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Chapter 1 : Christianity and American Democracy â€” Hugh Hecllo | Harvard University Press

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Alexis de Tocqueville reflected more deeply on the inherent weaknesses of democracy, stripped of religion, than anybody. His thesis went something like this: The premises of secular materialism do not sustain democracy, but undermine it, while the premises of Judaism and Christianity include and by inductive experience lead to democracy, uplift it, carry it over its inherent weaknesses, and sustain it. Alexis de Tocqueville Recently the newspapers have burst with stories: Judges stripping the Ten Commandments from court-room walls and forbidding students in schools from pledging allegiance to our flag, and the republic for which it stands, "one nation, indivisible, under God. Alexis de Tocqueville reflected more deeply on the inherent weaknesses of democracy, stripped of religion, than anybody at the ACLU today. Tocqueville began with a shocker: That the first political institution of American democracy is religion. By its own inherent tendencies, democracy tends to lower tastes and passions, to devolve into materialistic preoccupations, and to undercut its own principles by a morally indifferent relativism. Further, democracy left to itself tends to surrender liberty to the passion for security and equality, and thus to end in a new soft despotism, tied down with a thousand silken threads by a benign authority. Before the revolution of morals brought on by Judaism and Christianity, pagan philosophy held that most men are by nature slaves, and that "the strong do what they can, and the weak do what they must. In short, Christianity made the liberty of every individual before God the bright red thread of history, and its interpretive key. Underlying the chances of democracy, then, is its faith in the immortality of the human soul, which is the foundation of the concept of human rights and universal dignity. Lose this faith, and humans become harder and harder to distinguish from the other animals, and human rights become ever more difficult to define, defend, and uphold. He sometimes seems to be arguing that his principles are antithetical to Christianity, and sometimes that they are consistent with a high and faithful reading of Christianity. His followers tend to be divided as to which side of this equivocation they support. First, Judaism and Christianity correct and strengthen morals and manners. While the laws of a free society allow a person to do almost anything, there are many things which religion prevents him from imagining or doing. Second, fixed ideas about God and human nature are indispensable in the conduct of daily life, but daily life prevents most men from having time to work out these fixed ideas, and Christianity and Judaism present the findings of reason, tested in generations of experience, in forms that are clear, precise, intelligible to the crowd, and very durable. Moral clarity is a great gain in times of crisis. Third, whereas democracy induces a taste for physical pleasures and tends to lower tastes, and thus weakens most people in their commitment to the high and difficult principles on which democratic life depends, religion of the Jewish and Christian type constantly point to that danger and demand that humans draw back, and attend to the fundamental things. Belief in immortality prods men to aspire upwards, and to aim for further moral progress along the line of their own dignity and self-government. Fourth, faith adds to a morality of mere reason, whether of duty or utilitarian advantage, an acute sense of acting in the presence of a personal and undecivable Judge, Who sees and knows even acts performed in secret. Thus faith adds to reason motives for doing things perfectly even when no one is looking; it gives reasons for painting the bottom of a chair, and in general for doing things as perfectly as possible. In this way, faith gives morals a personal dimension. Fifth, in a democracy such as the United States, Tocqueville observes, religion does not direct the writing of laws or the formation of public opinion in detail, it does direct mores and shape the life of the home. Politically incorrect as his views may appear in a feminist and relativist age, Tocqueville lays great stress on the tumultuous passions that disrupt home life in Europe, and thus render populations unfit for self-government in democracies and more prone to authoritarian forms, in comparison with the high honor paid the marriage bond and the greater severity of domestic mores observable in America. This quiet regulation of home life is

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another contribution of Jewish and Christian beliefs to the sustainability of American democracy. For these eight reasons, then these three fundamental premises: That is, religion of the Jewish and Christian type, as described. For not all world religions establish the premises of personal dignity, universal equality, and the centrality of individual liberty. Nor do all add to reason the precise advantages classically delivered by Judaism and Christianity. Those that do, or come closest, also bring to democracy certain contributions to its own stability and progress. In an especially beautiful passage Tocqueville summarizes his view as follows: I have already said enough to put Anglo-American civilization in its true light. It is the product of two perfectly distinct elements which elsewhere have often been at war with one another but which in America it was somehow possible to incorporate into each other, forming a marvelous combination. I mean the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom. Far from harming each other, these two apparently opposed tendencies work in harmony and seem to lend mutual support. Freedom sees religion as the companion of its struggles and triumphs, the cradle of its infancy, and the divine source of its rights. Religion is considered as the guardian of mores, and mores are regarded as the guarantee of the laws and pledge for the maintenance of freedom itself. This article is reprinted with permission from National Review. To subscribe to the National Review write P. Box , Mount Morris, Ill or phone

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Chapter 2 : Democracy in America - Wikipedia

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Materialism Situation of women[edit] Tocqueville was one of the first social critics to examine the situation of U. Consistent with this limited view of the potential of women to act as equals to men, as well as his apparently missing on his travels seeing the nurturing roles that many men in the United States played, particularly in the Delaware Valley region of cultures where there was a lot of influence by Society of Friends as well as a tradition of male and female equality, Tocqueville considered the separate spheres of women and men a positive development, stating: Tocqueville seeks to apply the functional aspects of democracy in the United States to what he sees as the failings of democracy in his native France. These include his belief that democracy has a tendency to degenerate into " soft despotism " as well as the risk of developing a tyranny of the majority. He observes that the strong role religion played in the United States was due to its separation from the government, a separation all parties found agreeable. He contrasts this to France where there was what he perceived to be an unhealthy antagonism between democrats and the religious, which he relates to the connection between church and state. Tocqueville also outlines the possible excesses of passion for equality among men, foreshadowing the totalitarian states of the twentieth century. Insightful analysis of political society was supplemented in the second volume by description of civil society as a sphere of private and civilian affairs mirroring Hegel. Letters and Other Writings. Impact[edit] Democracy in America was published in two volumes, the first in and the other in It was immediately popular in both Europe and the United States, while also having a profound impact on the French population. By the twentieth century, it had become a classic work of political science , social science , and history. It is a commonly assigned reading for undergraduates of American universities majoring in the political or social sciences, and part of the introductory political theory syllabus at Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton and other institutions. In the introduction to his translation of the book, Harvard Professor Harvey C. Mansfield calls it "at once the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written on America. He anticipates the potential acrimony over the abolition of slavery that would tear apart the United States and lead to the American Civil War as well as the eventual superpower rivalry between the United States and Russia, which exploded after World War II and spawned the Cold War. Noting the rise of the industrial sector in the American economy, Tocqueville, some scholars have argued, also correctly predicted that an industrial aristocracy would rise from the ownership of labor. According to Tocqueville, democracy had some unfavorable consequences: Translated versions of Democracy in America and effects on meaning[edit] This translation was completed by Reeve and later revised by Francis Bowen. In , it was reissued in a modern edition by Alfred A. Knopf edited and with an extensive historical essay by Phillips Bradley. George Lawrence , translated in with an introduction by J.

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Chapter 3 : Alexis de Tocqueville - Wikipedia

This book is a collection of five lectures or essays on the partnership of Christianity and democratic forces in the American republic. The first, "Christianity and Democracy in America," by Hugh Heclo is by far the most important and longest (pages.).

Beginning in , he and Gustave de Beaumont toured the country of America for the purpose of observing the American people and their institutions. His two-part work, which was published in and , was entitled Democracy in America. It has been described as "the most comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the relationship between character and society in America that has ever been written. Upon my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things. In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country. Indeed, it is in this same point of view that the inhabitants of the United States themselves look upon religious belief. I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion-for who can search the human heart? This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or a party, but it belongs to the whole nation and to every rank of society. They all differ in respect to the worship which is due to the Creator; but they all agree in respect to the duties which are due from man to man. Each sect adores the Deity in its own peculiar manner, but all sects preach the same moral law in the name of God Moreover, all the sects of the United States are comprised within the great unity of Christianity, and Christian morality is everywhere the same. In the United States, if a political character attacks a sect [denomination], this may not prevent even the partisans of that very sect, from supporting him; but if he attacks all the sects together [Christianity], every one abandons him and he remains alone. I do not question that the great austerity of manners that is observable in the United States arises, in the first instance, from religious faith There is certainly no country in the world where the tie of marriage is more respected than in America or where conjugal happiness is more highly or worthily appreciated Christianity, therefore reigns without obstacle, by universal consent; the consequence is, as I have before observed, that every principle of the moral world is fixed and determinate.. I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great. The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law as well as the surest pledge of freedom. The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other. Christianity is the companion of liberty in all its conflicts-the cradle of its infancy, and the divine source of its claims. They brought with them From the earliest settlement of the emigrants, politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved. The Christian nations of our age seem to me to present a most alarming spectacle; the impulse which is bearing them along is so strong that it cannot be stopped, but it is not yet so rapid that it cannot be guided: Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that he found in America: An ostensible respect for Christian morality and virtue. In August of , while traveling through Chester County in New York, Alexis de Tocqueville had the opportunity to observe a court case. While I was in America, a witness, who happened to be called at the assizes of the county of Chester state of New York , declared that he did not believe in the existence of God or in the immortality of the soul. The judge refused to admit his evidence, on the ground that the witness had destroyed beforehand all confidence of the court in what he was about to say. The newspapers related the fact without any further comment. The New York Spectator of August 23d, , relates the fact in the following terms: The presiding judge remarked, that he had not before been aware that there was a man living who did not believe in the existence of God; that this belief

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constituted the sanction of all testimony in a court of justice:

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Chapter 4 : Democracy and Religion in America

Christianity and American www.nxgvision.com Hugh Hecllo. *The Alexis de Tocqueville Lectures on American Politics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, xii + pp. \$ cloth.

A page from original working manuscript of *Democracy in America*, c. Observing from the perspective of a detached social scientist, Tocqueville wrote of his travels through the United States in the early 19th century when the Market Revolution, Western expansion and Jacksonian democracy were radically transforming the fabric of American life. Tocqueville was an ardent supporter of liberty. The most recent translation from Arthur Goldhammer translates the meaning to be as stated above. Examples of misquoted sources are numerous on the internet, [22] but the text does not contain the words "Americans were so enamored by equality" anywhere. Of centralized government, he wrote that it "excels in preventing, not doing". As none of them is strong enough to fight alone with advantage, the only guarantee of liberty is for everyone to combine forces. But such a combination is not always in evidence". He cites protective laws in France at the time that protected an estate from being split apart among heirs, thereby preserving wealth and preventing a churn of wealth such as was perceived by him in within the United States. For Tocqueville, as for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, civil society was a sphere of private entrepreneurship and civilian affairs regulated by civil code. Egoism springs from a blind instinct; individualism from wrong-headed thinking rather than from depraved feelings. It originates as much from defects of intelligence as from the mistakes of the heart. Egoism blights the seeds of every virtue; individualism at first dries up only the source of public virtue. In the longer term it attacks and destroys all the others and will finally merge with egoism. In describing the American, he agreed with thinkers such as Aristotle and Montesquieu that the balance of property determined the balance of political power, but his conclusions after that differed radically from those of his predecessors. Tocqueville tried to understand why the United States was so different from Europe in the last throes of aristocracy. In contrast to the aristocratic ethic, the United States was a society where hard work and money-making was the dominant ethic, where the common man enjoyed a level of dignity which was unprecedented, where commoners never deferred to elites and where what he described as crass individualism and market capitalism had taken root to an extraordinary degree. Legislatures abolished primogeniture and entails, resulting in more widely distributed land holdings. This was a contrast to the general aristocratic pattern in which only the eldest child, usually a man, inherited the estate, which had the effect of keeping large estates intact from generation to generation. As Tocqueville understood it, this rapidly democratizing society had a population devoted to "middling" values which wanted to amass through hard work vast fortunes. In Europe, he claimed, nobody cared about making money. The lower classes had no hope of gaining more than minimal wealth while the upper classes found it crass, vulgar and unbecoming of their sort to care about something as unseemly as money and many were virtually guaranteed wealth and took it for granted. At the same time in the United States, workers would see people fashioned in exquisite attire and merely proclaim that through hard work they too would soon possess the fortune necessary to enjoy such luxuries. Despite maintaining that the balance of property determined the balance of power, Tocqueville argued that as the United States showed, equitable property holdings did not ensure the rule of the best men. In fact, it did quite the opposite as the widespread, relatively equitable property ownership which distinguished the United States and determined its mores and values also explained why the United States masses held elites in such contempt. Ordinary Americans enjoyed too much power and claimed too great a voice in the public sphere to defer to intellectual superiors. This culture promoted a relatively pronounced equality, Tocqueville argued, but the same mores and opinions that ensured such equality also promoted mediocrity. Those who possessed true virtue and talent were left with limited choices. They could join limited intellectual circles to explore the weighty and complex problems facing society, or they could use their superior talents to amass vast fortunes in the private sector. Tocqueville wrote that he did not know of any country where there was "less independence

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of mind, and true freedom of discussion, than in America". A writer is free inside that area, but woe to the man who goes beyond it, not that he stands in fear of an inquisition, but he must face all kinds of unpleasantness in every day persecution. A career in politics is closed to him for he has offended the only power that holds the keys". Though a supporter of colonialism, Tocqueville could clearly perceive the evils that black people and natives had been subjected to in the United States. Tocqueville devoted the last chapter of the first volume of Democracy in America to the question while his travel companion Gustave de Beaumont wholly focused on slavery and its fallouts for the American nation in Marie or Slavery in America. Tocqueville notes among the American races: The first who attracts the eye, the first in enlightenment, in power and in happiness, is the white man, the European, man par excellence; below him appear the Negro and the Indian. These two unfortunate races have neither birth, nor face, nor language, nor mores in common; only their misfortunes look alike. Both occupy an equally inferior position in the country that they inhabit; both experience the effects of tyranny; and if their miseries are different, they can accuse the same author for them. The men sent to Virginia were seekers of gold, adventurers without resources and without character, whose turbulent and restless spirit endangered the infant colony. No lofty views, no spiritual conception presided over the foundation of these new settlements. The colony was scarcely established when slavery was introduced; this was the capital fact which was to exercise an immense influence on the character, the laws and the whole future of the South. It enervates the powers of the mind and benumbs the activity of man. On this same English foundation there developed in the North very different characteristics. If the colony of Liberia were able to receive thousands of new inhabitants every year, and if the Negroes were in a state to be sent thither with advantage; if the Union were to supply the society with annual subsidies, and to transport the Negroes to Africa in government vessels, it would still be unable to counterpoise the natural increase of population among the blacks; and as it could not remove as many men in a year as are born upon its territory within that time, it could not prevent the growth of the evil which is daily increasing in the states. The Negro race will never leave those shores of the American continent to which it was brought by the passions and the vices of Europeans; and it will not disappear from the New World as long as it continues to exist. The inhabitants of the United States may retard the calamities which they apprehend, but they cannot now destroy their efficient cause. I do not think it is for me, a foreigner, to indicate to the United States the time, the measures, or the men by whom Slavery shall be abolished. Still, as the persevering enemy of despotism everywhere, and under all its forms, I am pained and astonished by the fact that the freest people in the world is, at the present time, almost the only one among civilized and Christian nations which yet maintains personal servitude; and this while serfdom itself is about disappearing, where it has not already disappeared, from the most degraded nations of Europe. An old and sincere friend of America, I am uneasy at seeing Slavery retard her progress, tarnish her glory, furnish arms to her detractors, compromise the future career of the Union which is the guaranty of her safety and greatness, and point out beforehand to her, to all her enemies, the spot where they are to strike. However, assimilation was the best solution for Native Americans and since they were too proud to assimilate, they would inevitably become extinct. Both populations were "undemocratic", or without the qualities, intellectual and otherwise needed to live in a democracy.

Chapter 5 : Alexis de Tocqueville Quotes on America as a Christian Nation

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Chapter 6 : Christianity and American Democracy by Hugh Heclo

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