

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Aristocracy, Democracy, and Liberalism: Using the Tocquevillian Dichotomy to Understand Modern Liberalism

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ABSTRACT

While previous scholarship has created anachronistic categories to analyze the political thought of notable liberals like John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, this article improves our understanding of liberalism by using an analytic category supplied by the writers themselves. Using Tocqueville's aristocracy-democracy dichotomy, this paper demonstrates important differences in the social and political thought of Mill and Tocqueville previously overlooked. Specifically, by focusing on Mill's reviews of Tocqueville's work and correspondence between the two authors, this essay points out the differences between Mill's "elitist democratic" liberalism and Tocqueville's "aristocratic democratic" liberalism. This distinction has important implications for understanding the dominant forms of modern liberalism.

Introduction

In the opening lines of his *Autobiography*, John Stuart Mill gave three reasons for writing about his life. One of those reasons was to acknowledge the debts which his "intellectual and moral development owes to other persons."¹ The first two people he mentioned on his list of debts were his wife, Harriet Taylor, and his father, James Mill. The third person he mentioned was Alexis de Tocqueville.² Tocqueville's prime location on Mill's list of intellectual debts, the two thinkers' personal friendship and correspondence,³ the reviews written by Mill of both volumes of *Democracy in America*,⁴ and the rhetorical resonance in certain passages of their writing, has caused several scholars to investigate the influence they had on each other.⁵

While there are many illuminating similarities between Tocqueville and Mill, previous scholarship has overdrawn these commonalities in a way that obscures important differences between the two thinkers.⁶ Tocqueville's unique dual citizenship in the worlds of aristocracy and democracy set his thinking on a different trajectory from that of Mill and other nineteenth-century liberals.⁷ Their different origins and ends constituted important differences in their thought. Given that the dominant contemporary forms of Western liberalism more closely follow Mill, setting his thought in relief with Tocqueville's can improve

our understanding of the ideas that dominate today's political landscape.

The approach of this essay's comparative analysis differs from previous scholarship, which has viewed Mill and Tocqueville's ideas through anachronistic frameworks. For example, Kahan lumps the two theorists together in a category he calls "aristocratic liberalism" to describe their common social and political ideas.⁸ While he helps us to better understand certain overlapping aspects of their thought, this taxonomic move also obscures some important differences between the two thinkers because Kahan uses the term "aristocratic" in ways that differ from Tocqueville and Mill's usage.⁹ In contrast, to understand the political thought of Tocqueville and Mill, this article uses the terms "aristocracy" and "democracy" the way the authors themselves used them in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Specifically, it will analyze their social and political ideas using Tocqueville's aristocracy-democracy dichotomy.

The Tocquevillian dichotomy

Mill's 1840 review of *Democracy in America* claimed that Tocqueville's work was "the first philosophical book ever written on Democracy."¹¹ Mill realized, of course, that Tocqueville was not the first political

philosopher to write about democratic regimes. Instead, he was identifying Tocqueville as the first philosopher to write about “democracy” in the sense that Tocqueville himself used that term: in reference to modern social conditions of equality.

It is necessary to observe that by Democracy M. de Tocqueville does not in general mean any particular form of government. He can conceive a Democracy under an absolute monarch. Nay, he entertains no small dread lest in some countries it should actually appear in that form. By Democracy, M. de Tocqueville understands equality of conditions; the absence of all aristocracy, whether constituted by political privileges, or by superiority in individual importance and social power.¹²

As Mill indicated, for Tocqueville, democracy is best understood in relief to aristocracy: modern social conditions of *equality* as opposed to pre-modern social conditions of *hierarchy*. This “democracy-aristocracy” dichotomy is a concept that has both social (equality vs. inequality) and historical (modern vs. pre-modern) dimensions.

According to Tocqueville’s framework, a nation’s fundamental social state—either aristocracy or democracy—involves three parts: its social and economic relations, its political forms and institutions, and its cultural “mores” and values. First, according to Tocqueville, social and economic relations under aristocracy are defined by a system of feudalism based on landed property and familial inheritance.¹³ Social and economic relations under democracy, on the other hand, are defined by a system of capitalism based on transferable property and commerce.¹⁴ Second, aristocratic political forms and institutions are defined by a decentralization of governing power spread among the nobility, while democratic political forms recognize the sovereignty of the people. Finally—turning to cultural mores—according to Tocqueville, aristocratic people value “greatness,” individual liberty, and fixed social ties, while democratic people value material gain, social equality, and individualism. The following three sections use this Tocquevillean dichotomy as a lens of analysis to clarify important differences between the political thought of Tocqueville and Mill with regard to their conceptions of history, conceptions of science, and views on democratic governance. The concluding sections then discuss how our dominant, contemporary form of liberalism can partly be understood as a product of the Millian way of thinking.

Tocqueville and Mill’s conceptions of history

Tocqueville made two main points about the distinct aristocratic and democratic conceptions of history. First, Tocqueville argued that aristocratic and democratic historians differ in their understanding of human progress. In aristocratic centuries, when individuals were born into a certain class position, humans had an idea of a finite amount of perfectibility, or virtue, within their rank. However, “as castes disappear, as classes get closer to each other, as men are mixed tumultuously...as new facts come up, as new truths are brought to light, as old opinions disappear and take their place, the image of an ideal and always fugitive perfection is presented to the human mind.” Thus, democratic equality suggests “the idea of the indefinite perfectibility of man” and progress.¹⁵

Second, Tocqueville argued that aristocratic and democratic historians conceive of historical causality in different ways. In the aristocratic era, a few, great, powerful individuals dominated the social and political scene. Aristocratic historians, therefore, tended to emphasize the causal effect of “the particular wills and humors of certain men.”¹⁶ In the democratic era, on the other hand, when “all citizens are independent of one another, and each of them is weak, one finds none who exert a very great or above all a very lasting power over the mass. At first sight, individuals seem absolutely powerless over it, and one would say that society advances all by itself...That naturally brings the human mind to search for the general reason that could strike so many intellects at once and turn them simultaneously in the same direction.”¹⁷ Democratic historians, therefore, “give great general causes to all the little particular facts.”¹⁸

With regard to historical progress and the indefinite perfectibility of man, Mill was much more optimistic than Tocqueville. In his 1863 essay on “Utilitarianism,” Mill argued that:

No one whose opinion deserves a moment’s consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable...Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguishable by the wisdom of society...Even that most intractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced...All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable.¹⁹

Tocqueville did not share Mill’s faith in the perfectibility of humanity through historical development. In his view, for each benefit that the new democratic age would bring, there would also be disadvantages: the aristocratic past and the democratic future consist

of, “as it were, two distinct humanities, each of which has its particular advantages and inconveniences, its goods and its evils that are proper to it.”²⁰ For example, while he lamented the loss of “greatness” in aristocracy, he welcomed the “justice” of democracy.

With regard to the attribution of causality in history, both thinkers gave great weight to general causes. For the democratic-minded historian Mill, human progress (or the lack of it) was caused by the amount of social diversity and social tolerance of individuality in a given society: “The progressive principle...is antagonistic to the sway of custom...and the contest between the two constitutes the chief interest of the history of mankind.”²¹ Tocqueville was also democratic in his use of general, social causes to explain historical development. For example, Tocqueville argued that America’s historical development was largely the product of a singular, formative “point of departure”: the Puritan founding of New England in the seventeenth century. “After having attentively studied the history of America...one feels profoundly convinced of this truth: there is not one opinion, one habit, one law, I could say one event, that the point of departure does not explain without difficulty.”²² Tocqueville was self-conscious, however, of his tendency to over-generalize in the style of a democratic historian. In a letter to Mill, in reference to a review of his book in the *North American Review*, Tocqueville admitted that he is “too much given to generalizing.”²³

Tocqueville was also democratic like Mill in his willingness to predict the future course of world history (something you can only do if you believe that long-term, general trends—more than individual agents—shape the course of history). For example, the theme of *Democracy in America* was the inevitable democratic revolution that was sweeping the world, and which no one person determined. However, to the extent that Tocqueville did have a “philosophy of history,” in the sense that Voltaire used that term, he had a “theology of history” in the sense that Lowith used that term.²⁴ When Tocqueville *did* speak of History running a destined course, he used the language of “Providence” rather than a universal history determined by nature.²⁵

Based on this analysis, we can see that both Mill and Tocqueville were somewhat “democratic” historians. They both focused on general, impersonal causes—for Tocqueville, the equality of conditions, and for Mill, the tolerance of individuality—to explain historical change. However, in his lack of optimism about the future course of world history, Tocqueville was ultimately less democratic than Mill. Tocqueville

conceived of history as having no known endpoint. Mill, on the other hand, ultimately believed that the linear path of history—despite occasional dips and plateaus—has an overall upward slant.

Tocqueville and Mill’s conceptions of science and philosophy

According to Tocqueville, aristocratic and democratic scientific approaches can be distinguished by their different aptitude for general ideas. Tocqueville argued that democratic people “show more aptitude and taste for general ideas than” aristocratic people. For Tocqueville, a general idea is a category that allows an individual to enclose “a very great number of analogous objects under the same form so as to think about them more conveniently.” General ideas involve tradeoffs: they are “admirable in that they permit the human mind to bring rapid judgments to a great number of objects at one time; but on the other hand, they never provide it with anything but incomplete notions, and they always make it lose in exactness what they give it in extent.”²⁶ Not only do humans tend to use more general ideas in more complex societies, in order to handle that complexity, but they also use more general ideas in democratic societies where individuals are accustomed to considering all human beings like themselves.²⁷ The passion for general ideas was the characteristic of the *philosophe* rationalists that Tocqueville explicitly criticized in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*.²⁸

According to Tocqueville, aristocratic and democratic scientific approaches can also be distinguished by the aristocratic tendency toward inductive scientific approaches and the democratic tendency toward deductive approaches. The democratic approach began in the sixteenth century when Protestant reformers subjected some of the Christian dogmas to “individual reason.” Then, in the seventeenth century, Bacon and Descartes subjected the dogmas of the natural sciences and philosophy to individual reason. Next, “the philosophers of the eighteenth century, finally generalizing the same principle,” submitted “the objects of all beliefs to the individual examination of each man.”²⁹ Finally, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, political writers began to posit utopian schemes to replace the social and political systems that they had criticized as irrational and artificial: “they all think that it would be good to substitute basic and simple principles, derived from reason and natural law, for the complicated and traditional customs which ruled the society of their times.”³⁰ According to Tocqueville, what had begun as a

rational combination of induction and deduction with Bacon and Descartes had become an over-reliance on simplistic, abstract, and deductive political systems. In Tocqueville's narrative, the equality of conditions increasingly made it possible for human beings to subject custom and tradition to individual reason. Thus, the democratic method is increasingly less inductive and more deductive in the realm of political philosophy and social science.

Mill was aware of the distinction Tocqueville drew between aristocratic and democratic approaches to science and philosophy, and he was particularly self-conscious of his own methodology given the extremely democratic approach of his father James Mill.³¹ Tocqueville's inductive and analytical method still made use of general ideas, but it was based on empirical case studies like his trips to America, England, Ireland, and Algeria. Thus, Tocqueville's rationalism as a social scientist was not simply the dogmatism of traditionalist reactionaries, on the one hand, or the abstract utopianism of "philosophe rationalists" and "old philosophical radicals" on the other. According to Mill, it was the correct balance. In his review of volume 2 of *Democracy in America*, Mill praised Tocqueville's methodology:

The importance of M. de Tocqueville's speculations is not to be estimated by the opinions which he has adopted, be these true or false. The value of his work is less in the conclusions, than in the mode of arriving at them...These volumes...contain the first analytical inquiry into the influences of Democracy. For the first time, that phenomenon is treated of as something which, being a reality in nature, and no mere mathematical or metaphysical abstraction, manifests itself by innumerable properties, not by some one only...His method is, as that of a philosopher on such a subject must be—a combination of deduction with induction: his evidences are, laws of human nature, on the one hand; the example of America, and France, and other modern nations, so far as applicable, on the other. His conclusions never rest on either species of evidence alone... [It is] the true Baconian and Newtonian method applied to society and government.³²

According to Mill, Tocqueville's ability to combine "deduction with induction" was the best form of social science—although it was an ideal toward which Mill recognized he himself fell short. Thus, as in their conceptions of history, both Mill and Tocqueville strike a balance between the aristocratic approach and the democratic approach, but, once again, Mill was ultimately more democratic than Tocqueville.

Tocqueville and Mill's views on democratic governance

Tocqueville's dichotomy raised two key issues concerning democratic governance. First, according to Tocqueville, one of the key distinctions in government between aristocratic and democratic ages is the centralization of power. In the aristocratic age, powerful families of the nobility held pockets of power that "raised insurmountable barriers against the tyranny of the prince."³³ No one single noble had the power to dominate the social and political life of the entire nation: power was decentralized into several different hands, and this maintained a diversity of thought, opinion, and lifestyle. Explaining the contrast between aristocratic decentralization and democratic centralization, Tocqueville wrote:

The idea of secondary powers, placed between sovereign and subjects, naturally presented itself to the imagination of aristocratic peoples because those powers contained within them individuals or families whom birth, enlightenment, and wealth held up as without peer and who seemed destined to command. For contrary reasons, this same idea is naturally absent from the minds of men in centuries of equality...they conceive, so to speak without thinking about it, the idea of a lone central power that leads all citizens by itself.³⁴

For Tocqueville, the centralization of power by monarchs in the late medieval period was a key part of the transition from aristocracy to democracy.³⁵

This first phenomenon, democratic centralization, is related to the second phenomenon: the people's adoption of the general ideas of the intellectual class. In *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville explained how, because the French people had not "taken part in government through the Estates-General" they "let themselves be inflamed by the writers' ideas."³⁶ Their unfamiliarity with the practice of government, resulting from state centralization, made them liable to adopt the general ideas and utopian visions of literary intellectuals who similarly had no experience in government. The abstract and general ideas of the literary class were influential because these ideas were simple and clear without the nuance and complexity of customary ideas derived from experience. "In general, only simple conceptions take hold of the minds of the people. A false idea, but one clear and precise, will always have more power in the world than a true, but complex, idea."³⁷ One of Tocqueville's great worries in the modern democratic world was the mass adoption of the simple, but dangerously utopian, ideas of the *philosophe* rationalists.³⁸

Tocqueville's resistance to state centralization was a theme throughout his writings, and he believed that centralization can be resisted in the democratic age through certain institutions, values, and mores. These institutions include township self-government, local administration, the division of government power between different levels, political associations, administrative decentralization, and civic associations. Despite the inefficiencies inherent in decentralization, Tocqueville still praised these institutions for their educative role in democracy. For Tocqueville, the political education provided by "aristocratic" decentralization in a democratic regime outweighed the costs of inefficiency.

For Mill, this calculus did not always come out in the same way. As someone who was frustrated by customary English decentralization, Mill had his doubts about its merits. He admitted that Tocqueville's book helped him to partly come around to its virtues, but he did not come all the way around. In his 1862 article on "Centralization," Mill wrote:

Any despotism is preferable to local despotism. If we are to be ridden over by authority, if our affairs are to be managed for us at the pleasure of other people, heaven forefend that it should be at that of our nearest neighbours. To be under the control, or have to wait for the sanction, of a Minister or a Parliament, is bad enough; but defend us from the leading-strings of a Board of Guardians or a Common Council...To be under the latter, would be in most localities, unless by the rarest accident, to be the slave of the vulgar prejudices, the cramped, distorted, and short-sighted views, of the public of a small town or a group of villages.³⁹

Although they both recognized the problems of "democratic" centralization, this was a much greater worry for Tocqueville. Mill's treatment of this issue in "Centralisation" takes a stance between what he sees as the French tendency to over-centralize and the English prejudice against centralization.⁴⁰ Ironically, on the issue of centralization, the Frenchman Tocqueville was closer to the English approach and the Englishman Mill was closer to the French approach. Once again, using Tocqueville's aristocracy-democracy dichotomy, Tocqueville was more aristocratic and Mill was more democratic.

The role of intellectuals in society was another problem that Tocqueville worried about in the modern democratic era, and he favored social forms and institutions that limited their influence. Although his "new political science" could not win out in the democratic marketplace of ideas against the *philosophe* rationalists, he believed that certain political institutions and forms

could cultivate in the people certain "mental habits," based on experience with the practice and rigors of governing, in a way that would make them resist the simple and utopian ideas of democratic rationalists. Examples of these salutary institutions, in minimizing the role of the intellectual, included: a diverse and commercial press that circulated ideas horizontally among the people rather than vertically from elites downward; the English legal system based around precedent and reasoning inductively from particular cases to general principles rather than deductively from general principles to specific application; and local government where the people are educated in the practical affairs of government through their clumsy administration rather than an efficient and streamlined top-down central administration.⁴¹ In this way, things like the common law and decentralized administration of government were "aristocratic" political forms while general ideas and enlightened top-down administration were "democratic."

Mill, on the other hand, favored administration by the "enlightened few," and saw governance by the uneducated masses as the great problem of the democratic age. Mill's ideal democratic state was a "rational democracy," and the only potential danger that democracy faced, according to Mill, was a substitution of delegation for representation:

Provided good intentions can be secured, the best government, (need it be said?) must be the government of the wisest, and these must always be a few... The interest of the people is, to choose for their rulers the most instructed and the ablest persons who can be found, and having done so, to allow them to exercise their knowledge and ability for the good of the people freely, or with the least possible control...The omnipotence of the majority would be exercised through the agency and at the discretion of an enlightened minority, accountable to the majority in the last resort... That ultimate control, without which they cannot have security for good government, may, if they please, be made the means of themselves interfering in the government, and making their legislators mere delegates for carrying into execution the preconceived judgment of the majority...such a government, though better than most aristocracies, is not the kind of democracy which wise men desire...The substitution of delegation for representation is therefore the one and only danger of democracy.⁴²

We can see in this passage fundamental differences between Mill and Tocqueville. For Tocqueville, there were many dangers and drawbacks of democracy that required a variety of values, mores, forms, and institutions to protect against. For Mill, the primary danger of democracy was a lack of enlightened governance,

and Mill's solution to this problem was "education" in the long run and governance by the "enlightened few" in the short run.

Where Mill wanted to educate the masses for democracy, Tocqueville wanted to cultivate "mental habits" and promote institutions that would temper the vices of democracy. Tocqueville was opposed to centralization and elite intellectual governance, while Mill favored these two things under English conditions. These two aspects of democratic governance highlight the distinction between Tocqueville's "aristocracy" and Mill's "elitist democracy"—an important distinction that is obscured by simply labeling both thinkers "aristocratic liberals."

Tocqueville and Mill's backgrounds in aristocracy and democracy

In the preceding sections, we have seen the similarities and differences between Tocqueville and Mill with regard to their conceptions of history, conceptions of scientific method, and views on democratic governance. To investigate these three areas, I have applied the lens of Tocqueville's aristocracy-democracy dichotomy. The differences between Tocqueville and Mill can be explained, partly, by their biographical backgrounds. Their different starting points led to different political ends. Tocqueville's relatively more aristocratic social and political thought makes sense given his biographical connections to the pre-democratic world. Mill's relatively more democratic thought makes sense given his radically democratic upbringing.

Tocqueville was born into an old aristocratic family in Normandy in 1805. Despite his family's earlier privileged position, Tocqueville was not a reactionary who sought to return to an aristocratic social state. He wrote in his Introduction to *Democracy in America* that he attempted to transcend the partisanship of aristocrats and democrats who debated social and political issues in his day. "This book is not precisely in anyone's camp; in writing it I did not mean either to serve or to contest any party; I undertook to see, not differently, but further than the parties; and while they are occupied with the next day, I wanted to ponder the future."⁴³ The future, for Tocqueville, was democracy—its dominance in society was inevitable and irresistible—and he criticized the reactionaries who attempted to return to a pre-democratic society.

The key for those living in the modern democratic age, according to Tocqueville, was to embrace the virtues and temper the vices of the given democratic social state. To do this, Tocqueville asserted, "a new political science is needed for a world altogether new."

Tocqueville's "new political science" involved clarifying our social and historical situation so that "those who direct society" can best guide their communities through the unique challenges of their particular time and place:

To instruct democracy, if possible to reanimate its beliefs, to purify its mores, to regulate its movements, to substitute little by little the science of affairs for its inexperience, and knowledge of its true interests for its blind instincts; to adapt its government to time and place; to modify it according to circumstances and men: such is the first duty imposed on those who direct society in our day.⁴⁴

This emphasis on prudential adaptation according to time, place, and circumstance was a rebuke to the ideologues of both the French Left and Right who, he believed, dogmatically argued for their positions based on abstract principles (e.g., the "rationalist *philosophes*" of the Left) or in denial of social reality (e.g., the "traditionalist" enemies of the *philosophes* on the Right).⁴⁵

Because his aristocratic background in a democratic age meant that his life was connected to two separate eras, Tocqueville was able to give us a clearer view of both eras from his vantage point. As Michael Walzer pointed out, it is impossible for a social critic to fully transcend their given situation in a particular historical context.⁴⁶ However, Tocqueville's unique position between two social states allowed him to get more critical distance than others. Mill called great attention to Tocqueville's unusual objectivity as "a philosopher whose impartiality as between aristocracy and democracy is unparalleled in our time."⁴⁷ Tocqueville's views were "the result of the influences of the age upon a mind and character trained up in opinions and feelings opposed to those of the age."⁴⁸ In this way, Tocqueville was situated between aristocracy and democracy as an advocate of liberty. To modify Kahan's phrase, he was an "aristocratic democratic liberal."

When Mill points to his *own* education and biographical background, he did so as an explanation for his partisanship—in contrast to Tocqueville's neutrality—toward democracy.⁴⁹ Mill's father, James Mill, was a child of the Scottish Enlightenment. The son of a "petty tradesman and...small farmer," James Mill received a scholarship to study at the University of Edinburgh to become a "preacher." Unable to "believe the doctrines of that or any other Church," James Mill moved to London where he established his literary career and famously befriended Jeremy Bentham.⁵⁰ John Stuart Mill was born in London in 1806 and

was educated from a very young age by James Mill as a kind of experimental protégé. Growing up under the tutelage of his father's democratic radicalism and utilitarianism fundamentally shaped John Stuart Mill's thought: both the radical democratic liberalism of his earlier years and the more qualified democratic liberalism of his later years.

Mill's thinking began to change course in the 1830s under "the influence of European, that is to say, Continental, thought, and especially those of the reaction of the nineteenth century against the eighteenth."⁵¹ His period of doubt caused him to "think that there was really something more fundamentally erroneous in my father's conception of philosophical Method, as applicable to politics, than I had hitherto supposed there was."⁵² However, these "turning points," Mill claimed, only confirmed for him the truths "which lay in [his] early opinions, and in no essential part of which [he] at any time wavered."⁵³ Furthermore, he maintained his fundamental political commitments as "a radical and democrat."⁵⁴ Mill never relinquished his belief that democracy and liberalism were the best means toward the end of human happiness, and that aristocratic domination was an "evil."⁵⁵ Mill's liberalism was informed by "elitism" rather than "aristocracy."

These sharply contrasting biographical contexts of Mill and Tocqueville help us understand their ideas, conceptions, and views addressed in the preceding three sections. Mill and Tocqueville had different starting points in their views of the world: Mill's starting point was deeply democratic and Tocqueville's starting point was a bridge between aristocracy and democracy. They also had different political ends: Mill's political end was, fundamentally, human happiness, while Tocqueville's political end was human liberty. These different origins and ends colored their distinct social and political thought as it relates to their conceptions of history, conceptions of science, and views on democratic governance.

Conclusion

Citizens of contemporary liberal democratic regimes are increasingly removed from the aristocratic age that preceded our democratic age. As such, we have increasingly democratic conceptions of history, methods of scientific analysis, and views on governance. It is hard for us to comprehend the way that people in aristocratic ages viewed the world, and it is even harder to sympathize with that way of thinking. Given our deeply democratic way of thinking, it is no surprise that our liberalism today looks much more like Mill's more democratic liberalism—with its belief in

social progress and human perfectibility, its affinity for universalizing and generalizing social science, and preference for technocratic elitism—than Tocqueville's more aristocratic liberalism—with its skepticism toward what the future brings, its focus on the ability of certain individuals to change the course of history, and its preference for local and imperfect governance rather than top-down and centralizing rule.

If we want to better understand the character of the liberalism that dominates Western democracies today, and that "is the final framework within which our political thinking moves," it is helpful to place it in historical context.⁵⁶ It is helpful to compare our kind of liberalism with other forms that have existed in the past. In making this comparison, we can see what is distinctive about our liberalism and examine the assumptions upon which it is based. The contrasting social and political thought of Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill are particularly useful in helping us think through the modern Millian world in which we live.

Notes

1. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1874), 1–2.
2. *Ibid.*, 190–1.
3. Byung-Hoon Suh, "Mill and Tocqueville: A Friendship Bruised," *History of European Ideas* 42, no. 1 (2016): 55–72.
4. John Stuart Mill, "Art. IV: De Tocqueville on Democracy in America," *The London Review* 2, no. 3 (1835): 85–129; John Stuart Mill, "Art. I: De Tocqueville on Democracy in America," *The Edinburgh Review* 72, no. 145 (1840): 1–47.
5. Ada Zemach, "Alexis de Tocqueville on England," *The Review of Politics* 13, no. 3 (1951): 329–43; Iris Mueller, *John Stuart Mill and French Thought* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956); T. H. Qualter, "John Stuart Mill, Disciple of de Tocqueville," *The Western Political Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 880–9; H. O. Pappé, "Mill and Tocqueville," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, no. 2 (1964): 217–34; Joseph Hamburger, "Mill and Tocqueville on Liberty," in *James and John Stuart Mill: Papers of the Centenary Conference*, ed. John M. Robson and Michael Laine (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976): 111–25; Alan S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Georgios Varouxakis, "Guizot's Historical Works and J.S. Mill's Reception of Tocqueville," *History of Political Thought*, 20, no. 2 (1999): 292–312; Ira Katznelson, "On Liberal Ambivalence," *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 779–88; Kevin Duong, "The Demands of Glory: Tocqueville and Terror in Algeria," *The Review of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018): 31–55.

6. Roger Boesche and Ira Katznelson point out that scholars overestimate, specifically, Mill's influence on Tocqueville. Roger Boesche, *Tocqueville's Road Map: Methodology, Liberalism, Revolution, and Despotism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Katznelson, "On Liberal Ambivalence"
7. Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
8. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*.
9. Notably, Kahan conflates Tocqueville's sympathy for the social bonds created by hierarchical political forms and aristocratic mores with Mill's call for technocratic elites to rule on behalf of the masses. These are two significantly distinct political ideas that are obscured by using the term "aristocracy" anachronistically.
10. While, as contemporaries and friends, Mill and Tocqueville used these terms in similar ways, they did not use them in identical ways. Given that this paper focuses on how Tocqueville used the concepts "aristocracy" and "democracy," future scholarship could focus on Mill's specific conceptions, but making two separate analyses is beyond the scope of this paper.
11. Mill, "De Tocqueville on Democracy in America" (1840), 3.
12. *Ibid.*, 5.
13. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4.
14. *Ibid.*, 5.
15. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 426–7. See, for example, Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind: Being a Posthumous Work of the Late M. de Condorcet* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1796), 269.
16. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 470.
17. *Ibid.*, 470.
18. *Ibid.*, 469.
19. John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," in *The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill*, ed. John Troyer (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing, Inc., 2003), 105.
20. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 675.
21. Mill, "Utilitarianism," 205.
22. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 29.
23. Alexis de Tocqueville, "To J.S. Mill, Esq., Baugy, November 10, 1836," in *Memoir, Letters, and Remains of Alexis de Tocqueville*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1861), 28–9.
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25. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 6–7.
26. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 411.
27. *Ibid.*, 412–13.
28. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, vol. 1, ed. Francois Furet and Francois Melonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
29. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 404–5.
30. Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, vol. 1, 196.
31. Mill, *Autobiography*, 202.
32. Mill, "De Tocqueville on Democracy in America" (1840).
33. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 8.
34. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 640.
35. *Ibid.*, 5.
36. Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, vol. 1, 197.
37. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 155.
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42. Mill, "De Tocqueville on Democracy in America" (1835), 72.
43. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 15.
44. *Ibid.*, 7.
45. For a description of this intellectual and partisan context, see Ceaser, "Tocqueville on Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual."
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48. John Stuart Mill, "Art. I: Oeuvres de Alfred de Vigny," *The London and Westminster Review* (1838): 1–44, 2.
49. Mill, *Autobiography*, 170.
50. *Ibid.*, 2.
51. *Ibid.*, 163–5.
52. *Ibid.*, 158.
53. *Ibid.*, 168.
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