:25; *DA*, 1:2:35).

But it was America's "feudal" present, as represented by the slave-owning South, that was more threatening to the vision of America that emerges in the first volume of *Democracy*. There were indeed several Americas—one in New England, one in the South, one in the western states, and the most elusive of all, the idea of America that Tocqueville formed in

11. For an interesting discussion of Burke's view of the American, British, French, and Irish national characters and their relation to policy, see Frederick A. Dreyer, *Burke's Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979), 60–67.

12. See Jack P. Greene, "Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 208–30.

the course of his autopsy on the France that had died in the Revolution and had not yet been reborn into modernity. But feudality was not an entirely negative condition. It could be so when the political system was largely governed by a fake or bad aristocracy—like the Irish Protestant or that of the Southern states. Austerely seen, aristocracy was politically defunct; nostalgically reconceived, it became for Tocqueville a condition that had become historically unavailable, most especially to modern democracy and its leveling tendencies. All of Tocqueville's versions of America are seen against an aristocratic European background, almost always French, and almost always rich in the virtues that democracy lacks, other than the capacity to survive.¹³ Precisely because there were several Americas in Tocqueville's analysis, and because of the increasing intensity of the battle between federal and state government on the issue of slavery, he could foresee that the Union itself might not survive, even though it did not seem to him that the idea of democracy would fade with it. In his eyes, this structural tension duplicated the very French dispute that had been at the heart of the crisis of the ancien régime and remained unresolved, although Napoleonic centralization had immensely intensified the centralizing and despotic power that had been briefly challenged in 1789. It is clear that readers of Tocqueville, among them Lord Acton, adopted this potentially tragic vision of a battle for liberty fought out between local or intermediate and federal or centralizing energies. In Acton's case, this gave him a way of understanding and participating in the disputes between the Vatican and national churches, between authoritarian fiat and the rights of the individual conscience. It is clear, too, that Acton interpreted the American Civil War in terms Tocqueville had supplied; hence, he regarded the victory of the North as a triumph of centralizing and equalizing forces over liberty.

Thus, in one version at least, the United States became for Tocqueville a possible democratic future for Europe, the more purely realized because it had not had aristocratic Europe as its past.¹⁴ Such a future would

13. See Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 229–40.

14. Tocqueville's point that America had no feudal past to repudiate is important for the so-called Atlantic thesis about the French Revolution, in which it is seen as part of a general revolution of the Western World in the late eighteenth century. See Jacques Godechot, *Les révolutions (1770–1799)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963); and R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959). According to this interpretation, the French Revolution had an American moment—up to the Constituent

be brought about or characterized by the inescapable “equality of conditions,” with democracy as the companion political system. His democracy had two modalities: one is the American democracy of the first volume, analyzed in detail; the other is the type of democracy itself, the description of which belongs to the second volume. “I confess that in America, I saw more than America; I sought there the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to hope or fear from its progress” (*DA*, introduction, 14).

Here Tocqueville’s acknowledged debt to Montesquieu, especially to his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734), is heavy indeed. Also, between the traveler’s report on an existing system and the political philosopher’s typology of the political form of which that system is an instance there is often a vexed relationship. Is the report the basis for the type, or is the type the structuring principle of the report? It is a question that could be asked of Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques ou Lettres sur les Anglais* (1734), Mme. de Staël’s *De L’Allemagne* (1810), or *Democracy in America* (1835–40). In each case, another country and culture—England, Germany, America—is offered as an example or model of what France had failed to become, or of what it should acquaint itself with to supply its own defects. The descriptions of these cultures are clearly politically determined by a program or a vision of reform or renovation for France. This does not necessarily weaken them as surveys or analyses. Indeed, the analysis of and sympathy for the foreign culture are often enhanced by the implied or explicit critique of the archaic France with which they are being compared. So even those who claimed that their countries were misrepresented by these travelers or visitors were in part missing the point.¹⁵ In every case, the author was attempting to describe what seemed to him or her a new and admirable social and political phenomenon that pre-figured for all who understood it the future of the world.

Assembly—which was then followed by the “déravage” into the Terror and protosocialism. This “true” revolution was resumed in July 1830. Tocqueville is certainly the most influential source for this view, although it was not, of course, unique to him. See also R. R. Palmer, ed., *The Two Tocquevilles, Father and Son: Hervé and Alexis de Tocqueville and the Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Alan Kahan, “Tocqueville’s Two Revolutions,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 5, no. 46 (October 1985): 585–96.

15. Heine went so far as to give his refutation of de Staël’s book the same title; see *De L’Allemagne* (Paris: Calman Lévy, 1835), 7, where he calls her “this grandmother of doctrinaires” who has “spread abroad in France so many erroneous ideas” about “the intellectual revolution in my country.”

Letter writing, naturally given to intimacy, had been adapted to several literary variations—the public letter, the epistolary novel, the memoir, diaries, the publication of a selected or collected correspondence, or the letter(s) of real or fictive travelers whose adopted personae meditated on issues of general import, sometimes reporting on foreign cultures or indirectly or directly on their own. There was also the literary form that varied from the descriptive sketch to the tour, a form of writing that could record contemporary change, sometimes set off against a supposedly unchanging landscape, and that could claim to be “scientific,” by which it usually meant it had tabulated and quantified the changes it recorded, or could more modestly indicate its anecdotal or impressionistic status. Even the more political forms of commentary did not entirely abandon the personal protocols that inevitably dominated letter writing or autobiographical ventures. They obviously persist in Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which the new France is taken to be the foreign country under analysis, and they play an important role in *Democracy in America*, which is a traveler’s report on a new country and on a condition that could possibly be Europe’s future. But such writing looks for ways by which the subjective element might be taken by its readers as the basis for a profound wisdom rather than for an impressionistic observation. Mme. de Staël claimed that for such commentary there must be an effective combination of closeness and distance; this was critical for the writing of history. As she put it in her *Considérations sur les Principaux Événements de la Révolution* (1818), “Mon ambition serait de parler du temps dans lequel nous avons vécu, comme s’il était déjà loin de nous (I would want to discuss the period we lived through as though it were already distant from us).”¹⁶ She often attempted to see what the present would look like in the eyes of posterity, and for her, the position of a foreign observer was as approximate and as available a substitute for posterity as could be found. Such distance allowed her to see the English and French Revolutions of the preceding 130 years as the third epoch in the advance of the human spirit toward its (somewhat Hegelian) fulfillment—the epoch of representative government. For Tocqueville, the enchanted phrase was “equality of conditions,” and for him, too, the rhetorical as well as the imaginative requirement was to see the phenomena of which he wrote in close and intense detail, as well as in the larger perspective of a movement that was embodied in the detail and that the detail embodied. The ensemble of immediacy with distance was much sought in historical writing in both

16. de Staël, *Oeuvres*, 2:258.

England and France in the wake of the French Revolution, and Burke's mode of evoking an immemorial past to ratify a present political system was widely influential in that regard.¹⁷

It is not surprising that the mid-twentieth century's revival of interest in both Burke and Tocqueville was governed for the most part by a political agenda that saw them as counterbalances to Marx, especially in relation to the idea of global revolution. They were both, in different but comparable ways, incorporated into the West's defense of its democratic traditions during the Cold War. Each provided a contrast between the American and French Revolutions; each provided a critique of that kind of revolution that was based on theory as opposed to one allegedly derived from history; and each claimed that those who acted from theoretic principle were liable to become fierce ideologues who would destroy the whole Christian Western tradition. The more clamantly right-wing Cold Warriors tended to draw on Burke; the more liberal or neoliberal theorists, whose chief pretense was and is not to be theoretically inclined at all, drew on Tocqueville. The central point in the middle decades of the twentieth century was to make a distinction between the French and Russian Revolutions, by claiming the first for the West and assigning the second to the East; or to say that the violence attendant on both was of the essence of revolution and that no revolution ever had achieved as much as reformism. This mode of interpretation persists, even after 1989 and the "triumph" of global capitalism.¹⁸

The American system, as Tocqueville understood it, produces a particular kind of citizen. The dynamic interplay between political and civil asso-

17. See J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Mark Salber Phillips, "Historical Distance and the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950*, ed. Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31–47; and on France, see Ann Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

18. One of the classic statements of Cold War liberalism in France is that of Raymond Aron; see especially "Alexis de Tocqueville," in *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, trans. Richard Howard and Helen Weaver, 2 vols. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 1:183–231; for more recent versions, see François Furet, *Penser la Révolution Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville et la nature de la démocratie* (Paris: Julliard, 1982), *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 103–13, and *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Mahoney and Paul Seaton (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988), 65–77.

ciations and the peculiarly pragmatic and unheroic American understanding of the principle of self-interest produce a citizen who is virtuous in a new and specific way. Midway between “extraordinary virtues” and “gross depravity,” able to reconcile material prosperity and “eternal felicity,” skilled in organization and appreciative of public tranquility and physical well-being, this is a citizenry that is as far above the general level of mankind as it is below the extraordinary levels that can be achieved by individuals from an aristocratic society.¹⁹ There is a risk that the “virtuous materialism” of the American democracy might “enervate the soul and noiselessly unbend the springs of action” (*DA*, 2:2:7–11:115–33); but this is a possible defect of a very real virtue, although such virtue is not to be found in Montesquieu’s version of the republican form of government. There is no element of abnegation of the self here. Tocqueville’s new political democratic citizen is as moderate and peace loving as the new being of the French Revolution is extreme and violent. This is the icon of the new democratic system of equality; a private citizen who at one time “seems animated by the most selfish cupidity; at another by the most lively patriotism.” The “passion for their own welfare and for their freedom” is unique to the American character (*DA*, 2:2:14:142).

Although Tocqueville regards uniformity as—alas—one of the constitutive features of democracy, it has at least the advantage of making generalizations about its citizens easier. Another way of putting it is that democratic debates appeal to humankind in general, rather than to particular nationalities or systems; “the political debates of a democratic people . . . have a degree of breadth that frequently renders them attractive to mankind. All men are interested by them because they treat of *man* who is everywhere the same” (*DA*, 2:1:21:93).

Indeed, this is for Tocqueville one of the advantages of modern civilization; it seems to herald the emergence of a social and political type that is in accord with a general view of human nature. Such a type has outgrown the eccentricities and glammers of the aristocratic (or other) eras. “Among aristocratic nations every man is pretty nearly stationary in his own sphere, but men are astonishingly unlike each other; . . . nothing changes, but everything differs. In democracies, on the contrary, all men are alike. . . . The aspect of American society is animated because men and things are always changing, but it is monotonous because all these changes are alike” (*DA*, 2:3:17:228). It is therefore a historical inevitability

19. The great “liberal” narrative of glamorous individuality is Jacob Burckhardt’s *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860).

that variety should disappear “as the men of each country relinquish more and more the peculiar opinions and feelings of a caste, a profession, or a family” and thereby “arrive at something nearer to the constitution of man, which is everywhere the same” (*DA*, 2:3:17:229). Even uniformity has for him its variations. American uniformity is produced within a system that allows for a variety of civic and political organizations that deflect the full force of centralized government. For the American system sponsors local politics to bring people together who might otherwise fall into the excessive isolation that individualism can create; and the connection between the general affairs of the nation and the local politics of its constituent parts is maintained. In France, centralization produced the uniformity of a political system in which individual selfishness was encouraged in order to make concerted action unlikely. The consequent forms of individualism or eccentricity might achieve exotic growth, but they remained politically neutered, private achievements. Tocqueville modified the relatively recent belief that commercial societies were necessarily freer than their less flexible and more statuesque predecessors. He goes so far as to say that when the commercial arts are cultivated in a society, the possibility of tyranny is at least as strong as the possibility of freedom. He shared with Adam Ferguson the suspicion of those who sought from the state above all else the tranquility that would allow them to enrich themselves, and he lived to see that tyrannical possibility become a reality as the despotism of Napoleon III replaced the dull and greedy régime of Guizot and Louis-Phillipe.²⁰ The tyrannical risk also existed in a commercial culture such as America but was alleviated by the voluntary and official institutions that promoted participation in the political process. Social uniformity was distinct from political conformity. To keep that distinction alive, a particular kind of citizenry had to be created, neither glamorously eccentric nor politically obeisant. Therefore the modern individual of the American and democratic type is a generic model of the human: the more satisfactorily generic, the more modern; the more uniform, the more universalizable. The premonitions of Max Weber’s analysis of religion, bureaucracy, the rationalization of society, and the loss of charisma are unmistakable here. Weber’s visit to America in 1904 provides an even more pointed comparison, since for him, as for Tocqueville, America was the exemplary instance of the forms of organization and distress—especially ennui or melancholy—that characterized mass industrial democracy.²¹

20. See Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 122–25.

21. See John Patrick Diggins, *Politics and the Spirit of Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books,

Burke had already developed extensively the argument against uniformity and the tyranny, as well as the dullness, that it heralded. But with him it had been reinforced by something more than a defense of aristocratic society as aesthetically attractive. This he certainly emphasized but added to it the appeal of such doomed and tragic figures as the French king and queen, in whom an ethical and an aesthetic tradition were dazzlingly embodied. The pathos of that disappearing civilization in Burke is the greater because of the ruinous and selfish dullness that is to succeed it. Tocqueville's ostensibly more objective analysis of the conformity and uniformity of the commercial-democratic society reduces this Burkean appeal, but it also incorporates something of its note of regret for such an inevitable and disenchanting transition. Sainte-Beuve said that Tocqueville "a le style triste." This is certainly enhanced by his rueful estimate of political possibility in "evaporating aristocratic time and expanding democratic space."²²

3. Inexorable Processes

Thus Tocqueville often surrenders to the belief that history is governed by inexorable processes, among which the growth of equality of conditions in the modern era is a dominant instance. It is a more "professional" approach than that of those historians of the Revolution who gave prominence to individuals such as Georges Danton or Robespierre and made the division between history and fiction even more insecure than it had been.²³ It breeds sententiousness of a new kind, neither that of proverbial wisdom (traditional) nor that of commonplace wisdom (modern), but something that partakes of both. Yet this belief at times appears to diminish to little more than a rhetorical stratagem designed to lend to his narrative the prestige of a revelation. For he seems also to be given to the belief that every culture, most particularly the French and the Anglo-American, has characteristics

1996), 1–16. On Weber and melancholy, ennui, and anxiety, see Fredric Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller," in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986*, vol. 2, *The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), 4–12; see also Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919) (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1955), chap. 9, 236–67.

22. George Armstrong Kelly, *The Humane Comedy: Constant, Tocqueville, and French Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 227.

23. The novel in the nineteenth century also changed to include this belief in the inexorable processes of law, destiny, economics, et cetera, and the loss of "individuality." See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 102–3.

that may either contravene or realize the goals of the inexorable processes he describes. As a consequence, they lose their inexorable character and become merely contingent. The historical status of the French Revolution is a case in point. If it arose from particular conditions within that country, and nevertheless spoke to humankind in general when preaching its basic doctrines, did that make it, or revolution in general, a necessary feature of the passage (or of one of the passages) to modernity? Modernity, after all, is the (quasi-American) condition in which provincial and local characteristics are subsumed into a universal nature. Tocqueville vacillates at times between seeing the Revolution as an especially vivid moment in a continuous and inevitable process or as a rupture within it. Did the centralizing tendency in French political life culminate in the Revolution (or in Napoleon), and was that part of its peculiarly French or of its specifically universal character?²⁴ The desire for equality had been so strong in France, he claims, that the need for liberty was ignored. But then it was, in those terms, a revolution specific to France and not necessary to the development of any universal idea of society.²⁵

Especially after 1848 and Napoleon III's coup d'état of 1851, Tocqueville was not inclined to look charitably on his fellow countrymen and their failure to escape the rhythmic variation from revolution to dictatorship. In effect, he sought to analyze a peculiarly French disease that had inhibited the nation from achieving the kind of liberty that had been created in Britain, a country in which he was predictably popular, not least because of his readiness to accuse the French people of infamy in their ready submission to tyranny.²⁶ This was the obverse of their spirit of radical innovation, the will to begin history all over again—as represented by the new revolutionary calendar or by the shooting at the church clocks during even the 1830 Revolution. Having in part prophesied the February Revolution, and supported the

24. On the question of the process of centralization and Tocqueville's dislike for what seemed an inevitable but particularly French phenomenon, see *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, ed. J. P. Mayer (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 202: "In France, there is only one thing we can't set up: that is, a free government; and only one institution we can't destroy: that is, centralization." See also Hugh Brogan, *Tocqueville* (London: Fontana, 1973), 72–76.

25. This was a question asked in these very terms in the first decade of the Revolution. See, for example, the writings of Burke's German translator and disciple, Friedrich von Gentz, translated in *Mercure Britannique* 17 (April 23, 1799): 3–34, esp. 28, and *Mercure Britannique* 20 (June 10, 1799): 197–217.

26. See Hedva Ben-Israel, *English Historians in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 219–21.

assault of General Cavaignac's army on the workers, Tocqueville returned to ask anew the questions that had dominated his career. The first concerned liberty. Could it be reconciled with equality? If France achieved the latter (or was on the way to doing so), why did it repeatedly abandon the former in its revolutionary (and now socialistic) fury? Was the system of administrative centralization peculiarly inimical to liberty, and why was it so peculiarly advanced in and attractive to France? His bitterness toward his countrymen found memorable expression in his memoir, *Souvenirs*, written at this time; it was there also that his diagnosis and fear of centralization began to predominate over his previously assured faith in the irresistible progress of equality. These were ingredients central to his proposed work on the Revolution, but he completed only the section on the ancien régime. In *Souvenirs*, Tocqueville retrospectively lamented the final dismissal of the aristocracy from the French political scene in the Revolution of 1830 and the triumph of a bourgeoisie for which he had the traditional aristocrat's contempt. In the ensuing confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the workers he saw the rights of property threatened by democratic envy and socialist theories, while the chances of the survival of liberty were sadly reduced by the bourgeoisie's anxiety to be given, above all else, the public order and peace they needed in order to enrich themselves further.²⁷

However, Tocqueville's France had at least two faces; it was fatally inclined to despotism or extremism, and this made it unique; yet it was also "the democratic country par excellence," and this made it universal.²⁸ The relationships between the genius of a people, the forms or types of government, and the universal laws that history exhibited are never entirely clarified in his writings; any one of these can play a dominant role at a given time. Yet whatever the local contingencies or the peculiar characteristics of a culture or of a situation, there is no doubt that Tocqueville constantly sought and often announced what seemed to him to be universal truths or, at the least, the existence of universal laws that gave form and meaning to the diversity of human affairs. Such laws and their accompanying processes are implacable. To believe in these and to discern their development in human history is also to provide an explanation for the destruction or disappearance of those societies, cultures, or classes that stand in the way of the spirit of

27. *Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 3; for an extension of this reading of 1830 to that of 1848, see 86–88.

28. From the 1843 essay "The Emancipation of Slaves," in *Alexis de Tocqueville: Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 207. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *WES*.

progress. The ancien régime is the most famous of Tocqueville's victims in this regard. But there were others.

4. Ireland

Britain (or, more properly, the United Kingdom) clearly provided an alternative, especially after the various reforms of 1828–32 abolished (at least in principle) the confessional basis of the ancien régime state, extended the franchise (influenced in doing so by the July Revolution of 1830 in France), and therefore seemed to have taken another notable step toward the achievement of American-style equality of conditions. It seemed to Tocqueville that the reluctant granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 was an example of the manner in which an “archaic” element of the British polity—Ireland—enforced a much-needed modernization.²⁹ It was, as I have said, inevitable that his belief in the irresistible but uneven progress toward equality should determine that he would discover in all societies a mix of modern and archaic elements. This was less the case with America, more the case with Ireland. For as Burke (and many others) had pointed out, Ireland suffered from the most bigoted and destructive of all aristocracies. The joint venture of Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont to Ireland in 1835 produced both Tocqueville's *Journey in Ireland* and Beaumont's *Ireland: Social, Political, and Religious* (1839), in which they both agreed that, in Beaumont's words, “the Protestant aristocracy which in England is the very heart of all political powers, seems in Ireland to be their cancer.”³⁰ Tocqueville's version was that the aristocracy in England “has for centuries given the English one of the best governments that exists in the world, the other, to the Irish, one of the most detestable that ever could be imagined.”³¹ However, under Daniel O'Connell, the immiserated Catholics had formed into a political nation; this phenomenon attracted a great deal of attention in France, particularly among French liberal Catholics such as Félicité Lamennais and Charles de Montalembert. In fact, Montalembert's essay in the

29. This is Beaumont's view even more than it is Tocqueville's. See Seymour Drescher, *Tocqueville and England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 116–17. According to Beaumont, “Britain might still, through Ireland, be concretely fitted into the world-wide democratic movement.”

30. Gustave de Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political, and Religious*, 2 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1839), 1:316. On Tocqueville, see J. P. Mayer, ed. and trans., *Journeys to England and Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958); and Emmet Larkin, ed. and trans., *Alexis de Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1990).

31. Larkin, *Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland*, 83.

journal *L'Avenir*, "Du Catholicisme en Irlande," in January 1831, clearly signaled that the alliance between Catholicism and democracy in Ireland was a lesson to France, most especially, since the Catholic faith present there was of a strength and steadfastness long lost to the French.

Tocqueville and Beaumont agreed; like Montalembert, they admired the Irish Catholic combination of a political commitment to democratic change with loyalty to religious belief. This was where the French had gone wrong; in abandoning all religious belief and practices, they had abandoned restraint. It was this Catholicism that made the O'Connellite movement so formidable. It was a force for and a principle of cohesion, made more effective by a clergy that had the support of their flock and was further consolidated by the hatred and contempt shown them by the members of the Protestant establishment, whose powers were fading but whose persisting animus latterly exhibited itself in the Orange Order and its provocative marches.³² Disavowing the standard accusation of Catholicism's affinities with despotism, Tocqueville saw the Irish Catholics, both at home and as emigrants in America, as inclined by their faith and by their experience to support the cause of democracy.

About fifty years ago Ireland began to pour a Catholic population into the United States. . . . These Catholics are faithful to the observances of their religion. . . . Yet they constitute the most republican and the most democratic class in the United States. . . . I think that the Catholic religion has erroneously been regarded as the natural enemy of democracy. Among the various sects of Christians, Catholicism seems to me, on the contrary, to be one of the most favorable to equality of condition among men. . . . On doctrinal points the Catholic faith places all human capacities upon the same level; it subjects the wise and ignorant . . . it confounds all the distinctions of society at the foot of the same altar, even as they are confounded in the sight of God. If Catholicism predisposes the faithful to obedience, it certainly does not prepare them for inequality; but the contrary may be said

32. See Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political, and Religious*, 1:276–83; 2:55, 312–13; Larkin, *Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland*, introduction, 7–12. The commentary on Orange provocation is extensive; see, for instance, John O'Driscoll, *Views of Ireland, Moral, Political, and Religious*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1823), 2:127–35; John Gamble, *Sketches of History, Politics, and Manners, in Dublin, and the North of Ireland in 1810* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1826), 269–71; and Francis Plowden, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Rise, Progress, Nature, and Effects of the Orange Societies in Ireland* (Dublin: Coyne, 1810).

of Protestantism, which generally tends to make men independent more than to render them equal. Catholicism is like an absolute monarchy; if the sovereign be removed, all the other classes of society are more equal than in republics. (*DA*, 1:17:300–301)

The Catholic religion had, then, this particularly strong cohesive force that lent stability to a political community otherwise dispossessed.

The various attempts to revive French Catholicism as a political and a religious counter to the secular radicalism of the Revolution drew heavily on the notion that a traditional, communal religious faith would help preserve the culture of the old world and at the same time greet (or at least accept) the political forms of the new. Irish Catholics, especially in their most recent political reincarnation of 1823 as the Catholic Association, and the achievement of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, seemed to offer an example of how this could be done. In Tocqueville's account, Catholicism favored equality, Protestantism (although not in its Irish mutation) favored liberty. The heart of his and of Beaumont's inquiry into the United Kingdom's system was to see if it could make the transition to democracy without undergoing revolution. Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Act of 1832 seemed to indicate that it would. Those seriously disaffected and previously excluded from the political system had been given the first installment of a promise that they would be integrated. National solidarity could thereby be sustained.

The French Liberal Catholic attempt to understand Ireland's role in the modernization and democratization of the British State was a serious effort to save both religion and the revolution—to show that traditional attachments were necessary for the preservation of liberty and the extension of equality. Some twenty years later, a similar attempt was made by Cardinal Newman through the promotion of the idea of a Catholic University that would save the British Empire, or perhaps all English-speaking peoples, from the alienating and secularizing effects of a militant liberalism of the kind associated with the British Whigs, the *Edinburgh Review*, and utilitarianism.³³ These views on the Irish Catholic question and on the wider issue of liberal democracy could be said to owe something to Burke's complicated arguments about the necessity of retaining the integrity of local cultures within an imperial framework. He had deployed these arguments with increasing ranges of intensity in relation to America (or to the thirteen colonies), Ireland, and India. But the preservation of a culture's integrity is per-

33. See my essay, "Newman, Ireland, and the Conversion of the Empire," in *Foreign Affections: Edmund Burke, Europe, and Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004).

haps only as persuasive as is the notion of the “culture” that is operative within or through it. Further, there is not—at least there is not in Burke—any accompanying or consequent threat to the imperial framework. As is regularly the case with apologies for imperialism, the “local” must be either nurtured or supplanted by the dominant culture, in the belief or under the pretense that the imperial culture represents “universal” values. This is a position Burke does not wholly occupy, but neither does he ever desert it entirely. The violence and rapacity of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy and of the East India Company’s employees stained (he believed) the reputation of Britain, although quite how the imperial venture could be sustained without these unlovely qualities seemed beyond the range of his consideration. Perhaps what he wanted was a system of softening and disguise, one whereby initial violence would ultimately be forgotten in the afterglow of imperial consummation. But insofar as Burke thought of imperialism as an improving or modernizing project, he thought that it, as much as the process of nation building, needed to learn the arts of reverence toward ancestry, antiquity, historical survival. The deep time of Irish or Indian civilization should have been an educative influence on the British colonial system, eliciting reverential awe rather than stimulating hatred or contempt; such ancient civilizations and their laws and practices constituted versions of the Political Sublime.³⁴

5. Algeria

In response to revolutionary fears or threats, and in pursuance of national stability, European states in the nineteenth century extended the suffrage and reformulated national identity. Such identities were, as before, defined in relation to others within the European system. But the French Revolution and the reaction against it, especially the Burkean version of reaction, had created the not entirely commensurable notions of a universal language of rights and of a specific European civilization of Christian nations, economically powerful and culturally sovereign. As Tzvetan Todorov has argued, it therefore became possible for those who, like Tocqueville or John Stuart Mill, regarded themselves as liberals to hold to ethical positions on relationships between individual persons, but to abandon these

34. See Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100–106; and Immanuel Wallerstein, *After Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 93–102.

or to regard them as inapplicable or quixotic if extended to relationships between nations.³⁵ So it was possible for Tocqueville to write eloquently about the institution of slavery and to call for its abolition, partly on the grounds that France, of all nations, should be in the vanguard of such a crusade; yet, at the same time, and without showing any awareness of contradiction, he could support French policies in Algeria that were of a piece with those of all European imperial powers—murderous, rapacious, and pursued in the name of the extension of civilization to a barbarous people. In this case, the unfortunate barbarians were the Algerians. The July Revolution and the occupation of Algeria belonged to the same year. For the remainder of his life, Tocqueville believed and argued that colonial possessions would help give to France the sentiment of pride and unity it required, reducing the prospect of internal revolution by providing the nation with a universal mission that would knit all classes together in a common enterprise. The development of liberty in France would be stimulated by the arrival of colonialism in Algeria. State violence, deployed at home in the interests of stability, could be exported in the name of progress—often by the same generals, particularly Bugeaud, Cavaignac, and Lamoricière.³⁶

Tocqueville's various recipes for the French colonization of Algeria were devised to make the successful exploitation of the country politically advantageous to France, first by increasing her prestige, and, second, by making the place economically advantageous to the colonists. In his 1841 "Essay on Algeria," he distinguishes between domination (like the English in India) and colonization, recommending that France should begin with the first and use that as a means to partial colonization (*WES*, 92). Domination is the less attractive, because it leaves everything in the hands of military men. Bugeaud, he admits in the debate in the *Chambre des Députés* in 1846, has "rendered a great service to his country on the soil of Africa. . . . He is the first to have applied, everywhere at once, the type of war that in my eyes, as in his, is the only type of war practicable in Africa. He has practiced

35. Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 198–201.

36. See Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 191–206. Soldiers under Bugeaud's command killed all the occupants of a house in the Rue Transnonian on April 15, 1834, in the course of quelling a republican insurrection in the Marais district of Paris. Daumier commemorated the event in a lithograph. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 699–700, 717. Lamoricière, a relative of Tocqueville, makes an unflattering appearance in the *Recollections*, 256.

this system of war with an unequaled energy and vigor" (*WES*, 122). It is a system Tocqueville initially distinguishes from the "Turkish manner, that is to say, by killing everything we meet." On the other hand, he finds that there are men in France, whom he respects, who "find it wrong that we burn harvests, that we empty silos, and finally that we seize unarmed men, women and children." These are unfortunate necessities, not required in Europe because there "we wage war on governments and not on peoples" (*WES*, 70). Still, Bugeaud's savage methods were ineffective because he resisted the establishment in Algeria of civil government, preferring only a military domination. Tocqueville saw the risk that military exploits prosecuted abroad in the name of the nation, and its civilizing mission to the world could win glamorous reputations for successful officers and glorify the military profession—a legitimate anxiety, given what almost immediately happened in France and what was to happen in the same decade in Britain after the brutal suppression of the Indian Mutiny (1857–58). He feared that a French general who had made a reputation in Africa might return "on the stage of public affairs. God save France from ever being led by officers from the African army!" (*WES*, 78; see also 244–45n). Yet Tocqueville supported precisely such a person, General Cavaignac, particularly during the June days of the 1848 Revolution, when he displayed in Paris a "system of war" that could have been called unimpeachably "African" (*WES*, 122).

Thus, Tocqueville's policy is to develop a system of colonization and war together; to teach the indigenous population that it will eventually gain advantages from this colonization; to abolish slavery in the French colonies; and to avoid beginning the "history of the conquest of America all over again." For the bloodshed that accompanied that conquest would now "be a thousand times less excusable," since now, "in the middle of the nineteenth century," the French "are far less fanatical, and we have the principles and the enlightenment the French Revolution spread throughout the world" (*WES*, 146). The blend of nationalist and colonial, enlightened and barbarous elements in his attitudes are classically those of European liberalism. Tocqueville's distress at the genocide of the Indians in America and the slavery of the Africans imported into the New World sits oddly with his support for such exterminatory policies in Algeria. Yet the contradiction helps the more to isolate the problem he raised in relation to America and refused to consider in relation to France: Was there an inevitable connection between modernity and crimes on this scale? Were these peoples victims of the inexorable forces of progress, and was it therefore right to join with history and side with modernity in erasing such barriers to its final expan-

sion? It seems that his answer had to be yes, but he could not give it directly, at least not where France was concerned. Like Burke, he sensed that the alliance between modernity and colonialism was atrocious in its consequences, but he refused to consider if these were constitutive of modernity, implying instead that they were one of its mysteries or one of its by-products. Alternatively, the process could be assigned to the “nationalism of the state-nation, which created the imperial state,” as Philip Bobbitt puts it; in order to aggrandize the State, “which was the deliverer of national identity and political liberty, other nations were subjugated and alien institutions imposed upon them.”³⁷

There is no gainsaying Habermas’s argument that the broadening of the “public sphere” into “public opinion,” effected by the extension of the franchise, undermined the liberal conception of what an enlightened public discourse might be. Once the plebeian element entered, or, in Tocqueville’s earlier and prescient terms in relation to America, once the “tyranny of the majority” became a reality, the liberal support for democracy transmuted into a support for an aristocracy of talent that tried to disguise itself as democracy.³⁸ This was also true in colonial terms, although in a much more brutal sense. Colonies and empire were politically useful because they provided a national and nationalist solidarity that class division threatened. In place of class, an ideology of race was formed. This ideology was crucial to, not antithetical to, European liberalism. Their true opponents were socialists and Marxists, although even they had difficulty in disengaging themselves from the appeal of a racial ideology that supported the idea of universal progress and the fantasy of local superiority.³⁹

Tocqueville was an aristocrat who envisioned the New World; Burke was a new man who reenvisioned the aristocratic world. Burke successfully provided an ideology of tradition for the new imperial power when it faced its most critical challenge; he defined the British system as the alternative to revolutionary doctrine and violence, but was consistent enough to find that it

37. Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 153.

38. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), pt. 4, chap. 15, 129–40.

39. See Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, Publishers, 2001), 88–100, 293–307. The most powerful analysis of the contradictions of the British liberal position and its relation to Burke’s writings, particularly on India, is Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

was at best difficult to reconcile it with colonial or imperial violence. Tocqueville reread Burke's analysis of the Revolution. In effect, he demoted it from the bad eminence Burke assigned to it in world history and absorbed it into a process or movement that had found one mode of realization in the United States and was implacably pursuing other modes in France and in Britain and Ireland. Yet it seemed to him, as to many other liberals, that it was possible to identify the national spirit of France or of Britain (or of Europe) with that inexorable process that could be aided in its realization abroad by the development of colonial systems and at home by the arrival of a democratic polity that would somehow preserve for intelligence the senior role formerly accorded to blood. There were indeed "new beings" in the world; revolutionaries indeed but also the soldiers of the imperial autocracies of the European nation states. For him, opposition to the first group led, by a logic that might be thought to be inexorable, to support for the second.