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Tocqueville Reconsidered: On Secular Morality and Religion's Place in Liberal Democracy

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What is the place of religion in a liberal polity? Are Church and State enemies, friends, or simply uncomfortable bedfellows? Modern political theory has long featured rival answers to this question.[1] One point of view depicts religion as an enemy of freedom due to its intolerance and narrowmindedness. Secularization is embedded in the liberal project—society cannot be considered liberal unless religion has withered away. Variants of this view can be traced to anticlerical Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Hume and their modern followers.

Another perspective insists that religion must conform to secular norms and values. While permissible, religion should not become a source of transcendent moral or theological values which might upset society. Faith must be stripped of its moral authority. J. Judd Owen identifies this project as a key goal of Hobbes, Locke, and Jefferson.[2] Montesquieu, too, may hold this position.[3]

Both of these positions share the conviction that traditional religion and liberal politics are locked in irreconcilable tension. They simply adopt different solutions to resolve this dilemma. The former, secularist perspective proposes secularization as the only way to resolve the tension. Religion cannot be transformed in any meaningful way, so it must be forgotten instead. By contrast, the

transformational view insists that the religious instinct cannot be erased. The question, then, is what to do with the religious instinct. The moral norms of faith *can* be changed; in fact, updating the moral content of faith presents the ideal way to minimize the public influence of belief.

A third view seeks to find a way around the oppositional stance adopted by both the secular and transformational theses. It seeks to harmonize religion and politics where possible in practice while giving faith the liberty to contribute toward the common good. It thinks that, far from corrupting the ideal liberal society, faith instills the virtues necessary to cultivate flourishing democratic institutions and thriving citizens. In short, it presents religion as an indispensable basis for morality in a democratic age, accepting the tension between faith and liberal democracy as healthy and even necessary. In this paper, we enter into dialogue with Alexis de Tocqueville's eloquent and compelling articulation of this idea.

Tocqueville's precise orientation to religious belief, however, provokes sharp debate. Some scholars see him as a "functionalist" who cares little for the content of religion, which he evaluates entirely with regard to its social utility rather than its truth. On this view, he advocates a "civil religion" that provides a common set of moral truths even if the religious passions and theological content underlying it are shallow.[4] Yet Cynthia Hinckley rightly points out that, while Tocqueville generally considers any religion better than no religion, he believes that some religions are better than others.[5] Christianity stands alone at the top of the hierarchy, whereas Islam and polytheism are inferior alternatives and Hinduism is worse than atheism. Moreover, as James Sloat shows, Tocqueville's account of religion makes no sense unless a critical mass of citizens in democracies display sincere faith.[6] We side with those who see Tocqueville's commitment to religion to be sincere, albeit undoubtedly racked with doubts.[7] He certainly does not advocate a mere civil religion that can be reduced to a set of moral teachings. Thus, as will become clear, our view clashes with Zuckert's argument that vaguely religious or even atheistic tenets can replicate the moral benefit of religion to democracies.[8] His own detached, utilitarian

statements about the practical value of religion should not obscure his desire to promote an sincere faith, without which religion cannot benefit democracy. Similarly, we must take care to note that religion, for Tocqueville, ought not be reduced to a set of "moral teachings" or ritualistic social practices. Rather, religion can offer moral guidance largely because of its otherworldliness, its ability to satisfy our hopes for immortality, transcendence, and communion with the divine. While our analysis dwells on the connections between religion and morality, it is compatible with, and at times point to, this broader understanding of religion.

But if religious belief is sincere, then how ought believers and unbelievers relate to each other in a democratic society? This question is the starting point of our paper. Tocqueville makes it quite clear that democracy "fosters a sort of instinctive credulity about the supernatural" (490) and that religion can easily lose the support of the majority if it offends democratic sensibilities. The relationship between traditional religion and democratic societies, then, is crucial for determining the scope of religious conflict, which must be tamed if societies are to reap the benefits of religion. In other words, while Tocqueville sees religion benefitting democracy in specific ways, we draw attention to the preconditions that render those benefits a possibility in modern political life.

We are hardly the first to notice this aspect of Tocqueville's thought. Nearly three decades ago, William Galston's reaction to the intolerance of the fundamentalist religious right drove him to make the novel—and dire—suggestion that Tocqueville's (heretofore) hugely successful thesis could fail.[9] How would this occur? Galston notes that religious indifference presents a dilemma for Tocqueville. Faith cannot influence society if people do not believe in it, especially inasmuch as liberalism is the "political expression" of "Christian teachings."[10] Furthermore, as Galston puts it, "the religious unity Tocqueville discerns—and praises—in America rests on … an etiolation of belief" that calms sectarian strife.[11] However, sincere religious faith is inseparable, Tocqueville thinks, from a certain measure of intolerance, making it difficult to obtain both piety and toleration simultaneously. Galston hypothesizes that

the tension between toleration and faith can be reconciled only in circumstances of "profound religious uniformity" which neuters the intolerance inherent in faith.[12] The problem, for Galston, is that the religious uniformity characteristic of the 1830s has given way to profound theological diversity, which has exacerbated the intolerance of the religious conservatives, pushing them to attempt to unite church and state in an effort to protect traditional values. We, however, argue that the more serious problem for Tocqueville is posed not by theological disunity but by moral fragmentation, in particular a growing divergence between religious minorities—that, while differing in theology, share a similar morality and appreciation for the transcendent—and an increasingly secular majority culture.

By examining the subtle structure of Tocqueville's powerful solution to minimize the conflict between religion and irreligion, our paper makes two different contributions to this literature. First, we take a unique approach by examining the logical structure and foundational beliefs underlying Tocqueville's argument. As we argue, Tocqueville holds that morality depends upon religion and that general conceptions of morality will not differ substantially across different segments of society. This moral core derives from transcendent theological and metaphysical beliefs, which check and balance the unhealthy tendencies of democratic society. Moreover, we show that the moral fragmentation observable in the modern world results from the impact of theological fragmentation, namely the growing predominance of a functionally secular worldview, on moral beliefs. But such theses are not arbitrary: one learns of their existence through Tocqueville's own writing on morality and religion, such as his neglected correspondence with Arthur de Gobineau. Second, contemporary scholarship does not attempt to wrestle with Tocqueville's thesis as it might apply to postmodern America. Is his vision a relic of a bygone liberalism, or can it speak to us today? We think that uncovering the logical structure of Tocqueville's argument is necessary to assess its continued relevance. In what follows, we argue that the rise of a secular morality weakens, though perhaps not fatally, the viability of

Tocqueville's harmonist vision. This analysis illuminates the preconditions that Tocqueville suggests are necessary for the success of his harmonizing project.

Religious Conflict and the Religious Case for Separating Church and State

Tocqueville hopes to harmonize religion and politics precisely because he rejects the view that religion is doomed to extinction and thus politically irrelevant. Many modern thinkers, most prominently Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, advanced the so-called "secularization thesis" that, in Tocqueville's words, contends that "religious zeal … was bound to dwindle as liberty and enlightenment increased" (340). From this perspective, the emergence of science and rational philosophy inexorably disenchants the world by displacing faith, scripture, and other so-called "mystifications." By contrast, Tocqueville's examination of human nature led him to expect religion to endure: "The incomplete joys of this world can never satisfy [a person's] heart. Man is the only creature to exhibit both a natural disgust for existence and an overwhelming desire to exist. … These divergent instincts constantly compel his soul to contemplate the other world" (342). Thus, belief in God is "as natural to the human heart as hope itself. … Men stray from religious belief … [but] an invincible inclination brings them back. Unbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent condition of mankind" (342).[13] Religion gains its power from the hope for a better life, in this world or the next, brought about by a union or relationship with the divine. Religion cannot be replaced precisely because it is more than a set of empty rituals or discrete moral propositions—it is a language of hope that calls humans to situate themselves and the world into a divine reality. While democratic society fosters doubt and not everyone will have faith—Tocqueville in fact doubted the sincerity of many Americans' religious professions (338)—it will continue to attract large numbers of adherents as long as circumstances do not intervene.

But if human nature ultimately yearns for transcendence, then Tocqueville's view demands a continual reconciliation between

religion and the politics of modernity. This goal, he believes, requires the church to accept the separation of church and state and for society to accept the social dominance of religion. In pursuit of this aim, he argues both that disestablishment benefits religion and that robust religion in turn benefits democratic society. He crafts these arguments to the human being as believer, who wants to strengthen faith for its own sake, and to the human being as citizen, who values religion for its political benefits.

The novel conviction underlying Tocqueville's theory is that faith and freedom can flourish alongside one another. His travels in America convinced Tocqueville that Europeans had created a false dichotomy between the two. "In France," he writes, "the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty almost always pulled in opposite directions. In the United States I found them intimately intertwined: together they ruled the same territory" (341). In fact, "Americans so completely confound Christianity with liberty that" they cannot "think of one without the other" (338). Moreover, Tocqueville argues, religiosity and enlightenment are not incompatible, inasmuch as "in America we find one of the freest and most enlightened peoples in the world zealously observing all of religion's outward requirements" (340). On this basis, Tocqueville concludes that the secularization and religious conflict in Europe "should not be man's natural state with respect to religion today" (347).

To explain the divergent European and American outcomes, Tocqueville proposes that Europe had largely rejected church/state separation while America had embraced it. In Europe, the "accidental and particular cause" that prevents the "human spirit" from embracing its natural religiosity is "the close alliance between politics and religion" (347). A Christian state church, in Tocqueville's view, is an historically anomalous institution whose existence had wrongly persuaded Europeans that no church could thrive apart from state assistance. By contrast, Tocqueville thought that religion dominated in America because disestablishment had enhanced, rather than weakened, its vitality.

Disestablishment benefits religion, according to Tocqueville, because an alliance between church and state encourages many

people to oppose religion for political reasons. He accepts the paradoxical thesis that "diminishing a religion's apparent strength could actually make it more powerful" from American clergymen, who universally attributed "the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state" (341–42). Though uniting throne and altar helps religion to rule souls "by terror as well as by faith" (342), Tocqueville argues that "when a religion enters into such an alliance, it … sacrifices the future for the sake of the present, and in obtaining a power to which it is not entitled, it risks forfeiting its legitimate power" (342–43). By distinguishing between the eternal ends of the church and the temporal concerns of secular rule, Tocqueville observes that the former become obscured when the church embraces political power, since "religion cannot share the material might of those who govern without incurring some of the hatred they inspire" (342). It is better to avoid the trappings of political power altogether than to risk politically motivated reprisals. Tocqueville concludes that any alliance with political powers "is bound to be onerous for religion. It has no need of their help to live, and in serving them it may die" (343–44). In binding itself to the state, the church mortgages its own future. "Alone, [religion] can hope for immortality; linked to ephemeral powers, it shares their fortune and often falls with the fleeting passions that sustain them" (344).

Once the church has stopped attracting unnecessary enemies, Tocqueville argues, it will flourish by its own power. The church can "aim for universality" so long as it "seeks to found its empire solely on the desire for immortality that torments the hearts of all men equally" (343). Tocqueville admires how American clergy opened doors for wider proselytization by teaching that "in God's eyes no one is damnable for his political views" (342). Once the church could appeal to all people, no matter their political affiliation, Christian faith could "win the affection of the human race" (343). Though, as Tocqueville observes, Christian leaders cannot hope to attain political office because of legal and societal restrictions (341), they nonetheless enjoy substantial influence *as clergymen*. In a country without a national church, religion's "influence is

limited to a particular sphere, but there it is pervasive and dominates effortlessly" (345). However, when a church grasps power and becomes just another political group to be supported or opposed, its otherworldly vision is obscured.

In support of this thesis, Tocqueville notes that Christianity's natural appeal, unencumbered by a state church, had allowed it to dominate American public opinion. Given the coercive power of democratic public opinion (293) and the resulting "empire" of religion over both "mores" and "intelligence," even unbelievers "profess Christian dogma … because they are afraid lest they seem not to believe them" (337). As a result, he writes: "With those who do not believe hiding their incredulity and those do believe showing their faith, public opinion develops in favor of religion. … So the mass of men, whom religious feeling never forsakes, see nothing to dissuade them from established beliefs. Their instinct for another life … opens their hearts to the precepts and consolations of faith" (346). "Christianity therefore reigns without impediment, by universal consent" (337), exercising substantial influence on American beliefs.

The Political Benefits of Socially Dominant Religion

Given that he thinks that the separation of church and state will heighten the social dominance of religion, Tocqueville must convince unbelievers to appreciate this state of affairs if lasting harmony is to be achieved. After all, Europe taught Tocqueville that secular support for religion is conditional: unbelievers will jump to fight religion if they perceive it as harmful. Social pressure alone cannot explain why the influence of Christianity has been accepted by all sides. Thus, to motivate unbelievers, he provides reasons to support religious practice that are *extrinsic* to religion itself.

Accordingly, Tocqueville argues that Christian morality provides social and political benefits that can be appreciated by believers and skeptics alike, even if the latter reject the nonmoral components of religion, such as theology or worship ritual. He is optimistic that unbelievers will support Christianity once it dissolves

its unholy alliance with authoritarianism precisely because they see the value of Christian morality. "I do not know whether all [Americans] have faith … [B]ut I am certain that they believe it be to be necessary for the preservation of republican institutions" (338). The unbeliever "ceases to believe in true religion but continues to deem it useful. Looking at religious beliefs from a human angle, he recognizes their power over mores, their influence on laws. He understands how beliefs can make men live in peace and prepare them gently for death" (345–46). In short, Tocqueville urges unbelievers to support religion for the sake of democracy.

But how, specifically, does Christianity influence American society if it lacks political power? In America, Tocqueville writes, religion does not influence "the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores," (336). Tocqueville defines "mores" as "the whole moral and intellectual state of a people," a set of widely shared opinions (331). They are "habits of practical reason and ethics."[14] If mores have anything to do with public life, and if religion supports these mores, then the claim that religion must be kept *private* is certainly not one Tocqueville makes. The dangers of political-religious unity need not imply that religion must be excluded from the public square, and especially from public moral discourse. "Separatism … implies that clergy, as clergy, do not have a reserved political office," but not that "morality is separated from politics."[15] Political powerlessness is compatible with cultural dominance. Religious morality proves indispensable to a right understanding of liberty by checking the excesses of liberal democratic society. Inasmuch as religions "inspire quite contrary instincts" to the "highly dangerous instincts" inspired by democracy, "[r]eligious peoples are therefore naturally strong precisely where democratic peoples are weak" (503). For Tocqueville the "cure for democracy is not more democracy" but rather "the support and chiding of religion," which exerts "a contrary force against extreme expressions" of equality and liberty without repudiating either ideal.[16] His argument presupposes "that the validity of moral boundaries is far from self-evident to democrats absent some form of authority."[17] Religion is uniquely able to

exert this influence because divine authority does not rely on the uncertain aid of feeble human reason (501–3).

Religion is not the only underpinning of morality in democratic culture, however. According to Tocqueville, democratic mores tend to inculcate a "self-interested" view of morality that is in direct opposition to the traditional (and religious) view that morality is self-sacrificing. The "doctrine" of "self-interest properly understood" motivates people to practice traditional moral virtues, such as honesty, diligence, and kindness, because it benefits them in the long run and not for any "moral" reason (610–13). Discovering the benefits of cooperation and mutual exchange—as seen for instance in a capitalistic marketplace—prevents democratic societies from descending into naked selfishness or open conflict. Such a view of morality rarely inspires elevated acts of self-sacrifice but has the advantage of being widely accessible, readily comprehendible, and easily adopted even by selfish people. Consequently, despite its status as an "imperfect instrument," Tocqueville considers "the doctrine of self-interest properly understood" to be "the most appropriate" moral theory for democratic societies and recommends that it become the "primary focus of today's moralists" (612).

Nevertheless, we do not interpret Tocqueville to believe that rational self-interest can wholly replace traditional morality. A "nondemocratic" religious moral code can check and balance democratic faults in at least two ways. First, only the prospect of postmortem rewards and punishments can induce rational egoists to make ultimate sacrifices that can only be rewarded after death (614). One might consider, for instance, dying in battle to defend one's country, or spending one's life serving the poor or diseased. Tocqueville highlights the ability of religion to persuade people to deny current pleasures in pursuit of distant goals, which inculcates a kind of long-term thinking that benefits both the individual and society (614–15). At this stage, religion serves to extend and broaden self-interest without fundamentally changing the motivation underlying the pursuit of morality. Its only contribution is to inject the metaphysical belief in postmortem rewards into people's

interest calculations. A religious doctrine of self-interest properly understood, then, can hardly inspire and may even offend deeply religious people.

More importantly, Tocqueville thinks that religion influences thought and action in another, more elevated way. He explicitly denies that "self-interest," namely the "prospect of a reward" in heaven, is the "sole motive of religious men" (614–15). Many believers come to embrace the idea that "we must do good unto our fellow men for love of God," a "magnificent expression" by which "man, through his intelligence, enters into the mind of God; he sees that God's purpose is order; he freely associates himself with that grand design; and … expects no other reward than the pleasure of contemplating it" (614–15). Thus, as Kahan writes: "Religion balances the imperatives and inclinations of human nature in democratic society, above all materialism. It presents an alternative ideal to democratic society, an ideal of a certain kind of human perfection (e.g., the love of God) as a good in itself regardless of its utility."[18] Whereas self-interest properly understood merely placates or mitigates democratic deficiencies, heartfelt religion eradicates them by elevating the human spirit to something purer and higher. Generally speaking, religions cannot be reduced to a list of moral rules accompanied by rewards and punishments, and to think of religion in this way is to cheapen it. The problem for Tocqueville is that "pure" religion cannot penetrate the masses to the same extent as rational self-interest, rendering the latter a more necessary component of democratic morality (615).

In particular, religion counters the excesses of materialism and individualism which endanger liberty and self-government. Materialism and individualism, Tocqueville writes, result from the fact that in a classless society "people owe nothing to anyone, and … expect nothing from anyone" (585–86). The removal of inherited privileges and miseries ignites a feverish race for material acquisition, but the decline of classes, guilds, and other corporate identities leaves everyone racing alone (617–19). Equality thus "tends to isolate people from one another, so that each individual is inclined to think only of himself. It also leaves their souls inordinately

vulnerable to material pleasures" (503). The end result is that people "withdraw into the circle of family and friends" and abandon "the larger society to take care of itself" (585). Religion in general checks these tendencies by encouraging citizens to care for each other both individually and collectively.

> There is no religion that does not place the object of man's desires beyond and above the goods of the earth, and that does not naturally raise man's soul toward regions far superior to those of the senses. Nor is there any religion that does not impose on each individual certain duties toward, or in common with, the human race and does not therefore turn him away now and then from contemplation of himself (503).

Tocqueville is struck by the cessation of commercial endeavors on Sunday, during which pastors remind each parishioner of "the countless evils caused by pride and lust" and of the "need to control his desires and of the more refined pleasures associated with virtue alone" (841).

A particularly important way Christianity refines the democratic expression of freedom, Tocqueville maintains, is by shaping family life and sexual mores. "[T]he great severity of American mores is due primarily to religious beliefs. … America is surely the [country] in which the marriage bond is most respected" (336). He considers marriage and home life to be politically relevant because the public and private lives of citizens mirror each other (336–37). "In Europe, virtually all social disorders are born" from the "tumultuous passions" originating "at home," whereas the "order and peace" of American family life facilitates "natural" and "innocent" pleasures and teaches Americans to regulate their opinions and tastes (336). Thus, "it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state" (336). If he is right, any attack on the influence of religion may involve—perhaps even *must* involve—an attack on religious family morality, if not the integrity of the family itself.

Some scholars suggest that Tocqueville ultimately concludes that religion will accommodate itself so greatly to democratic values as to lose it vitality and transcendence.[19] They argue that between the publication of volumes one and volume two of *Democracy*, he came to believe that the skepticism and materialism unleashed by equality of conditions would progressively eradicate or marginalize robust faith. Admittedly, a tone of deep pessimism about the survival of religion in democracies permeates Tocqueville's writings. In notes taken during his American visit, for instance, he repeatedly questions the genuineness and depth of American religious sentiment—doubts at which he only hints in volume one of *Democracy* (338, 346).[20] Democratic peoples, he explains in volume two, are naturally inclined toward religious skepticism, intellectual independence, and pantheism (483–93, 504, 512–13). Moreover, democracy's all-embracing materialism threatens to smother religious sentiments (635–36). It is clear that Tocqueville and the Americans do not value religious morality for identical reasons. Many Americans pragmatically appreciate religion because it yields moderate and orderly mores, which facilitates wealth creation (329).[21] Tocqueville is troubled by this democratic tendency to value religion for its usefulness while ignoring its transcendence.[22] As Pierre Manent's subtle analysis reveals, the political utility of religion consists in the citizen's devotion to faith for its own sake. Difficulty arises when citizens *themselves* begin to consider religion from an overly practical perspective.[23]

Nevertheless, while Tocqueville concedes that American religion bears the stamp of democratic values, the "transformationalist" thesis is exaggerated and incomplete. It is more accurate to say that Tocqueville thinks religions change their outer appearance more than their inner substance. Because "nothing [is] so little variable by their nature as religions" given their claim to rest "on absolute truth," he writes, it is easier to "destroy" than "change" religious customs. Thus, while democracy "at least modifies the language and the form," it is unable "to change the substance of Christianity, which is eternal."[24] For example, he adds, pastors may

change their oratorical style and the evidence to which they appeal, but not morality and doctrine. Although "subsidiary notions" may be retained or dropped as needed, the "principle opinions" or "articles of faith" may never be changed "regardless of the particular spirit of the times" (507). Tocqueville concludes, for instance, that despite the aristocratic bent of the middle ages, Christianity "did not lose sight of the principal general ideas it has brought to light" (505).

Tocqueville claims repeatedly that the transcendent is an ineradicable part of democratic religious morality—even if its reach is restricted and often shallow. This is because "the taste for the infinite and the love of what is immortal were not born of a caprice of [man's] will. Their fixed foundation lies in man's nature. … He can hinder and deform but not destroy them" (623). The frequent spiritualist revivals in America represent an extreme form of the instinct for transcendence (623–24). Far from deterring potential converts, this spiritualist element constitutes the primary appeal of religion. "The heart of man … can entertain both a taste for the good of this earth and a love of the goods of heaven at the same time. At times it may seem to surrender utterly to one of the two, but it never goes for long without thinking of the other" (637). Therefore, utilitarian justifications for traditional morals can only supplement, not replace, the metaphysics of religious morality.

For this reason, religious morality is still able to check materialism and individualism, Tocqueville believes. True, religion is always modified by its social state, and democracy undermines religious asceticism, which tries to "destroy" altogether the commercial spirit and the love of material gratification (507). Still, he states explicitly that all religions prioritize otherworldly goods and altruistic duties over self-indulgence (503, cf. 633). Thus, although religions "will not succeed in dissuading men from love of wealth," they may "purify, regulate, and restrain the overly ardent and exclusive desire for well-being" (508). The glorification of monasticism characteristic of medieval Catholicism cannot be revived, for instance, but wealthy industrialists may be persuaded to pay their taxes and donate their money to the poor.

In sum, while Tocqueville doubted the resilience of religion in democracies, his publicly stated position is that many religions can survive more or less intact. Statements assuming the continued existence of faith can be found throughout *Democracy* (336–37, 345–46, 501–3, 623, 633–34). While religion must make certain concessions to democratic tastes—such as adhering strictly to monotheism, avoiding taking positions on nontheological topics, and eliminating unnecessary rituals (504–9)—there is little reason to think that religions compatible with these prescriptions, such as Protestantism, must die out. In fact, Tocqueville's plea for accommodation makes no sense unless religion can survive in some form, and he even predicts that Catholicism "would suddenly make great conquests" once it made the necessary changes (510). For the purposes of our analysis, therefore, we assume that this public posture accurately represents his actual views.[25]

The Prerequisites Underlying Tocqueville's Harmonization

We turn now from describing Tocqueville's attempt to harmonize religion and politics to evaluate the theses or assumptions undergirding it. His claim that unbelievers will publicly support religion for practical reasons, we show, depends on two presuppositions concerning the social influence of religious morality that he neither systematically articulates nor defends. If either presupposition proves untrue, his argument unravels.

Tocqueville's most fundamental premise, which we label the "Unity Thesis," holds that morality is unified—at least in its external social and political manifestations. In other words, because one moral system deriving from the Christian tradition supplies an overwhelmingly uncontroversial moral core in American culture, two reasonable people will agree on the vast majority of moral questions. By precluding debate over moral issues, this uniformity lends stability to an otherwise raucous American society: "in the moral world, everything is arranged, coordinated, anticipated, and decided in advance. In the political world, everything is agitated, contested, and uncertain" (48–49).

The Unity Thesis involves two distinct subclaims. First, Tocqueville expects moral unity to prevail among theologically distinct Christian denominations.[26] Despite the theological diversity among the "countless sects in the United States," they "all agree about man's duties to his fellow man. Each worships God in his own way, but all preach the same morality in God's name. … In any case, all sects in the United States are encompassed within the overarching unity of Christianity, and Christian morality is the same everywhere" (335). Second, the Unity Thesis holds that the moral teachings of religious and secular worldviews will nearly always coincide. Tocqueville does not anticipate total *unanimity* among all who reflect on the human good, or that moral disagreements will never occur. Rather, his argument assumes a convergence on morality's *content*, if not its *metaphysics*. Even if atheists reject the religious basis for morality, they generally seek rationalistic justifications for the same moral principles rather than adopting radically different rules for behavior. Thus, moral debate might arise between moralists and immoralists, but not among sincerely moral people.

The Unity Thesis depends, in turn, on a second fundamental prerequisite—the "Dependence Assumption"—which states that morality is not freestanding but must find its basis in religious faith. Tocqueville's belief in moral unity presupposes that a nonreligious morality would never rival Christian teaching and that robust morality cannot thrive in a secular society. Even if unbelievers' practical morals regularly align with the faithful, he insists that noble or altruistic morality, including heartfelt devotion and sacrifice, wilts when divorced from religious faith. This fact carries enormous political significance. He implores "[c]hampions of freedom" to "invoke the aid of religion, for they must know that without morality freedom cannot reign and without faith there is no basis for morality" (12). Tocqueville utterly distrusts the civic capacities of a democratic nation in which religion is wholly absent: "Despotism can do without faith, but liberty cannot. Religion is … most necessary of all in a democratic republic. How can society fail to perish if, as political bonds are loosened, moral bonds are not

tightened? And what is to be done with a people that is its own master, if it is not obedient to God?" (340). For Tocqueville, religion undergirds "a shared set of norms that act as rules of the game, legitimizing political action."[27]

The Dependence Thesis comes across even more clearly in Tocqueville's correspondence in 1843 with the French aristocrat and intellectual Arthur de Gobineau. They debated whether there was anything "really *new* in the works or in the discoveries of the modern moral philosophers? … Did they really see the obligations of mankind in such a new light?"[28] In this exchange, Tocqueville argues that morality depends on religion, whereas Gobineau upholds the secularity of post-Enlightenment morality and its divergence from traditional religious morality. This correspondence clearly reveals Tocqueville's belief that morality cannot survive apart from religious faith.

Tocqueville's first letter argues forcefully that the secular morality of the Enlightenment derived from Christianity and mirrored its teaching. He attributes "to Christianity the origins of all modern morality, no matter how seemingly 'advanced' or 'secular.' Avant-garde moral and economic principles, including socialism, were just variations of Christianity due to the democratic social state."[29] Christianity upended the moral code of the ancients, with its "half savage" virtues such as military valor, in its place elevating the "milder virtues" of "neighborly love, pity, leniency," extending the scope of moral obligation to all humans, including slaves and foreigners, and prioritizing "the equality, the unity, the fraternity of all men."[30] Moreover, by removing "the sanction of moral laws" and "the ultimate aim of human life" to the afterlife, Christianity imbued morality with a "purer, less material, less interested, and higher character."[31] By contrast, he argues, for the most part "our modern morality … has merely developed and expanded the consequences of Christian morality without affecting" its "essential principles," namely "equal rights" and the "duty … to help those who have less."[32] Genuine innovations result from theological rather than philosophical differences between the systems. For example, skepticism of the afterlife induces rationalists "to find

the sanctions of moral laws in this life" and to concentrate on "material needs and pleasures."[33]

In reply, Arthur de Gobineau affirms the originality of the Enlightenment morality and its difference from Christianity. First, it is fundamentally secular and divorced from all metaphysical or religious doctrines, a decoupling that "dislodges those foundations on which morality has been established since the earliest of historical times."[34] Previously, Christians, pagans, and philosophers alike "had to believe in a body of religious doctrine" to uphold moral claims, entailing that the "only important thing in life was to know the fate of man after death."[35] By contrast, modern morality does not include pious or theological virtues but consists exclusively in doing good to others. A pagan may be as virtuous as a monk. Second, Gobineau claims, the Enlightenment unshackled human passions from the restraints imposed by Christianity. Post-Enlightenment morality is "indulgent" toward our "natural inclinations"; the "love of luxury and of material enjoyments" is deemed "potentially useful" rather than "evil" since it stimulates wider economic benefits for society.[36] Gone is the concern for the perfection of the soul, with its attendant restraints on the passions; now actions are evaluated solely according to their consequences. Crucially, Gobineau insists that modern morality approves of "any kind of reasonable satisfaction" that involves "no inconvenience to others," thus carving out a large domain of autonomous private life free from moral judgment.[37]

Tocqueville's response reasserts the importance of Christian morality and the redundancy of secular alternatives. Even the few "really new" changes in modern morality are merely "the applications of Christianity to a larger sphere, to other political forms, and to a very different social state."[38] Moreover, Tocqueville defends the thesis that religion is necessary for morality to thrive. The overemphasis on faith as a prerequisite to virtue, a vice shared by "every religion," nevertheless causes "far less" damage "than would result from moral systems that have emancipated themselves from religion altogether."[39] In fact, he writes, a "positive religion" is "necessary" for society in that it improves "the general temper of

habits and ideas."[40] Because of his conviction that no society had ever gone without religious laws, Tocqueville remains skeptical of "the continuation of the prosperity and greatness of modern societies without religion" and predicts that the weakening of religious faith heralded "the coming of some new religion" rather than secularization.[41]

The Dependence Thesis presupposes inherent limits on human reason. Tocqueville argues that "dogmatic beliefs … that men accept on faith and without discussion" are universally necessary, both because of the limitations of human reason and because the "social body" cannot function properly "without common ideas" (489–90). He is singularly unimpressed by the efforts of unaided reason to discern moral truths. Despite enormous exertion, philosophers have discovered "only a small number of contradictory notions … without ever managing to grasp the truth firmly" (501–2). In fact, "it took the coming of Jesus Christ to make people understand that all members of the human race are by nature similar and equal" (496). For Tocqueville, only religion can supply the dogmatic beliefs necessary for human flourishing: "There is virtually no human action … that does not originate in some very general human conception of God, … of the nature of the human soul, and of man's duties toward his fellow man. … The primary purpose of religion, and one of its principal benefits, is to provide an answer to each of these primordial questions that is clear, precise, intelligible to the multitude, and eminently capable of withstanding the test of time" (501–2). Therefore, without religion, "doubt takes hold of … the intellect," producing "confused and fluctuating notions about the matters of greatest interest" (502). In short, democratic society depends on nondemocratic values because there can be no democratic moral philosophy equivalent to Christianity. The metaphysics of morality originates in Christianity; secularists merely imitate it.

Our analysis raises a deeper question about the relationship between the Unity and Dependence Theses. If religious and democratic values are nearly identical because a true secular alternative does not exist, then how can religion check democracy's

defects? And why would it need to do so? For instance, Zuckert argues that, by the time he wrote volume 2, Tocqueville had come to believe that the moral contributions of Christianity detailed in volume 1 actually derived from nonreligious sources and had concluded that religion only needs to preserve a few socially beneficial beliefs—the "saving minimum"—such as the immortality of the soul. On Zuckert's view, these beliefs, for Tocqueville, have been greatly adapted to democratic mores and need not even be religious in origin.[42]

This is a strange reading of Tocqueville, whose position, we think, coheres only if religion exerts an independent and *moral* influence that checks democratic public opinion from a transcendent standpoint. If, *pace* Zuckert, Tocqueville ultimately argues that religion should promote the public welfare by proclaiming a "saving minimum" of useful precepts (which may even be secular precepts), what exactly distinguishes religion from civil society? A robust form of religion changes one's entire outlook—it does not merely offer platitudes. We find little evidence that he trusts in a "saving minimum" religion that conforms completely to democratic society and thus cannot check democratic pathologies. Indeed, if this is Tocqueville's program, it seems entirely calculated to hasten—not forestall—the demise of faith in Europe.

Still, the problem remains: for religion to exert any effect at all, it must somehow both appease democratic society and yet remain distinct from it. While Tocqueville never addresses this puzzle directly, he clearly believes that religious morality *is* essentially different, and superior, because it comes from a transcendent source. Zuckert's reading ignores Tocqueville's statements—from both volumes—that all religions check democratic vices by means of a transcendent morality (albeit one propped up by this-worldly supplementary arguments such as "self-interest properly understood"). A totally compliant religion would be useless because it "cannot perform the functions of checks and balances for a society to which it is too close. For Tocqueville, religion cannot just embody society, nor can it simply exalt the favorite attributes of the majority."[43] Rather, religion impels us to something higher that we

desire but are unable to achieve on our own. "By fear or prudence, [democratic man] recoils before the idea of his absolute self-sufficiency inscribed in democratic principle … [T]hrough [religion] he wishes to circumscribe his own freedom. … The American religion is the sigh of the democratic citizen, oppressed by an excess of freedom."[44] For Tocqueville, even unbelievers generally see materialism and individualism not as positive goods but as vices to be overcome in pursuit of the good life and recognize religion's role in resisting these temptations (cf. 338–39). Despite their democratic skepticism, Americans saw morality as unified, indissolubly connected with the church, and essential for the exercise of freedom.[45]

Tocqueville's Argument in Contemporary America

We are now in a position to consider the current American situation in light of Tocqueville's harmonist thesis. We argue that the relationship between religion and morality in the modern world diverges somewhat from the patterns identified by Tocqueville. Morality is not nearly as unified as in Tocqueville's day, in large part because the moral traditions springing from Christianity do not all speak with one voice. Tocqueville never considers the possibility that sincere conflict and debate within the "Christian" moral world (rather than between the moral and the "immoral") may undermine his hope that everyone will tolerate vibrant and publicly influential religion. Rather, the more a secular moralist experiences discomfort at traditional modes of Christian morality, we argue, the more he or she will look skeptically on Tocqueville's argument for Christian cultural dominance.

Most fundamentally, the rise and widespread acceptance of an altruistic "secular" morality undermines the idea that morality depends on religion, at least in the public mind. Tocqueville predicts that, apart from religion, democracy will promote moral theories reliant on egoism—particularly "self interest properly understood"—that seek to harmonize traditional moral precepts and rational self-interest (610–13). Such theories might often replicate old-fashioned moral axioms but lack nobility or self-sacrifice.[46]

On the contrary, (moderately) self-denying moralities, which are untethered to any religious worldview, not only exist but attract a large following at both the popular and academic level. Many Americans care for others and devote time and money to "secular" moral campaigns that do not benefit them personally, such as civil rights, environmentalism, military service, adoption, and drug rehabilitation. Polling data corroborates this shift: although most people in developing countries agree that belief in God is necessary to be moral, most people in wealthy democracies (particularly Europe) deny any connection between theism and moral behavior.[47]

Two clarifications are in order at this point. First, it should be obvious that any nonreligious worldview cannot replace religion across the board. Modern moral doctrines may displace traditionalist ones, but nothing can replace the role of religion as a belief system based on faith in God and hope for the afterlife. Christianity is not simply a set of moral propositions but a lived faith which invites believers to experience God—both in this world and the next. It is precisely this longing for transcendence and immortality, and not moral feelings, on which Tocqueville grounds religious faith. Unsurprisingly, then, modern morality is often accompanied or supplemented by theistic belief, but this deistic religiosity is not seen as the ground of morality or politics.

Second, to be clear, we do not take a metaphysical position on whether secular moral theories are justified, nor are we attempting to show that morality depends on religion (or not). Rather, we simply point out that the "morality depends on religion" thesis has come into serious question. True, Tocqueville might argue, as he did with Gobineau, that even the "secular" morality of the twenty-first century derives from a Christian base. After all, many of the moral impulses of the modern West, such as the feminist or LGBT movements, base themselves on the principle of human equality which Tocqueville believes to be Christian in origin (cf. 496). Perhaps, just like the socialism of the early nineteenth century, the feminism of the early twentieth century is simply a more progressive incarnation of the Christian belief in equality. Even if this is

true, however, modern morality applies the equality principle in ways that traditional Christianity does not. As we will see, whether or not one understands this morality to be "secular" or not—as its adherents do—is less important than acknowledging that the single ethical tradition known to Tocqueville has produced divergent and contradictory offspring.

These newfound moral views, it turns out, often differ substantively from traditional Christian morality, leading to the breakdown of Tocqueville's claim that all is "certain" and "settled" in the moral world—i.e., the Unity Thesis. Moral *certainties* have become moral *questions* subject to debate. Many significant political conflicts now pit believers and unbelievers against one another, especially over moral issues. Indeed, although traditionalist believers and atheists are all over the map on economic issues, conservatively religious Americans increasingly diverge from mainstream public opinion across a number of so-called "culture war" issues, most of which involve sex and gender in some sense. Public opinion is divided on whether all employers ought to pay for contraception for their employees, whether religious objectors must provide services for gay weddings, and whether transgender people have a right to use the restroom of their choice.[48] Polls also show stark differences between Americans of different religious backgrounds in attitudes toward same-sex marriage and abortion.[49] Thus, even if modern morality owes much to Christianity, there can be little doubt that the assumed consensus over important moral questions has evaporated. The possible status of modern morality as an outgrowth of the Christian doctrine of equality cannot change the fact that these factions no longer speak with one voice.

Consider Tocqueville's comments about sex and the family. He believes that both "religious" and "industrial" nations, in continuity with historic Christianity, naturally gravitate toward conservative sexual mores (695). He attributes the growing sexual license of European society not to a new morality but to the upheaval of social revolution, concluding that such "disorders … do not seem to me to be a durable fact" (703). Here, however, Gobineau seems more prescient: secular morality apparently endorses all passions

that do not directly harm others, which is why many Americans do not object to (consensual) extramarital sex. Moreover, as previously shown, Tocqueville thinks that religion's concern with the family allows it to influence political society. Such a position assumes that people generally agree on what a good family is. For his part, Tocqueville rejected the nascent European feminism that made the sexes "not only equal but alike" in their "work, pleasure, [and] affairs" on the grounds that it "degrades them both," producing "weak men and disreputable women" (708). In agreement with traditional Christianity, Tocqueville advocates the equal worth of both sexes alongside differentiated gender roles in marriage and argues that a high view of marriage is compatible with freedom (695–97, 705–8). Today this traditional view competes with a different conception of the family. Many liberals argue that men and women are (or should be) no different, at least in terms of rights and responsibilities, while others go farther and maintain that gender itself is a fluid rather than a binary concept. While for Tocqueville God-given nature (i.e., the biological sex of parents) gives a particular shape and function to marriage, contemporary liberals deny the naturalness of this social "convention," leading to contrasting views of marriage and the moral duties thereof.

In addition, contrary to Tocqueville's expectation, even Christians no longer teach a consistent morality across denominational lines. These divisions are a mirrored response to the radical moral disagreements in larger American society. As what we are calling "secular morality" has become increasingly dominant, Christians have chosen diverse paths of resistance and/or accommodations to it. As polling data show, recent decades have seen an increasing divide between theologically progressive and traditional denominations and the splitting of congregations over moral questions, especially on issues of sex and gender.[50] Conservative Presbyterians, for instance, are now likely to agree more with conservative Baptists regarding same-sex marriage than with liberal Presbyterians. There is a similar division over morality within the American Catholic Church.[51] Even more radically, Roman Catholics who embrace the church's teaching on issues

such as abortion and marriage tend to form alliances with Evangelicals, as the 1994 ecumenical agreement *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* attests.[52] These dynamics both reflect and complicate, without erasing, the growing moral dichotomy between secular and religious worldviews.

The breakdown of the Unity and Dependence Theses undermines Tocqueville's expectation that unbelievers will support religion for pragmatic reasons. Contemporary unbelievers do not, like Tocqueville, perceive many political benefits in a public expression of traditional religion but conversely often find the moral views of many believers to be offensive and unjust. "Traditional religion," Heclo comments, can "now be seen mainly as an impediment to broader values of tolerance and social inclusion, an inhibition of individual self-expression, and an enemy of free scientific inquiry."[53] Unbelieving Americans no longer support religion because their support has always been conditional on its utility, and many Americans now believe that religion is, at best, irrelevant to morality and, at worse, promotes regressive moral views. Polling data reveal that fewer Americans than ever before believe that religion plays a role in answering "all or most of today's problems," that more and more Americans consider religion "old-fashioned," and that opinions on these issues are polarized based on religiosity and partisanship.[54] It is no surprise, then, that evangelical Christians and atheists have mutually negative feelings about each other.[55] This moral polarization has fueled increasingly intense moral conflict, as seen in the many high-profile social and political disputes over abortion, the definition of marriage, transgender rights, gender roles, the extent of religious liberty, and so on.

Given the moral flavor of contemporary partisan struggle, Tocqueville's hope that partisanship can be insulated from moral conviction seems a rather forlorn one. If the sphere of moral opinion were really "certain and settled" (337), then both parties would adhere to generally the same moral principles, and partisans would merely fight over what practices would best achieve shared (moral or nonmoral) ends. But if the moral world is indeed heterogeneous because a new "secular" morality has arisen, it is unsurprising that

we observe a political battle over which morality should rule. As a consequence, Christians often find it difficult to exert cultural influence without endorsing political parties and platforms. It is hard to see how traditional believers can avoid political entanglements without abandoning deeply felt priorities. But the alliance of the "religious right" with the Republican Party represents exactly the kind of alliance between religion and politics that Tocqueville so detested. It risks alienating Democrats who otherwise might support traditional religion. During the 1990s, for instance, the increase in Americans claiming "no religion" occurred only among political moderates and liberals.[56] Following the evangelical-Republican alliance, young people increasingly "came to view religion … as judgmental, homophobic, hypocritical, and too political."[57] This outcome is far from the relative harmony envisioned by Tocqueville.

Given these developments, traditional believers clearly cannot sustain their cultural and moral dominance. Historically orthodox religions cannot combat materialism or individualism without running afoul of contemporary views on sex, gender, and family. The culture wars suggest that the moral foundations of liberal modernity may be far more antithetical to socially influential religion than Tocqueville supposed.[58] Thus, religious functionalists, liberals who appreciate religion only because it seems "necessary to foster the mores that sustain freedom," are dead wrong.[59] The ascendance of a secular morality erodes functionalism by transforming societal mores. Tocqueville's view was indeed plausible in the aftermath of the intense religiosity of the Second Great Awakening in America, when secular or non-Christian voices were rare and/or marginalized and thus political debate occurred overwhelmingly between morally similar co-religionists. But his attempt to reconcile traditional religion with liberal democracy ultimately fails because it assumes moral unity between the sacred and secular, whereas modern democratic citizens typically reject, even oppose, the need for a transcendent source to ground and motivate moral behavior—even if they valorize "Christian" themes such as equality simultaneously. Contemporary liberalism is currently

wedded too closely to individualist and egalitarian conceptions of the human good to embrace the constraints imposed by a transcendent religious vision.

Conclusion

An insightful analysis of liberal democracy requires a careful accounting of its interaction with religious faith. What, for Tocqueville, is the precise nature of its relation to Christianity? In our view, Tocqueville's understanding of the Christian roots of modern morality are inextricably tied to his arguments for liberal toleration and for the political utility of faith. The contemporary shattering of unity in moral sentiment severely impairs, we think, the functionalist interpretation of Tocqueville's beliefs about the moral role played by Christianity. If Tocqueville saw Christianity as nothing but a collection of moral ideas, then moral disagreement would certainly undermine not only the public appreciation of faith but also the very meaning of belief itself. And for all his prescience, Tocqueville himself perhaps underestimated the tension between Christian moral norms and the trajectory of liberal thought, which sees "the obligations of mankind in such a new light."[60] Liberal society increasingly views Christianity as an unwelcome and illiberal guest because of its moral teaching. This is not a call for believers to shut up and surrender, or change their moral views, but rather to accept a dose of realism. How can society value the exercise of faith if the moral teaching of faith runs counter to culture—and faith is nothing more than a collection of moral beliefs? Thus, we suggest reading Tocqueville with an openness to the idea that religious practice is good, on an individual and political level, for reasons far surpassing its social utility. In fact, the religious critique of liberal values may force liberals to appreciate religion for its own sake and not simply because it produces a more well-regulated democracy.

At the same time, secularization or religious transformation are two possible paths the liberal regime could take. Yet we think both ultimately will not remove the conspicuous presence of a religious moral minority from liberal society. First, although variations on

the "secularization thesis" still attract adherents, the evidence indicates that traditional religious belief and practice remains quite robust both in the United States and globally.[61] The practice of faith remains an important part of life for millions of people.[62] Furthermore, many religious groups resist the pressure to conform to liberal morality. The Catholic church opposes both the materialism fueling American capitalism and the individualism fueling the sexual revolution (although many Catholics dissent from official church teaching on moral issues).[63] Likewise, many evangelical denominations, the Mormon church, Muslims, and Orthodox Jews maintain traditional moral positions. These trends suggest that moral conflict in American society will persist for some time.

Yet Tocqueville's claim that democracies will seek out unquestioned moral assumptions is accurate, we think (see 489–91). If even liberal societies require a shared morality, then robust moral pluralism is likely unsustainable. This is especially true if Tocqueville is correct that democracy accords enormous moral authority to the majority and backs it up by erecting "a formidable barrier around thought," such that those communicating unpopular opinions face social and economic ostracism and marginalization (283–95). Moral conflicts typically involve what Tocqueville considers to be the "first and most intense of the passions" characteristic of democracy: the love of equality (581). If democrats "love equality far more ardently and tenaciously than they love liberty" (581), then debates over equality will not be peripheral to the moral concerns of democratic people. Accordingly, as secular morality has become increasingly dominant, compromise between its supporters and religious conservatives has grown increasingly rare—just as religious conservatives rarely tolerated rival conceptions of morality and the human good when they reigned supreme. What distinguishes our current situation from previous eras is that conservative religionists can hardly be expected to accept and support the dominance of secular morality in the same way that unbelievers (allegedly) publicly supported Christianity in Tocqueville's day. Because traditionalist believers reject the social utility of the new morality, its hegemony will be contested and probably less gentle.

Liberals therefore face a serious "religion" problem: religious morality is in some ways antithetical to liberal values, but religion itself is not going away anytime soon—partly because it represents more than a list of do's and don'ts. We think Tocqueville's arguments hold the key to understanding these challenges at the heart of liberal democracy. A great deal of its plausibility depends on the extent to which people accept his claims about the salutary moral effect of religion in society. If the radical Enlightenment wish for a society of moral atheists has indeed been granted, then liberals would do well to consider whether a society of moral believers is possible.

Notes

1. To clarify the terminology used, by "liberalism," "liberal democracy," or "liberal modernity," we mean societies that express political tendencies arising out of, and modified by, liberalism's core commitments (i.e., to rights, individualism, commercial freedom, equality, etc.).
2. J. Judd Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy: Transformation from Hobbes to Tocqueville* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
3. Thomas L. Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010). John Rawls's "political liberalism" perhaps represents a contemporary defense of this view as well. Rawls encourages citizens to embrace "comprehensive doctrines" based on philosophical or theological beliefs but restricts public discourse to arguments compatible with "public reason"—arguments embraceable by all citizens equally without recourse to comprehensive beliefs. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
4. Jack Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (London: Clarendon Press, 1962), 197; Marvin Zetterbaum, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), 147.
5. Cynthia J. Hinckley, "Tocqueville on Religious Truth and Political Necessity," *Polity*, vol. 23 (1990), 39–52.
6. James M. Sloat, "The Subtle Significance of Sincere Belief: Tocqueville's Account of Religious Belief and Democratic Stability," *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 42 (2000), 759–779.
7. Tocqueville himself, though outwardly a practicing Catholic, apparently rejected biblical revelation. While tentative, the evidence suggests

that he was a tormented skeptic and deist who accepted a few basic doctrines such as the existence of God, the immortal soul, divinely instituted moral laws, and an afterlife of rewards and punishments. See Doris S. Goldstein, *Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville's Thought* (New York: Elsevier, 1975), 1–14; and Alan S. Kahan, "Checks and Balances for Democratic Souls: Alexis de Tocqueville on Religion in Democratic Societies," *American Political Thought*, vol. 4 (2015), 111. See also Tocqueville's own words on the matter. In a letter to Mary Mottley, he once wrote: "I have never been more disposed to think of God, more convinced of the reality of another existence, than when I think of you. … *If I ever become a Christian*, I believe that it will be through you"; see "Tocqueville to Mary ('Marie') Mottley, from America, date undetermined," in *Letters from America*, edited by Frederick Brown (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 37–38. We must add, however, that his religious position does not affect our thesis; nothing about our argument would change if he was a sincere Catholic. This is because Tocqueville takes a somewhat sociological approach to religion and is willing to consider its effects apart from its truth. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 502. Subsequently, we will cite this edition of Democracy in America using unnamed parenthetical references.

8. Catherine Zuckert, "The Saving Minimum? Tocqueville on the Role of Religion in America—Then and Now," *American Political Thought*, vol. 5 (Summer 2016), 494–518.
9. William A. Galston, "Tocqueville on Liberalism and Religion." *Social Research*, vol. 54 (1987), 499–518.
10. Ibid., 508.
11. Ibid., 513.
12. Ibid, 514.
13. We must distinguish between religion being natural and being spontaneous. Despite his belief in the naturalness of religion, Tocqueville encourages democratic peoples to bolster it (640–41). But if religion is "natural," why then would it require assistance in democratic societies? We interpret him to mean that religious *institutions*, while naturally occurring, nonetheless require work to maintain, just as (for example) mere hunger does not guarantee fine restaurants. The "natural" human desire for transcendence cannot always ward off the "indifference" caused by factors such as materialism and the "close alliance between politics and religion" (347).

14. Donald J. Maletz, "Tocqueville on Mores and the Preservation of Republics," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 49 (2005), 4.
15. Douglas Kries, "Alexis de Tocqueville on 'Civil Religion' and the Catholic Faith," in *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, eds. Ronald Weed and Jon von Heyking (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 167–204.
16. Patrick J. Deneen, *Democratic Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 230.
17. Maletz, "Tocqueville on Mores," 7.
18. Kahan, "Checks and Balances," 103.
19. Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy*; Zuckert, "The Saving Minimum?" But see also Richard Avramenko, "Tocqueville and the Religion of Democracy," *Perspectives on Political Science*, vol. 41 (2012), 125–37.
20. Arthur Kaledin, *Tocqueville and His America: A Darker Horizon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 300. Tocqueville, in our view, avoids blanket generalizations about the sincerity of religious belief in the United States, seeing evidence in both directions. However, we understand him to (mostly) presume sincere belief when discussing religion in *Democracy in America*.
21. Cf. Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy*, 130–31.
22. Deneen, *Democratic Faith*, passim.
23. Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 1996), 96.
24. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 3, trans. James Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 859–60. This quotation comes from "a short chapter, entitled 'Religious Eloquence or Preaching,' drafted but never included in final text." James T. Schleifer, "Tocqueville, Religion, and Democracy in America: Some Essential Questions," *American Political Thought*, vol. 3 (2014), 267.
25. We do so for two reasons. First, we think that he was wrong about the superficiality of religion in America. As Kaledin notes, he dismissed the passionate, low-church evangelicalism that overtook America in the 1830s, which both mystified and revolted him. Kaledin, *Tocqueville and His America*, 299–312. Second, his position as we have defined it aligns with the larger "harmonist" tradition in American political thought that we seek to evaluate.
26. Tocqueville largely ignores non-Christian religions (but cf. 504). We do too due to the outsized role of Christianity in America, but our comments largely apply to all major religions.

27. Goldstein, *Trial of Faith*, 128.
28. Alexis de Tocqueville, *"The European Revolution" & Correspondence with Gobineau*, ed. and trans. John Lukacs (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 190.
29. Kahan, "Checks and Balances," 116.
30. Tocqueville, "Correspondence with Gobineau," 191.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 192–193.
33. Ibid., 192.
34. Ibid., 198.
35. Ibid., 196.
36. Ibid., 202.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 207.
39. Ibid., 206.
40. Ibid., 206, 212.
41. Ibid., 212.
42. Zuckert, "The Saving Minimum?"
43. Kahan, "Checks and Balances," 106.
44. Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, 95–96.
45. This moral influence cannot originate (as Zuckert argues) with the power of the majority—otherwise, given the potential for majority tyranny highlighted in volume 1 (283–319), how could Tocqueville argue for an alliance between religion and freedom?
46. See Dana Jalbert Stauffer. "Tocqueville on the Modern Moral Situation: Democracy and the Decline of Devotion," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 108 (2014), 772–82.
47. Pew Research Center, "Worldwide, Many See Belief in God as Essential to Morality," March 13, 2014, http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality.
48. Ibid., "Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination," September 28, 2016, http://www.pewforum.org/2016/09/28/where-the-public-stands-on-religious-liberty-vs-nondiscrimination.
49. Ibid., "Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage," May 12, 2016, http://www.pewforum.org/2016/05/12/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/; Pew Research Center, "5 facts about abortion," January 26, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/26/5-facts-about-abortion.
50. For an analysis of extensive Gallup polling that shows a divergence among Protestants of different denominations, see Frank Newport,

"On Moral Issues, Not All Protestants Are Created Equal," Gallup News, http://news.gallup.com/poll/218204/moral-issues-not-protestants-created-equal.aspx.

51. Michael Lipka, "Majority of U.S. Catholics' Run Counter to Church on Contraception, Homosexuality," Pew Research Center, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/19/majority-of-u-s-catholics-opinions-run-counter-to-church-on-contraception-homosexuality.
52. Co-signed by Richard John Neuhaus and Charles Colson.
53. Hugh Heclo, *Christianity and American Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 86.
54. Art Swift, "Majority in US Still Say Religion Can Answer Most Problems," Gallup News, http://news.gallup.com/poll/211679/majority-say-religion-answer-problems.aspx?g_source=position2&g_medium=related&g_campaign=tiles.
55. Pew Research Center, "U.S. evangelical Christians are chilly toward atheists – and the feeling is mutual," July 16, 2014, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/16/u-s-evangelical-christians-are-chilly-toward-atheists-and-the-feeling-is-mutual.
56. Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 67 (2002), 165–190.
57. Robert D. Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 121.
58. Zuckert argues that Tocqueville's analysis of religion and politics succeeds today because most Americans still subscribe to the "saving minimum" of beliefs, such as the immortality of the soul. See Zuckert, "The Saving Minimum?" However, her analysis curiously ignores and apparently denies the significance of the culture war, which has devastated Tocqueville's vision by shattering moral unity.
59. Sanford Kessler, *Tocqueville's Civil Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 5.
60. Tocqueville, *"The European Revolution" & Correspondence*, 190.
61. Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unpopular Theory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011). For one rebuttal, see Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World Is More Religious Than Ever* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2015).
62. According to the Pew Research Center, the percentage of Americans professing adherence to Christianity declined from 78.4% to 70.6% from 2007 to 2014. However, the decline occurred mostly among Catholics and liberal mainline denominations, whereas evangelical and historically

black denominations declined by less than 1%, and the Mormon share declined only nominally. Orthodox Jews and Muslims, who tend to be conservative socially (though not necessarily politically), actually grew. Evangelicals were also alone among religious groups in that they gained more adherents than they lost from religious switching. It is also important to keep in mind that, as Tocqueville notes, American society experiences cyclical fluctuations in religious belief, periods of relative calm punctuated by "awakenings" of violent spirituality (623–24). Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12; and "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews," August 26, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/08/26/a-portrait-of-american-orthodox-jews.

63. C.f. Heclo, *Christianity and American Democracy*, 111; Pew Research Center, "Key Findings about American Catholics," September 2, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/02/key-findings-about-american-catholics.