

Tocqueville and Weber on the Sociological Origins of Citizenship: The Political Culture of American Democracy

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While Alexis de Tocqueville's commentary on America is famous, Max Weber's is far less so. However, in scattered writings, he addresses two of the themes at the centre of Tocqueville's analysis of the 'manners and mores' of the American political culture: the potential for a 'tyranny of the majority' in the US and the critical role of civil associations. By reference to these two themes, this study seeks to examine the divergent perspectives of these classical theorists upon the political culture of the US, contrast Tocqueville's more structural and interest-based mode of analysis to Weber's emphasis upon the significance of values and beliefs, and comment upon, in light of the insights offered by both theorists, the sociological origins of citizenship. Unlike Tocqueville, Weber sees an odd juxtaposition—an accentuated, 'world mastery' individualism and an accentuated orientation to civic sphere ideals—at the centre of the American political culture.

I am still further from thinking, as so many people do think in Europe, that men can be instantaneously made citizens by teaching them to read and write. True information is mainly derived from experience; and if the Americans had not been gradually accustomed to govern themselves, their book-learning would not help them much at the present day. (Tocqueville, 1945, vol. 1, p. 329)

The whole life of an American is passed like a game of chance, a revolutionary crisis, or a battle. (Tocqueville, 1945, vol. 1, p. 443)

The sects' importance extends beyond the religious sphere. Only they give ... American democracy its own flexible structure and its individualistic stamp. (Weber, 1985, p. 10)

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We modern, religiously 'unattuned' people are hard pressed to conceptualize or even simply to *believe* what a powerful role ... religious factors has in those periods when the characters of the modern national cultures were being stamped. (Weber, 1985, p. 11; original emphasis)

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is considered today to be perhaps the most profound analysis of American society ever written.¹ Far more than a 'political commentary', this classic focuses upon the 'manners and mores'—the customs²—at the very foundation of the political culture of the US. Two major themes, both of which originate from Tocqueville's focus upon the far-ranging differences between 'aristocratic and democratic nations' and the ways in which the 'equality of conditions' widely influences American society, stand at the centre of his analysis: a concern regarding a potential 'tyranny of the majority' danger and an emphasis upon, if democracy is to remain stable, the necessity of widespread civil associations.

Max Weber also sojourned in the US and he retained a life-long interest in this nation. Although far less well-known and broadly scattered throughout his works, his commentary upon the American political culture addresses the two major themes of concern to Tocqueville.³ An examination of these writings and a comparison of their conclusions to Tocqueville's, in respect to these themes, constitutes the major task of this investigation.⁴ Tocqueville attempts to capture the political culture of the US largely by reference to its widespread egalitarianism and the tyranny of the majority theme, as well as the nimble capacity of the Americans to formulate civil associations. While cognizant, as Tocqueville, of a debilitating tendency towards rigid social conformism in American life, Weber focuses upon a counterbalancing 'world mastery' individualism and the development of a distinct civic sphere penetrated by a specific constellation of values.

In comparing Tocqueville and Weber, this study seeks to define the distinct perspectives of these classical theorists upon American political culture, contrast Tocqueville's more structural and interest-based mode of analysis to Weber's emphasis upon the significance of values and beliefs, and demarcate a number of underlying axes of the American political culture. On the basis of insights offered by both theorists, it hopes to comment upon an array of significant sociological forces at the origin of modern citizenship.

A Tyranny of the Majority in the US?

Alexis de Tocqueville

After a 9 month journey, Tocqueville left the US with a favourable impression (see, vol. 1, p. x). Convinced that democratic governance would eventually come to European shores and seeking to impart the lessons he had learned to his countrymen, he hoped to assist the development of democracy in Europe and, in particular, in France (see vol. 1, pp. ix-x, 3, 14-5, 338-42). Nonetheless, he remained skeptical in a major respect: unless a series of distinct 'safeguards' existed, he feared that democracies would unavoidably call forth a tyranny of

the majority.⁵ He based this conclusion upon his observation of the American political culture.

Democracy in the US, Tocqueville argues, is rooted in the overarching assumption that majority opinion has a *moral* authority. It is widely believed 'that there is more intelligence and wisdom in a number of men united than in a single individual' (vol. 1, p. 265), and hence 'the interests of the many are to be preferred to those of the few' (vol. 1, p. 266). 'All authority,' he asserts, 'originates in the will of the majority' (vol. 1, p. 268) and the majority understands itself as a 'superior intelligence' (vol. 1, p. 265).

Tocqueville calls attention to the 'germ of tyranny' that arises from the simple fact that the 'right and means of absolute command' (vol. 1, p. 270), conveyed to the majority, is not restrained by a countervailing force. If 'no obstacles exist [to] impede ... its progress' (vol. 1, p. 266; see also pp. 270-1), to whom, then, can the wronged individual appeal? A legislature represents the majority and the executive is elected by the majority—even judges are in many states elected: 'When I see that the right and the means of absolute command are conferred on any power whatever, be it called a people or a king, an aristocracy or a democracy, a monarchy or a republic, I say there is the germ of tyranny, and I seek to live elsewhere, under other laws' (vol. 1, p. 270).

Tocqueville argues that the great powers of majority rule are especially visible in respect to the 'exercise of thought'. Wherever the majority constitutes the legitimate court of last appeal, individuals become extremely aware of and sensitive to the opinions of their fellow citizens. Indeed, once pronounced by the majority's vote, decisions entail an end to all discussion and silence. Debates involving broad ranging and fundamental issues are curtailed. Hence, Tocqueville proclaims he 'knows of no country where there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion' (vol. 1, p. 273), and it appears 'at first sight as if all the minds of the Americans were formed upon one model, so accurately do they follow the same route' (vol. 1, p. 277). A certain narrowness of opinions prevails, even to the extent that the question arises whether viable political liberties can be said to exist. Whoever entertains positions and opinions opposed to those of the majority soon realizes that political careers cannot be followed; they also often experience social ostracism.

The lesson is clear to Tocqueville: wherever government is 'self-made' and individuals feel themselves equal to one another, a conformity of opinions will result. Wherever citizens are without clear social standing by birth and must create their social positions, as in democracies unlike feudal societies, they become, merely to avoid scorn, inordinately sensitive to the opinions of others (see vol. 1, pp. 274-7). Whereas the aristocrat's superiority is never questioned or weakened in spite of the most outrageous pronouncements and behaviour, for it is founded securely in noble birth, citizens in egalitarian societies must continually create and re-create their social standing, always doing so by reference to the opinions of their peers. Moreover, a currying of favour and extreme timidity very often become widespread. Unlike organically stratified societies in which persons are strongly connected with one another as a consequence of fixed obligations, duties and responsibilities, equality implies an isolation of persons one from another—if only because the clear 'sense of place'

indigenous to the feudal society is now lacking. This isolation on the one hand allows every man to 'concentrate [his] attention upon himself' (vol. 2, p. 23) and on the other hand increases even more his awareness of and sensitivity to the opinions of others. To Tocqueville:

Whereas the authority of a king is physical, and controls ... actions without subduing [the] will, ... the majority possesses a power which is physical and moral at the same time, which acts upon the will as much as upon the actions, and represses not only all contest, but all controversy. (vol. 1, p. 273; see also pp. 276-8)

The majority ... exercise a prodigious actual authority, and a power of opinion which is nearly as great; no obstacles exist which can impede or even retard its progress, so as to make it heed the complaints of those whom it crushes upon its path. This state of things is harmful in itself and dangerous for the future. (vol. 1, p. 266)

Nonetheless, Tocqueville discovered an array of significant forces that tend to counteract and hold in check this 'tyranny'. Taken together, they moderate his fears regarding the dangerous consequences that follow from the majority's 'omnipotence'. He first calls attention to several secondary factors: a decentralized administration in the US that refrains from 'descending to the details' of governance (vol. 1, pp. 281-2); a strong legal profession which, oriented to legality, regularity and public order, stands 'above the masses' as a 'natural aristocracy', opposing innovation and 'neutralizing the vices of popular government' (vol. 1, pp. 282-90); and the institution of trial by jury, which acquaints citizens with laws and 'invests the people with the direction of society', thereby cultivating responsibility and caution. Jury trials as well 'oblige [them] to turn their attention to other affairs than their own [and hence diminish] private selfishness' (vol. 1, pp. 291-7). Tocqueville also notes the importance of a free press (vol. 2, p. 343), a widespread respect in the US for laws, a strong court and judicial system to uphold laws, 'restrain the masses, and counteract the imperfections of human nature' (vol. 2, p. 343; vol. 1, pp. 309-10). Finally, he contends that township institutions 'impart a taste for freedom' (vol. 1, p. 310). However, Tocqueville focuses his analysis upon two further safeguards that 'mitigate the tyranny of the masses' and 'maintain democracy': religion and civil associations.

He repeatedly emphasizes the significance of religion. The sheer flux and perpetual change that reigns in those epochs characterized by an equality of conditions poses a great danger to democracies. Indeed, to Tocqueville, equality implies innovation and a continuous shifting of daily politics and morality. 'Everything seems doubtful and indeterminate in the moral world' (vol. 1, p. 339) whenever equality reigns. The 'daily practice of men's lives' requires 'constancy', Tocqueville contends, and 'happiness and greatness' ... can only appear if 'a salutary restraint [is imposed] on the intellect' (vol. 2, p. 22). Hence, as equality spreads, religion all the more becomes a necessity, for it 'inspires diametrically contrary principles' (vol. 2, p. 23): 'fixed ideas about God and human nature' and

'standards of truth and virtue ... that then need not be sought in daily politics' (vol. 2, p. 22). By laying down absolute principles and hence relativizing greed, envy, and self-interests, religion safeguards morality 'and morality [is] the best security of law and the surest pledge of the duration of freedom' (vol. 1, p. 46).

Despotism may govern without faith, but liberty cannot. Religion is much more necessary in the republic ...; it is more needed in democratic republics than in any others. How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed? And what can be done with a people who are their own masters if they are not submissive to the Deity? (vol. 1, p. 318; see also vol. 2, p. 27)

I am inclined to think that if faith be wanting in him, he must be subject; and if he be free, he must believe. (vol. 1, p. 23)

Civil associations also constitute a strong safeguard against the tyranny of the majority. They serve, Tocqueville argues, as obstacles against the unmediated opinions of the majority and hence insulate their members. On the other hand, civil associations counteract the psychological isolation that results from the equality of conditions, thereby offering boundaries and guidelines to individuals otherwise restless (vol. 2, p. 124). As well, they assist individuals 'easily lost' and at risk of 'disappearing into the throng' (vol. 1, p. 339), far better than occurs when individuals either stand alone or join an 'uncontrolled mob', to acquire practice in self-government, to engage in political activity, and to make their voices heard: 'The greater the multiplicity of small affairs, the more do men ... acquire facility in prosecuting great undertakings in common' (vol. 2, p. 123). Finally, civil associations introduce continuity and, when numerous, balance out contending groupings.

These safeguards might well be effective against the dangers—both isolation and conformity pressures—presented by the equality of conditions, for they prevent the extreme centralization of opinion prerequisite to a constitution of majorities and their unequivocal endorsement by public opinion. Rather than quickly rendered superfluous, political discussion could then continue, the rights of minorities would be preserved, opinions would be less circumscribed, and the 'exercise of thought' and imagination would be less restricted.

Nonetheless, a deep doubt, even skepticism regarding the long-term stability of democratic governance under conditions of equality reappears in nearly every section throughout *Democracy in America*. This theme is explored from a vast variety of perspectives. Tocqueville sees a distinct narrowing of the parameters of debate and public opinion in the US. Owing to the importance in this regard of religion and civil associations, he is especially unwilling to recommend the adoption of an American-style democracy in Europe, where civil associations and religion were weak (see vol. 2, p. 114). He remains wary to the end.

Max Weber's writings address the tyranny of the majority theme from a different perspective. They implicitly pose the question of whether Tocqueville's analysis accurately captures the central dimensions of the American political

culture. Might Tocqueville have overemphasized the omnipotence of the majority and the tyranny danger? Did he adequately portray the character of American individualism?

Max Weber

As Tocqueville, Weber called attention to the unusually group-based nature of American society and the severity of the resulting conformity pressures (*Konformitätsdrang*). However, he never saw a tyranny of the majority danger or a weak, 'enfeebled' individual. Rather, he discovered a force at the very centre of the American political culture—the 'world mastery' (*weltbeherrschende*) individualism called forth by ascetic protestantism—that appeared effectively to counterbalance any tendency towards such a tyranny, indeed in a manner far more comprehensively than the safeguards identified by Tocqueville. Might American political culture, following *both* Tocqueville and Weber, be best captured by reference to a *tension* between the conformist pressures inherent to the 'equality of conditions' on the one hand and the self-reliant individualism of the ascetic Protestant tradition on the other? If so, what lessons for an understanding of American democracy and the political culture of citizenship can be drawn?

Weber rejected the view, dominant in Europe at the turn of the century, that understood American democracy as rooted in atomistic and solitary individuals (1985, p. 10; 1946, pp. 308–12). He argued instead, as Tocqueville, that ubiquitous associations characterized this society: churches, sects, social clubs, hobby organizations, and so on. Both theorists observed that Americans formulated groupings in an exceedingly quick and nimble fashion. Moreover, although membership surely provided to some extent a sense of belonging and a safe and secure locus for activity, Weber emphasized that it also constituted a 'badge of respectability', or mark of social honour. The orientation toward honour so central in feudal societies had not simply vanished; on the contrary, it remained strong in egalitarian societies, yet assumed a different form: it now was 'acquired' through admission to organizations widely respected in one's community rather than given by birth (see 1946, pp. 308–11; 1985, p. 8; 1968, p. 933). American democracy, he argued, could not be characterized as a 'sandheap' of lonesome individuals; rather, the US must be understood as a society of 'joiners', massive associations, and 'exclusivities'.

The genuine American society—and here we include especially the 'middle' and 'lower' strata of the population—was never such a sand-pile. Nor was it a building where everyone who entered without exception found open doors. It was and is permeated with 'exclusivities' of every kind. Where the old relationships still exist, the individual does not have firm footing, either at the university or in business life, when he has been unable to be accepted into or maintain his position in a *social organization* (earlier almost always religious, today of one kind or another). (1985, p. 10; original emphasis)

In the past ... it has been a characteristic precisely of the specifically American democracy that it did *not* constitute a formless sandheap of individuals, but rather a buzzing complex of strictly exclusive, yet voluntary associations. (1946, p. 310; original emphasis)

It is still true that American democracy is not a sand-pile of unrelated individuals but a maze of highly exclusive, yet absolutely voluntary sects, associations and clubs, which provide the centre of the individual's social life. (1968, p. 1207)

Thus, Weber calls attention to an aspect of American life stressed in the strongest terms by Tocqueville: its multiple and multifarious 'civil associations'. Although he never explicitly notes the manner in which these associations restrict the 'independence of mind' of the Americans, he was surely aware of this danger, as is apparent particularly in his discussions of the conformist pressures within the ascetic Protestant sects and their powers to expell and then socially ostracize the disobedient.

The [sect] member's reputation largely corresponds to his actual qualities, for the intensity of indoctrination and the impact of exclusion are much more effective than any authoritarian ecclesiastic discipline can be. (1968, p. 1206; see also pp. 1205-7)

The extraordinarily strict moral discipline of the self-governing congregation ... was unavoidable because of the interest in the purity of the sacramental community. (1946, p. 316; see *passim*; see also 1985, p. 8)

These observations would seem to lead Weber to Tocqueville's conclusion: a great tyranny of the majority danger exists in the US. In effect, the influence upon behaviour of the ascetic Protestant sects and churches, according to Weber's rendering, could be understood as elucidating the sociological basis for such a tyranny. However, he never draws this conclusion; indeed, his attention turns strongly towards another aspect of American democracy: the *world mastery individualism* called forth by ascetic Protestantism. This focus led Weber to conclude that any potential danger would be mitigated in the US by a counterbalancing force even more effective than the safeguards Tocqueville identified. At the foundation of this difference regarding the American political culture stand very different approaches to comparative-historical sociology: while one is rooted in the notion of *Verstehen* and a strong acknowledgement of values, the other offers a more structural and interest-based methodology.

World Mastery Individualism

Ascetic Protestants undoubtedly adhered to God's commandments as a consequence of the purely pragmatic possibility of expulsion from their religious communities and social ostracism. Weber's entire sociology, however, emphasizes as well another dimension to human experience: belief. He does not doubt that

religious faith can be sincere, conscientious and sociologically significant. As he notes frequently, it is of course difficult for 'we moderns' to imagine the urgency of the central question to 16th and 17th century ascetic Protestants (see 1930, pp. 109–10, 155, 183, 233, n. 66; 1985, p. 11): 'am I among the saved?' However, this difficulty should not lead sociologists to conclude that Calvinists, Methodists, Mennonites, Baptists, Quakers, Pietists and Congregationalists could not be sincerely devout.

Central to Weber's sociology is the attempt to *understand* the subjective meaningfulness of social action by persons situated in sociologically significant groupings (for example, status groups and organizations such as churches, sects and bureaucracies). If the subjective meaning of Calvinists, for example, is reconstructed, it will become apparent that conformity to the opinions of peers in the church indeed constituted only one aspect of their religious devoutness. Another component—their strong individualism or, in Weber's terms, their world mastery asceticism—is equally significant, *and* grounded directly in their beliefs. Neglected by Tocqueville, *this* individualism, Weber argues, *co-exists* in American democracy with the social conformity that presents a tyranny of the majority danger. Indeed, it offers a powerful safeguard against this tyranny. How did it do so?

Unlike Catholics, Calvinist⁶ believers stood alone before their Deity, unassisted by a Church of virtuoso believers with special access to God: priests, bishops, cardinals and popes. Expected to read and interpret scripture on their own, Calvinists remained in a one-to-one relationship with God. Moreover, their Deity—the wrathful, vengeful distant and all-powerful God of the Old Testament—expected strict adherence to His Commandments, and human weaknesses could not be absolved through Confession. Finally, the Calvinist devout were expected, as the Catholic monks before them, to be loyal alone to God, and thus intimate relationships in particular—even those between spouses—must assume a tone of moderation and restraint, for strong allegiances to others could only endanger the most important Relationship.

Such a doctrine could only have had the effect of calling forth a sturdy and self-reliant individualism. Yet Weber sees Calvinism as doing so in perhaps an even more fundamental manner. According to the reforms undertaken by Richard Baxter, an influential 17th-century English pastor and writer on Puritan ethics, activity in the world—hard work, competition, the search for profit, and so on—could provide believers with the wealth that, or *so they could convince themselves*, indeed derived from the favouring hand of an omnipotent and omniscent God. And, of course, it could be logically reasoned, God would favour only those he had chosen—or *predestined*—to be saved. In this manner, practical activity itself, or *mastery* of the world on behalf of the creation on earth of God's affluent Kingdom, acquired a 'religious premium' (see 1930, pp. 98–127, 155–80)—all the more owing to the distinctly *ascetic* character of this doctrine.

Hence, all activities undertaken on behalf of the accumulation of wealth now became legitimated, even highly acclaimed: rugged competition, innovation, upward mobility, and initiative-taking and risk-taking. This new way of leading a life (*Lebensführung*)—to Weber, a new *ethos*, or set of values—not only

unleashed a tremendous energy and injected a massive dynamism into American economic development, but also implied a strong, activity-oriented individualism. While Reform Calvinism mainly directed this individualism towards the ascertainment, through the accumulation of wealth, of the believer's state of grace, it also required that the devout hold others responsible for their conduct. *All*, in the new 'City on the Hill', must now demonstrate allegiance to God and uphold His Commandments, for in His community 'weakness' and 'worldly evil' must be mastered. A passive acceptance of evil was prohibited: the faithful must 'be strong' and act *against* evil (1930, pp. 98–127). Moreover, with Reform Calvinism, believers now stood under a *religious* obligation, should rulers violate God's decrees, to protest against and overthrow such 'illegitimate' authority (see 1985, p. 10; 1968, pp. 1208–9). In these ways the devout became empowered to act decisively on behalf of a set of beliefs in both the political and economic arenas (see 1930, pp. 155–80).

The ascetic conventicles and sects formed one of the most important historical foundations of modern 'individualism'. Their radical break away from patriarchal and authoritarian bondage, as well as *their* way of interpreting the statement that one owes more obedience to God than to man, was especially important. (1946, p. 321; original emphasis; see 1985, pp. 10–11)

This brief (and incomplete; see Kalberg, 1996, pp. 57–64) overview of Weber's argument in *The Protestant Ethic* must suffice to indicate that Reform Calvinism introduced a strong and self-reliant individualism into the American landscape, as did ascetic Protestantism generally. A readiness to act and to reform the world on behalf of religious values arose out of the ascetic Protestant churches and sects. Neither cautious nor contemplative, nor accepting of the random flow of daily life, the faithful were now, through their *ethical* action, motivated to transform society as a whole. The teaching and cultivation of this ascetic, world mastery individualism occurred in the family and the self-governing congregation.

Weber emphasizes that the devout were encouraged by their beliefs to act not simply against unjust secular authority, but also, if necessary, against popular opinion (1968, pp. 1208–9; 1985, p. 10). If the 'practical-ethical' action that organized daily life contradicted the opinions of groupings, whether constituted from majorities or otherwise, the faithful were *obligated* to stand against popular opinion. Their asceticism itself imbued their ethical action with a great intensity. Moreover, the overriding importance of the *certitudo salutis* question insured that the herculean labours of believers to control daily activity would take God's abstract principles and rules as their fulcrum rather than the particular features of persons, emotional bonds with them, or popular and fashionable currents (see 1930, pp. 115–6; 1968, pp. 424, 578).

As industrialization, urbanization and secularization occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries, the extreme aspects of inner-worldly asceticism became routinized into utilitarian modes of action (see 1930, pp. 48–56). Nonetheless, in many communities a world mastery individualism remained and assumed normative status. At times fully devoid of its religious tenor, it now became carried and

cultivated by families, neighbourhoods and community leaders. This activity-oriented and self-reliant individualism was characterized by resoluteness and a robust optimism regarding the capacity of persons to challenge firm traditions and to confront social problems. As well, it motivated individuals to stand against popular opinion.

Tocqueville and Weber: A Tyranny of the Majority?

Tocqueville's understanding of individualism varies dramatically from Weber's. He fails to attribute a particular influence upon its development in the US to ascetic Protestantism. His examination of religion remains almost entirely limited to general discussions regarding the manner in which religious beliefs provide standards of behaviour and virtue particularly indispensable, if a tyranny of the majority is to be avoided, in egalitarian societies (see above, pp. 202-3; vol. 2, pp. 22-9).⁷

For Tocqueville, as noted, individualism arises with the decline of feudalism and the appearance of egalitarianism; for him, 'individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to spread in the same ratio as the equality of condition' (vol. 2, p. 104). According to this purely structural argument, equality itself loosens the fixed positions and duties inherent to feudalism's organic stratification and allows persons to view themselves as separate from the past as well as all firm societal anchoring; the 'bond of human affection is extended, but it is relaxed' (vol. 2, p. 104). Without firm social hierarchies, persons are no longer 'links in a chain'. They become disconnected from one another and even strangers: '... as social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases ... [who] owe nothing to any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands' (vol. 2, p. 105; see also pp. 104-7). Fundamentally, Tocqueville defines individualism as involving an isolation of persons—an 'atomism'—and 'concentration of attention upon oneself': '... democracy ... throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart' (vol. 2, p. 106).⁸

Far from oriented to world mastery, or rooted in the ascetic's rigid adherence to abstract principles and rules, this individualism is 'enfeebled' and devoid of a clear line of internal direction, for 'equality sets men apart and weakens them' (vol. 2, p. 344).⁹ Not surprisingly, in his discussions of the various safeguards against a tyranny of the majority, Tocqueville fails to mention individualism. The individualism Weber sees in American democracy—anchored in the world mastery orientations of ascetic Protestant *belief*¹⁰ rather than a social levelling process—diverges dramatically Tocqueville's.

In sum, Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority thesis derives from a view of the individual as fundamentally passive and timid. As reconstructed here, Weber's observations on American political culture call attention to a very different individualism characterized by severe conformity, yet *also* anchored 'from within' by orientations to absolute values and principles. Capable of acting 'in the world' on their behalf, this individualism may stand *against* even a popular opinion bolstered by the 'omnipotence of the majority'.¹¹

Weber's analysis reveals Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority danger as stemming from a portrait of American democracy that attends to only one of its two major axes. An enduring *tension* in the political culture of the US between a world mastery individualism on the one hand and strong pressures towards social conformity and group orientations on the other is at the centre of his investigations. A *pendulum* movement across a spectrum ranging from 'world-oriented' individualism to social conformity is typical. Both axes are deeply rooted in American religious history and neither locates its source, according to Weber, in a purely structural transformation: the rise of conditions of equality and social levelling. When utilized as an explanatory framework, egalitarianism, he argues, neglects the crucial question of its *cultural* context.

Both Tocqueville and Weber also address the central sociological significance of civil associations in the American political culture, and both marvel at their ubiquitousness. However, once again their explanatory frameworks diverge distinctly: while Tocqueville sees civil associations as originating from political associations as well as a variety of interests, Weber argues that a set of conducive values—which together constitute a demarcated *civic sphere*—prove indispensable if civil associations are to appear on a broad scale.

The Critical Role of Civil Associations

Alexis de Tocqueville

As noted, as the social hierarchies of feudalism decline and social conditions become more equal, Tocqueville argues that a great danger arises: individuals will become more and more isolated. Cut off from all firm 'sense of place' and hence without a defined connection to others or to the past, amidst this social levelling individuals increasingly stand on their own (vol. 2, pp. 109–10). This separation not only leads to individuality on the one hand and a massive conformism on the other; in addition it implies 'the danger of severe instability followed by a call for the authoritarianism of a strong leader'. The omnipotence of the majority, Tocqueville argues, is 'full of peril to the American republics' (vol. 1, p. 202; see also vol. 2, pp. 336–8).

'Democratic nations are menaced [by a new species of oppression] ... unlike ... ever before existed' (vol. 2, p. 336): anarchy and servitude threaten their long-term stability. As Tocqueville notes: 'The principle of equality begets two tendencies: the one leads men straight to independence and may suddenly drive them into anarchy; the other conducts ... them to servitude' (vol. 2, p. 304).

If ever the free institutions of America are destroyed, that event may be attributed to the omnipotence of the majority, which may at some future time urge the minorities to desperation and oblige them to have recourse to physical force. Anarchy will then be the result, but it will have been brought about by despotism. (vol. 1, p. 279)

When there is no longer any principle of authority in religion any more than in politics, men are speedily frightened at the aspect

of this unbounded independence. The constant agitation of all surrounding things alarms and exhausts them. As everything is at sea in the sphere of the mind, they determine at least that the mechanism of society shall be firm and fixed; and as they cannot resume their ancient belief, they assume a master. (vol. 2, p. 23)

This servitude also arises as a consequence of the 'tendency of democracy to destroy all that stands between the individual and kings', thus leaving the individual alone and isolated 'before the power of the state' (vol. 2, pp. 336-7).

All the safeguards noted above oppose anarchy and servitude (see pp. 202-3). Tocqueville pays special attention to civil associations. The tendency of egalitarian societies towards authoritarianism can be curtailed, he contends, if the formation of civil associations takes place to the same degree that social levelling occurs.

If each citizen did not learn, in proportion as he individually becomes more feeble and consequently more incapable of preserving his freedom single-handed, to combine with his fellow citizens for the purpose of defending it, it is clear that tyranny would unavoidably increase together with equality. (vol. 2, p. 114; see also pp. 115-6, 118)

Whether more oriented to political, religious, occupational, hobby or leisure activities, these associations stand firm against despotism. As organizations that empower otherwise weak citizens and offer tutelage in the fine arts of governance, civil associations prove indispensable under conditions of equality.

Fortunately, the Americans, he stresses, are remarkably adept at forming these associations. They do so 'constantly' and in a natural and spontaneous fashion. He speaks of an 'extreme skill' in founding civil associations 'of a thousand ... kinds' (vol. 2, p. 114) and 'for [even] the smallest undertakings' (vol. 2, p. 115): 'The most democratic country on the face of the earth is that in which men have, in our time, carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires' (vol. 2, p. 115; see also p. 117). Whereas in America civil associations are quickly created to address social ailments of all sorts, in England the upper class and in France the government undertake to do so (vol. 2, p. 114). In this respect the Americans could teach the Europeans a great deal: 'Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America' (vol. 2, p. 118).

The centrality of civil associations in Tocqueville's analysis poses an urgent question: how do the Americans manage to form them with such 'extreme skill'? That civil associations did not simply appear of their own accord with conditions of equality is apparent from his comments on France. As feudalism declined and social levelling expanded throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, this levelling brought forth on the one hand calls for a 'more able and active government' (vol. 2, p. 116) and on the other a 'group individualism': varieties of classes with firm boundaries developed, each asserting a claim to social honour and distinctiveness (Tocqueville, 1955, p. 96).

Tocqueville sees the first impulse towards civil associations in America as

deriving from the realm of commerce. Common economic interests, he asserts, draw people together into associations. As such 'small affairs' multiply, persons acquire experience in coming together in consequence of common interests. A facility in doing so is born (see vol. 2, p. 123).

As it develops, this facility carries over into the political realm. In turn, political associations effectively give sustenance to civil associations. As the 'knowledge of public life' increases, 'the notion of associations and the wish to coalesce present themselves' and 'political life makes the love and practice of association more general' (vol. 2, p. 123). Hence, from the political realm itself there arises 'a desire of union'. Moreover, by teaching persons how to associate in groupings, this realm repeatedly brings persons together and, eventually, for a variety of purposes.

In politics men combine for great undertakings, and the use they make of the principle of association in important affairs practically teaches them that it is in their interest to help one another in those of less moment. A political association draws a number of individuals at the same time out of their own circle; however they may be naturally kept asunder by age, mind and fortune, it places them nearer together and brings them into contact. Once met, they can always meet again. (vol. 2, p. 124)

Thus, the major impulse towards association, Tocqueville asserts, comes from the political realm—not least because, unlike commercial undertakings, far fewer monetary risks are involved. But, as participants learn 'how order is maintained among a large number of men' and how goals are realized in common, they acquire skills readily transferable to a variety of activities. Indeed, wherever freedom of political association is openly allowed, citizens come to view 'public association as the universal ... means that men can employ to accomplish the different purposes they may have in view' (vol. 2, p. 125).

In their political associations the Americans ... daily acquire a general taste for association and grow accustomed to the use of it. There they meet together in large numbers, they converse, they listen to one another, and they are mutually stimulated to all sorts of undertakings. They afterwards transfer to civil life the notions they have thus acquired and make them subservient to a thousand purposes. (vol. 2, p. 127)

As Tocqueville notes, 'a natural and perhaps necessary connection' (vol. 2, p. 123) exists between political and civil associations.

Yet he understands the unusual growth of civil associations in the US in several further ways. Tocqueville maintains that citizens participate in public affairs merely because they readily become aware that, in democracies, the successful pursuit of private interests is closely related to the prosperity of the public realm—and the public welfare requires joint activity (vol. 2, pp. 111–13). In addition, freedom itself and free institutions, Tocqueville contends, oppose the evils produced by equality and lead to civil associations: 'Local freedom ... perpetually brings men together, and forces them to help one another, in spite

of the propensities which sever them' (vol. 2, p.111). Freedom also calls forth a notion of service to the public.

Free institutions ... and political rights ... remind every citizen ... that he lives in society. They every instant impress upon his mind the notion that it is the duty, as well as the interest, of men to make themselves useful to their fellow-creatures ... Men attend to the interests of the public, first by necessity, afterwards by choice: what was intentional becomes an instinct; and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow-citizens, the habit and the taste for serving them is at length acquired. (vol. 2, p. 112)¹²

Tocqueville also finds a well-developed sense of 'public spirit' in the American political culture. In turn, the public spirit assists the growth of civil associations. He discovers its origin on the one hand in the belief of the Americans that their nation, owing to the opportunity it affords for open participation, is of their own making, and on the other in their conviction that participation is beneficial to the realization of one's own interests.

[Attachment to country] ... springs from knowledge; it is nurtured by the laws; it grows by the exercise of civil rights; and, in the end, it is confounded with the personal interests of the citizen. A man comprehends the influence which the well-being of his country has upon his own; he is aware that the laws permit him to contribute to that prosperity, and he labours to promote it, at first because it benefits him, and secondly because it is in part his own work. (vol. 1, p. 251; see also vol. 2, pp. 109-10)¹³

Tocqueville is convinced that the most effective means of awakening an interest in citizens in their country's welfare 'is to make them partakers in the government' (vol. 1, p. 252). Where people 'look upon the fortune of the public as their own', as in democracies, they will, he maintains, develop a zealous interest in the public welfare and become active participants (vol. 1, p. 252; see also vol. 2, p. 112). Accordingly, the public spirit, as well as civil associations, grow.¹⁴

Weber's analysis in respect to the rise of civil associations diverges distinctly from Tocqueville's. If the unusual success of the Americans in formulating civil associations is to be explained, then a *civic sphere*, he suggests, comprised of specific and facilitating *values*, must be acknowledged. Wherever they appear on a broad scale, civil associations must be understood as having crystallized in reference to such a social context characterized by a distinct set of conducive, value-based *ideals*.

Max Weber: The Origin of the Civic Sphere and its Value-Based Nature

How did a *civic sphere* arise in the US? Weber again calls attention to religious beliefs in the Colonial era. He examines the manner in which ascetic Protestant doctrine encouraged the devout to create the Kingdom of God on earth, the understanding of the congregation as an 'ethical community', and the generalization of the congregation's values into secularized neighbourhoods,

schools and communities. Together, these developments created a social structure that assisted the birth of civil associations.

Creating the Kingdom of God The world mastery individualism of Reform Calvinism, as noted,¹⁵ implied a strong orientation to the *individual's* salvation, yet an equally strong orientation to a *community*: God's Will must be served by creating His Kingdom on earth. Rather than to be utilized for the believer's own enjoyment, riches serve, through their re-investment, the community as a whole—for we are *all* God's children engaged in a grand Mission to enhance His glory through the creation of prosperous communities. Thus, believers never viewed the improvement of their communities in purely utilitarian or cognitive terms, but as part and parcel to their religious obligations. An orientation to the community's prosperity manifestly constituted a *service* to God.

However, Reform Calvinism pushed the devout in an even more effective way further in this direction. As noted above, this church left individuals alone to discover 'signs' of their predestined status. Neither a church, its sacraments, nor holy intermediaries could assist in the alleviation of the extreme anxiety that accompanied uncertainty regarding one's salvation status. Yet Reform Calvinism offered several means of doing so; for example, if worldly success were attained, the faithful could *convince* themselves that this wealth itself indicated the favour of their mighty God. Nothing in His universe occurred by chance, and of course He would assist *only* the foreordained (see Weber, 1930, pp. 115, 117; 1968, pp. 1198–1200). In this manner, for the devout, unusually strong 'psychological premiums' rewarded methodical work; great riches might be attained only through such systematic labour.¹⁶

Remarkably, a deepening of the believer's commitment to a *community* resulted from this intensification of work and its elevation to a central place in their lives. Although the faithful were left alone by Reform Calvinist doctrine to create 'evidences' of their predestined status, the means of doing so—methodical work—never served the individual alone. Instead, as noted, labour on behalf of God's glory and the creation of the humane earthly Kingdom constituted a firm obligation. Thus, work now served to *bind* believers to a community: labour in a vocation became both intensified and oriented to a task far broader than mere self-interested calculations regarding the accumulation of material goods.

Accordingly, community participation became a significant and important activity, one rendered all the more probable as a consequence of the congregation: this organization served as a natural training ground for the acquisition of group participation skills and practice in self-government (see 1968, p. 1208). The laity's involvement in the admission of new members proved central in this regard (see 1946, p. 314, n. 8), as did its pivotal role in admonishing the 'unworthy' to avoid communion and in selecting a righteous minister (see 1946, pp. 315–16)—all in order strictly to insure 'the purity of the sacramental community' (1946, p. 322). As Weber notes: 'The sect controlled and regulated the members' conduct *exclusively* in the sense of formal *righteousness* and methodical asceticism' (1946, p. 322; see also p. 316, n. 20; 1968, p. 1208).

In this way, Reform Calvinist churches placed into motion a strong thrust towards the formulation of civil associations.¹⁷ They did so in another manner

as well. Weber's analysis at this point places the emphasis upon a set of further values called forth and cultivated by ascetic Protestantism. These values proved to be ones that created a specific tenor for social relationships in the congregation, and these in time came to set the tone for relationships in entire communities. They paved the way for and assisted the widespread development of civil associations.

The Ethical Community: The Congregation In Weber's analysis, all ascetic Protestant congregations in Colonial America and the early US called into being and cultivated candour and trust among persons unrelated by blood. Sect and church members understood their activity as involving a great Mission to create *communities* of believers in which *all* would be brothers (1946, p. 318). New *family* relationships of trust, helpfulness, allegiance and ethical conduct under the watchful eyes of God were born among 'the brethren'. A quite practical mechanism ensured the purity of this ethical community: owing to rigid investigative procedures, only persons of 'good moral character' could enter the 'community of believers'. Thus, membership implied a seal of righteous behaviour as well as the member's commitment to treat God's children in strict accord with an ethos of equality and fair play.¹⁸ Good will and openness, rather than fear, threat, insecurity, manipulation, and the sheer calculation of interests, prevailed in the congregation. Indeed, sect and church membership established so securely a reputation for honesty and candour in business that non-believers preferred to conduct commercial dealings with the devout; fair treatment, they were convinced, would be their reward (1985, pp. 7–8; 1946, pp. 312, 318–19).

In this way, carried by ascetic Protestant congregations, trust, ethical conduct and goodwill broke through their original locus in the particularist ties of the family and clan and became awarded to 'unknown others'—as long as they were members of an ascetic Protestant sect or church. Trust now became, Weber argues, understood as an *impersonal and binding principle*—a firm *ideal* even for commercial relationships—rather than as constituted from a strong personal relationship alone (see, 1946, pp. 303–06, 312–13; 1985, pp. 7–9). This transformation proved to be a crucial step towards the formation of a delimited civic sphere characterized by an ideal of trust.

However, the ethical community contributed to the development of a value-based civic sphere in a further significant manner: it set into motion a strong thrust towards civic activism. Because the faithful were expected to 'master' worldly evil and to undertake the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth, a tolerance of or separation from evil remained unacceptable. Instead, a religious obligation of world mastery constituted an imperative to the devout: to act *against* worldly evil, even if doing so involved challenges to secular authority or popular opinion. As noted above (p. 206–8), rather than a cautious and contemplative individualism, ascetic Protestantism called forth a world mastery individualism that signified a *readiness* to reform the world on behalf of God's Will. This 'practical-ethical' individualism endowed the devout with great confidence to participate in the alteration and improvement of their communities (Weber, 1930, pp. 98–127; 1968, pp. 549, 578–9; 1985, p. 11). Activity would be assessed in terms of its *consistency* with God's abstract principles and rules. In

this manner, ascetic Protestantism again set into motion a strong thrust towards the formation of civil associations (see also Kalberg, 1993).

The Generalization of the Congregation's Values into Communities

Wherever ascetic Protestant congregations were influential, the values they carried became dominant throughout entire communities—and remained so, Weber insists, even as the sects and churches themselves eventually became, with secularization, weakened. Values originating in the religious domain lived on, now cultivated by families, schools, neighbourhoods, and communities.

As this took place, 'community standards' of 'respectable' behaviour became articulated. As social relationships based in trust, candour, honesty, fair play, norms of equality, and ethical conduct in general became widespread, *ideals* of public ethics—*civic* ideals—came into being. Public sphere activity could be evaluated against these ideal standards of conduct. Hence, Weber argues, discrete and random associations of citizens separate from the state, the family, and business-oriented organizations never alone constituted the American civic sphere; rather, a specific constellation of *values* also characterized this arena. To the extent that social relationships were empirically influenced by these values, other relationships oriented to power, domination, the instrumental-rational calculation of interests, and conventions anchored in rigid social hierarchies were to the same degree called into question.¹⁹

By calling forth in the US distinct, even ethical, ideals for public life, the values of ascetic Protestantism, Weber contends, assisted the creation of a civic realm. Such an arena of goodwill and trust proved agreeable and welcoming rather than harsh and authoritarian, and even capable of 'pulling' citizens into civil associations.²⁰ These ideals strongly facilitated their creation; once in place, they also legitimated them.

A civic sphere crystallized in this manner in Colonial America and the early US. Weber's analysis locates its source and substance in a specific religious tradition and its social carriers—ascetic Protestant churches and sects and, in particular, Reform Calvinism—rather than in various civil associations arising largely from the realms of commerce and politics, as Tocqueville argues. This tradition provided the *social context*—civic activism and ideals—Weber views as indispensable if civil associations are to develop widely.²¹ Moreover, it established firm patterns. Although civic activists in the more secularized America of the 19th century seldom viewed their participation as 'doing God's work' or as an effort to acquire God's favour through a confrontation with evil and the creation of an ethical community on earth, they were still, as earlier, rewarded with the esteem of their community. No longer a mark of devoutness but still one of trust and social honour, a secular 'badge' of respectability and a 'status elevation' now accompanied membership in civil associations.²² Indeed, because it alone certified persons as trustworthy and as 'gentlemen', membership in an exclusive club proved decisive if one hoped to be fully accepted in one's community, let alone to be upwardly mobile (see 1946, pp. 311–2; 1985, pp. 7–8; 1968, p. 1207).²³ As 'community norms' of participation and 'service', as well as ideals of public ethics, the legacies of ascetic Protestantism now strongly assisted the formation

of diverse civil associations. Weber repeatedly calls attention to the significance of these legacies for an understanding of American society's proclivity to formulate such associations on a broad scale. For him, 'the old "sect spirit" holds sway with relentless effect in the intrinsic nature of the associations' (1985, p. 10). And:

Today, large numbers of 'orders' and clubs of all sorts have begun to assume in part the functions of the religious community. Almost every small businessman who thinks something of himself wears some kind of badge in his lapel. However, the archetype of this form, which *all* use to guarantee the 'honourableness' of the individual, is indeed the ecclesiastical community. (1985, p. 8; original emphasis)

The modern position of the secular clubs and societies with recruitment by ballot is largely the product of a process of *secularization*. Their position is derived from the far more exclusive importance of the prototype of these voluntary associations, to wit, the sects. (1946, p. 321)

It is obvious that in all these points the modern functions of American sects and sectlike associations ... are revealed as straight derivatives, rudiments and survivals of those conditions which once prevailed in all asceticist sects and conventicles. (1946, p. 319, n. 3; see also pp. 309–11; 1972, pp. 173–4)

Surely a political climate of openness can be understood as in part calling forth civil associations and social activism, as Tocqueville argues. In emphasizing the congealing in the American Colonies and early US of a delineated civic *sphere* endowed with an array of conducive values, Weber quite differently addresses the same development. An explanation of the unusual 'propensity' of the Americans to formulate civil associations requires, he contends, not simply reference to commercial and political associations, freedom and free institutions, the idea that the nation's destiny lies in the hands of its citizens, and a realization that the furtherance of one's private interests is connected to the public prosperity, for these elements have existed in political cultures where civil associations have remained rare. Rather, these associations are formed on a broad scale, Weber maintains, only where facilitating civic values, complemented by the practical experience of self-governance in sects and churches,²⁴ have paved the way for their development (see Kalberg, 1993).²⁵

Conclusion

Although far less well known than Alexis de Tocqueville's commentary upon the political culture of the US, Max Weber's writings on America address the two major themes of *Democracy in America*: a tyranny of the majority danger and the central role of civil associations. In regard to both themes, however, he offers interpretations distinctly at variance with Tocqueville's.

A fundamental point of departure anchors Tocqueville's entire analysis:

he sees a structural transformation—the development from ‘aristocratic to democratic nations’ and the rise of the ‘equality of conditions’—as the root cause of all that distinguishes the US. Egalitarianism not only calls forth an enfeebled individualism as well as the potential of tyranny, but also renders civil associations indispensable if democratic stability is to be maintained.

Weber’s attention to different features of the American political culture leads him to different conclusions. Its distinctiveness can be best isolated, he maintains, by reference to a set of religious values rather than a structural transformation. The world mastery individualism of ascetic Protestantism, which placed abstract principles at the core of the believer’s life and obligated the devout to orient their action towards them, stands in direct opposition to all tyranny of the majority pressures. Instead of a dangerous potential for tyranny, at the centre of Weber’s analysis stands a permanent tension between strong pressures towards social conformity and group orientations on the one hand and this ‘world-oriented’ individualism on the other.

Tocqueville and Weber diverge as well in respect to civil associations, even though both note the American capacity to formulate groupings as unusually nimble and swift. Tocqueville understands the formation of civil associations as arising on the one hand from commercial and political associations and on the other from a combination of freedom and free institutions, the idea that the nation’s destiny lies in the hands of its citizens, and a realization that the furtherance of one’s private interests is connected to the public prosperity. In opposing fundamentally Tocqueville’s explanation, Weber again sees values and beliefs as pivotal. For him, an array of civic values constituted in a delineated *civic sphere* proved indispensable. They provided, in effect, a facilitating pathway—within which Tocqueville’s explanatory forces could be located—for the development of civil associations.

In respect to both major themes, Weber’s *verstehende* sociology points to a background factor neglected by Tocqueville’s mode of analysis: a crucial cultural context influenced by ascetic Protestantism. Rather than the equality of conditions, values and beliefs and their ‘carrier organizations’—churches and sects—stand at the forefront of Weber’s analysis. Moreover, while Tocqueville’s approach attends primarily to a monumental macro transformation, Weber focuses upon particular groupings, their values, and the manner in which the subjective meaning of persons in groupings establishes firm patterns of action. If ‘carried’ by powerful organizations, these patterns cast their imprint across the ages; they do so, as legacies, even as monumental changes—secularization, for example—lead to an alteration of their social carriers. Tocqueville’s emphasis upon a global structural transformation on the one hand and the rational, enlightened interests of individuals on the other renders his analysis, when compared to Weber’s a-historical²⁶ and a-contextual.

Weber identifies a world mastery, activity-oriented individualism and a demarcated civic sphere penetrated by a specific set of values as pivotal components in the American political culture, and locates their original source in ascetic Protestantism, particularly Reform Calvinism.²⁷ His analysis argues forcefully that this odd juxtaposition—self-reliant individuals yet also individuals oriented to civic activities—was founded neither upon chance occurrences nor

minor or deviant currents in American history.²⁸ Rather, it stands squarely at its core. Uniquely American in its intensity, this dualism remains obscured to all modes of analysis that take global concepts—industrialization, modernization or evolutionary progress—as their focus, as well as to Tocqueville's master-key concept: equality of conditions.

Moreover, as long as it endures, the juxtaposition of an accentuated, world mastery individualism with an accentuated orientation to civic sphere ideals endows the American political landscape with an inherent tension: although possessing a common origin and inextricably intertwined, the 'individual' and 'civic' components of this dualism strain in opposite directions and clash repeatedly.²⁹ However, far from random, these conflicts occur across a firmly bounded spectrum, and pendulum movements too far in one direction are invariably pulled back towards the centre (Kalberg, 1997; Schlesinger, 1986).

This dualism injects dynamism into the American political culture. On the one hand, if a prominent civic aspect had been lacking, world mastery individualism would long ago have become routinized into an individualism focused alone upon the calculation of self-interests. Ultimately, massive cynicism would stand at the end of such a development—in respect to *both* the realm of politics and the realm of ethical action generally. On the other hand, if a world mastery individualism had been lacking, a widespread and oppressive social conformism—which, unlike 'the authority of a king, ... acts upon the will as much as the actions' (Tocqueville, vol. 1, p. 273)—would long ago have called forth a severe social, political and economic stagnation.³⁰ The very tension between these central and interwoven components of the American political culture injects a vigorous capacity for rejuvenation. In doing so, this tension itself stands in opposition to tendencies towards a tyranny of the majority.

Notes

1. Interestingly, this study acquired little attention in the US before 1950.
2. 'The importance of customs is a common truth to which study and experience incessantly direct our attention. It may be regarded as a central point in the range of observation, and the common termination of all my inquiries. So seriously do I insist upon this head that, if I have hitherto failed in making the reader feel the important influence of the practical experience, the habits, the opinions, in short, of the customs of the Americans upon the maintenance of their institutions, I have failed in the principal object of my work' (1945, vol. 1, p. 334). And: 'It is the influence of customs that produces the different degrees of order and prosperity which may be distinguished in the several Anglo-American democracies' (1945, vol. 1, p. 334; see also pp. 310, 331–4). (Hereafter the volume alone is given for *Democracy in America*).
3. Aside from brief remarks in a number of texts, Weber examines the US in *Economy and Society* (1968, see esp. pp. 1204–10), 'The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism' (1946, pp. 302–22) and its earlier version, "Churches", and "Sects" in North America' (1985, pp. 7–13), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), and the collection of essays in response to his *Protestant Ethic* critics (1972).
4. In a letter to J.P. Mayer, Marianne Weber states that Max Weber had 'doubtlessly' read Tocqueville (see Mayer, 1972, p. 166, n. 11). In discussing the broad reception of Tocqueville in Germany, Eschenburg (1976) notes that Dilthey (pp. 876, 923–4), Roscher (pp. 922–3) and Tönnies (pp. 927–8) had all read Tocqueville. However, to my knowledge, Weber never comments upon or cites Tocqueville.
5. Tocqueville's ambivalence regarding democracy is apparent. He perceived the US as offering not the ideal form of government, but the best possible: 'The gradual growth of democratic manners and

institutions should be regarded, not as the best, but as the only means of preserving freedom; and, without caring for the democratic form of government, it might be adopted as the most applicable, and the fairest remedy for the present ills of society' (vol. 1, p. 341). However, Tocqueville unequivocally opposes a simple transposition of the American political culture onto France: 'Those who, after having read this book, should imagine that my intention in writing it was to propose the laws and customs of the Anglo-Americans for the imitation of all democratic communities would make a great mistake; they must have paid more attention to the form than to the substance of my thought. My aim has been to show, by the example of America, that laws, and especially customs, may allow a democratic people to remain free. But I am very far from thinking that we ought to follow the example of the American democracy and copy the means that it has employed to attain this end' (vol. 1, p. 342). Rather, he wishes to demonstrate that, if democratic institutions are not gradually introduced, 'there will be no independence at all, ... but an equal tyranny over all; and ... the unlimited authority of a single man' (vol. 1, p. 342; see also pp. 14-5).

6. I am here focusing on only one of the ascetic Protestant churches: Calvinism. This church, and especially Reform Calvinism, constitutes Weber's purest example (see 1930, pp. 98-128).
7. While Tocqueville sees religion in Europe as weak (see vol. 1, p. 339), he finds it to be extremely strong in the US (see, vol. 1, pp. 45, 314-6, 319-26).
8. 'The principle of equality, which makes men independent of each other, gives them a habit and a taste for following in their private actions no other guide than their own will' (vol. 2, p. 304; see also p. 343).
9. Tocqueville's description of individualism is quite harsh. He equates it with selfishness and sees it as '[sapping] the virtues of public life' as well as, 'in the long run, [destroying] all others'. Moreover, 'individualism proceeds from erroneous judgement more than from depraved feelings; it originates as much in deficiencies of mind as in perversity of heart' (vol. 2, pp. 104-5). It is very clear throughout his writings that he does not believe in *populism*, or a trust in the good judgement and basic wisdom of the common man. On the contrary, he fears the common man, seeing him as liable to impulsive behaviour, easy manipulation by charismatic figures, and, unless restrained, ruled by restless ambitions, passions and 'a love of material gratification' (vol. 2, p. 23). Hence again the central importance for him, in democracies, of civil associations and religion: both set indispensable standards for behaviour, truth and virtue, without which mob rule and social chaos looms (see vol. 2, pp. 22-3; see p. 211). In this regard Tocqueville's (Counter-Revolution) anthropology varies little from Durkheim's.
10. If Weber's methodology had focused exclusively upon a charting of structural transformations, he would have noted the 'equality of conditions' as leading to a specific outcome: 'passive democratization' (see 1968, pp. 984-7, 1453). This term refers to the social levelling 'of the governed' that follows whenever feudal hierarchies are weakened and even banished. New groupings of persons formally equal appear. Typically, Weber's discussions of this development are distinguished by their reference to specific historical cases (rather than a putatively global uniformity)—and hence the possibility that this structural transformation could be inhibited and even counteracted under specific conditions (such as the broad growth and competition of sect organizations, multiple exclusive associations and the presence of a world mastery individualism). This new equality does not call forth, as for Tocqueville, an isolated, weak and 'atomized' individual; rather, it gives rise to bureaucratization within state administrations as well as political parties, and hence the domination by officials (although the extent to which this occurs also varies depending upon nation-specific constellations). As bureaucratization develops, Weber argues, it often calls forth atomization: "Atomization" is usually a consequence not of democracy but of bureaucratic rationalism' (1985, p. 10).
11. Weber here discovers a strong sociological source for the notion of the 'Rights of Man' (see 1968, pp. 1208-9).
12. There is, Tocqueville maintains, a 'secret tendency in democratic institutions that makes the exertions of the citizens subservient to the prosperity of the community in spite of their vices and mistakes' (vol. 1, p. 250).
13. Thus, in respect to the origin of both civil associations and the public spirit, Tocqueville prominently refers to the individual's own interests. In fact, this mode of explanation reoccurs with great frequency throughout *Democracy in America*. By reference to self-interests Tocqueville explains, for example, the contribution of jury trials to social stability (vol. 1, pp. 291-7), the assistance one gives to others and support for the welfare of the state (vol. 2, p. 130), the 'habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight and self-command' (vol. 1, p. 131), the 'means by which religions ... govern

- men' (vol. 2, p. 134; see also pp. 133–5), patriotism (vol. 1, p. 250), the unwillingness to attack the rights of others (vol. 1, pp. 254–5), the enforcement of obedience to the law (vol. 1, p. 257), the necessity for religions to proselytize (vol. 1, p. 318), the correct manner of teaching individuals to exercise political rights (vol. 1, p. 255), the co-operation of individuals engaged in public affairs (vol. 2, pp. 109–10), and the willingness of 'the more opulent [to] take great care not to stand aloof from the people' (vol. 2, p. 111). He is unequivocal in particular in regard to political rights: 'If ... you do not succeed in connecting the notion of [political rights] with that of private interest, which is the only immutable point in the human heart, what means will you have of governing the world except by fear?' (vol. 1, p. 255; see also vol. 2, p. 112). Tocqueville states directly the causal centrality for him of self-interests on a number of occasions; for example: 'The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends' (vol. 1, p. 452). And: 'The principal of self-interest rightly understood appears to me the best suited of all philosophical theories to the wants of the men of our time. ... It must ... be adopted as necessary' (vol. 2, p. 131; see also pp. 112, 129–32).
14. This mode of explanation—people will support that which they believe to be of their own making—also appears frequently in *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville refers to it not only in discussing the origins of public spirit (see above) and civil associations, but also, for example, patriotism (vol. 1, p. 250), civic zeal (vol. 1, pp. 252–3) and the authority of the law (vol. 1, pp. 256–7).
 15. Again, Baxter's Reform Calvinist doctrine best exemplifies Weber's argument (see 1930, pp. 155–6).
 16. Weber's argument is examined in detail in Kalberg (1996).
 17. Weber speaks of a 'community-forming energy' imparted by the ascetic Protestant sects 'to an Anglo-Saxon world' (1985, p. 11).
 18. 'For the individual, this basic nature of a congregation formed by selective admission has the practical significance of legitimating his personal qualities. Anyone admitted as a member can thereby demonstrate to the world that he has measured up to the congregation's religious and moral standards after a thorough examination' (1968, p. 1205).
 19. Given the strength of these opposing forces, Weber is quite well aware that often these ideals had little actual impact. Nonetheless, the tension established against them as a consequence of a demarcated constellation of civic sphere values was significant to him (see Tiryakian, 1975).
 20. Surely here can be seen, as well as the trust cultivated among believers in the congregation, one of the sociological sources for the widespread belief in America in populism, or trust in the good judgement and basic wisdom of the common man. Tocqueville's entire study neglects this very central aspect of the American political culture; on the contrary, he emphasizes the great dangers of empowering the masses (see n. 9). Lipset sees populism as *the* distinguishing attribute of American political culture (see 1963).
 21. Industrialism's advance and the concomitant expansion of the public sphere will never alone establish, Weber is convinced, the civic ideal of public trust central for the formation of civil associations. As well, a 'generalization' of the values of the family and clan (in-group solidarity, assistance in time of need, openness and trust, and so on), as a consequence alone of far greater contact among 'unknown others', did not occur. Social trust cannot be understood as a result of an evolutionary development as such (Parsons, 1966, 1971). Specific values, specific sources for them, and specific strong carriers, according to Weber, prove indispensable.
 22. Hence, a formal parallel here exists to Weber's argument regarding the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (see 1930, pp. 180–2): in both cases the religious roots had died out.
 23. Just the extreme importance, for one's social status, of admission into a community's churches and clubs led Weber to describe the US as a society of 'benevolent feudalism' (see 1978, p. 281).
 24. Although Weber's analysis strongly emphasizes the importance of values in formulating a social context conducive to the formation of civil associations, it cannot be emphasized too much that he does not stop of this point. He pays particular attention, as noted, to social carriers. Furthermore, he strongly acknowledges the significance of the state, the state's authority and laws (as does Tocqueville). Because the importance of value constellations is frequently neglected in the citizenship literature, and attention to the state, the state's authority, and laws is nearly universal, I have chosen to focus upon values and omit Weber's discussion of these factors. A more comprehensive—and accurate—Weberian analysis would address all of these factors and, in particular, their unique interweaving in the American political culture.
 25. Had Tocqueville viewed the civic sphere as a discrete realm characterized by constellations of social

- action oriented to values, he would have surely noted it as capable of offering, as religions, a set of ideals that stood in opposition to—or safeguarded against—any tyranny of the majority.
26. Time and again Tocqueville explains features of American society by reference to the equality of conditions rather than to the legacies of ascetic Protestantism. For example, the 'willingness to work', the high honour attached to labour, the tendency of the wealthy to devote their leisure time to 'public business' (vol. 2, p. 161), the tendency for persons in America to follow 'commercial and industrial occupations' (vol. 2, p. 163; see also pp. 165, 168; vol. 1, pp. 442–4), the 'taste for well-being' (vol. 2, p. 164, n. 2), the directing of all 'energetic passions' to trade and commerce, 'the immense progress [of the Americans] in productive industry' (vol. 2, p. 165), the 'sober way of life' and 'serious, deliberate, and positive turn' of the minds of 'all who live in democratic times' (vol. 2, p. 219; see also p. 131), the 'purity of morals' of the Americans (vol. 2, p. 220; see also pp. 215–16), their 'love of riches' (see vol. 2, pp. 238–40; vol. 1, p. 30), the 'transporting of the habits of public life into ... [private] manners' (vol. 1, p. 330), their methodical and deliberate 'zeal' (vol. 2, p. 134), and their 'tendency to ... look upon all authority with a jealous eye' (vol. 2, p. 304).
 27. Tocqueville notes that 'innumerable' sects are to be found in the US (vol. 1, p. 314; vol. 2, p. 28), yet he nowhere distinguishes them either by name or by doctrine. Rather, his discussion is remarkably generic. He asserts that 'all Christian morality is everywhere the same' (vol. 1, p. 314) and that 'all [Americans] look upon their religion in the same light' (vol. 2, p. 28; see also pp. 22–33 *passim*, 133–4). Only rarely does he note distinctions even between Protestants and Catholics (see vol. 1, p. 311; vol. 2, pp. 30–1). His focus in regard to religion remains, throughout *Democracy in America*, consistently upon its capacity to set standards and boundaries and hence its indispensability in periods of equality (see above and vol. 2, pp. 21–9).
 28. One can see this tension from a different angle in those passages where Weber notes the peculiarly individual orientation even of group members.

[In associations] the individual seeks to maintain *his own* position by becoming a member of the social group ... The cool objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) of the sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*) promotes the precise placement of the individual in the purposive activity (*Zwecktätigkeit*) of the group, be it a football team or a political party. However, this in no way means a lessening of the individual's need to constantly attend to his self-affirmation. On the contrary, this task of 'proving' *himself* is present more than ever *within* the group, in the circle of his associates. And thus, the social association to which the individual belongs is for him never something 'organic', never a mystical total essence which floats over him and envelops him. Rather, he is *always* completely conscious of it as a mechanism for his own material and ideal *ends* (*Zwecke*). (1985, pp. 10–11; original emphasis)

And:

Only [the sects] give ... American democracy its own flexible structure and its individualistic stamp. On the one hand, ... [they place] the individual absolutely on his own in the matter most important to him. On the other hand, this qualification through self-probation is viewed exclusively as the foundation for the social union of the congregation. Thus, the tremendous flood of social structures which penetrate every nook and cranny of American life is constituted in accordance with the schema of the 'sect'. (1985, p. 10)

29. It remains an open question, and one at the centre of a lively debate, whether this tension endures to this day. Weber himself saw the civic sphere as drastically weakened and noted, on many occasions, the widespread corruption in American politics. Many recent commentators have argued that 'the civic' has declined dramatically (see Etzioni, 1997; Bellah, 1985; Putnam, 1995; Selznick, 1994). This 'communitarian-libertarian' debate cannot be addressed here. It might only be pointed out that one empirical measure of the civic sphere's viability can be seen in the endurance of a strong missionary component in American foreign policy: the US assumes to this day that its civic ideals are appropriate and valid for other political cultures. See Kalberg, 1991.
30. Egalitarianism without activity-oriented individualism would imply a massive conformity scarcely imaginable to Americans today (the old German Democratic Republic?), one accompanied by a *rigid* defense of the few remaining hierarchies untouched by egalitarianism.

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