Abstract: Citizens of liberal democracies today increasingly exhibit a distrust of perceived elites, especially experts and those of advanced educational attainment. John Stuart Mill’s work provides insight into the origins of this revolt against intellectual distinction, as well as potential responses to it. Mill regards deference to superior wisdom as an essential part of a well-developed character while at the same time esteeming independent thought. Though his emphasis on the importance of character formation is well known, his concern for inculcating a salutary form of deference has been left unexplored. I show how Mill’s approaches to this task include redesigning the political process in order to amplify the voice of the highly educated, promoting more widespread opportunities for learning, and consistently emphasizing the partiality of human understanding. I also compare Mill’s treatment of the place of deference in democratic politics to that of Alexis de Tocqueville’s, and consider both where they agree and how Tocqueville might critique Mill’s strategies for cultivating deference. In so doing, I demonstrate how these authors provide us with resources for navigating the tensions between popular sovereignty and expertise, and between independent thought and intellectual authority.

# Introduction

The citizenry of many liberal democracies around the world today increasingly exhibit a distrust of perceived elites. This especially true with respect to experts and those of advanced educational attainment. People’s unwillingness to defer to the consensus of putative experts can be seen in a variety of policy areas, from vaccines and climate change to genetically modified foods. Moreover, a recent Gallup poll found that Americans’ confidence in higher education dropped from 57 percent in 2015 to 48 percent in 2019.[[1]](#footnote-1) Some treatments of this phenomenon regard it as one of recent genesis. In *Twilight of the Elites*, Chris Hayes draws on sociology and social theory to argue that America’s meritocratic system has produced a self-perpetuating elite class disconnected from the rest of society, giving particular emphasis to how this manifests itself in an unwillingness to defer to claims of specialized knowledge.[[2]](#footnote-2) In *The Death of Expertise*, Thomas Nichols bemoans what he sees as the infantilizing effects of the modern university, as well as the internet’s tendency to assail us with an overwhelming mix of serious analysis and crackpot speculation.[[3]](#footnote-3) By contrast, Richard Hofstadter argues in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* that distrust of intellectuals has been a part of the United States since its inception.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Insight into the origins of the decline of deference to intellectual distinction, as well as potential responses to it, can be found by considering the work of John Stuart Mill, a theorist who reflected on the nature of mass democracy as it was first emerging. While Mill early in his career contends that the unwillingness to defer to claims of superior knowledge derives from specific historical factors, in his later works he characterizes hostility to intellectual distinction as endogenous to democracy as a regime type, and thus a permanent feature of our way of life. Mill not only advances an account of the genesis of the decline of deference, but also argues for political reforms and social practices intended to educate this tendency and mitigate its harmful effects while at the same time taking advantage of its positive potential. I show how Mill’s approaches to cultivating deference among citizens include the redesign of the political process in order to amplify the voice of the highly educated, the promotion of more widespread opportunities for learning, and the consistent emphasis on the partiality of human understanding in his work, most notably in his autobiography.

Although the theme of deference and its place in democratic societies is present from Mill’s early essays through his mature works, it has not received sustained scholarly analysis.[[5]](#footnote-5) Indeed, Mill regards deference to superior wisdom as an essential part of a well-developed character while at the same time esteeming the active practice of independent thought. While the latter may be a more familiar aspect of Mill’s philosophy, the former is important as well. Mill himself saw these two aspects of his thought as being related, rather than at odds. Recent scholarship has shown that Mill’s theory of education reflects the insight that thinking is not a spontaneous process but a power in need of proper cultivation.[[6]](#footnote-6) I build on this work by highlighting Mill’s account of how democracy poses both challenges and opportunities for the cultivation of deference. An immoderate attachment to the principle of equality underlying democratic political institutions risks producing two pathological outcomes. It can generate an epistemic arrogance manifested in an unwillingness to look up to anyone. It can also lead to an epistemic humility manifested in slavish conformity to the opinions of the democratic majority.[[7]](#footnote-7) In Mill’s analysis, these two dispositions often exist simultaneously: democratic people are unwilling to defer to particular individuals while at the same time deferring unthinkingly to the abstract mass of their fellow citizens. Mill’s concern with the latter is widely known; his concern with the former, though less familiar to readers, is noteworthy as well.[[8]](#footnote-8) Indeed, it is an important part of his focus on character formation.

Of course, many scholars regard liberalism as being indifferent or even hostile to character development.[[9]](#footnote-9) They contend that the doctrines of foundational liberal theorists represent nothing more than a peace treaty among individuals with diverse conceptions of the good but a shared interest in self-preservation and prosperity. In this framework, the good liberal society requires only the proper configuration of rational self-interested activity. However, this view neglects the ways in which figures in the liberal tradition attempted to synthesize liberal ideas with the concern with character associated with pre-modern political thought. Mill is a prominent example of such a figure.[[10]](#footnote-10) Analyzing the ways in which he tried to combine a defense of representative government, individual freedom, and equality under the law with the development of character yields resources for contemporary theorists occupied with this task.[[11]](#footnote-11)

I also compare Mill’s treatment of the place of deference in democratic politics to that of Alexis de Tocqueville’s, and consider both their areas of overlap and how Tocqueville might critique Mill’s strategies for cultivating deference among people in democratic societies. With regard to areas of overlap, Tocqueville’s account of the educative effects of involvement in politics and civil society suggests that similar benefits could be obtained from the cooperative workplaces that Mill regards as an important source of character formation. In terms of areas of divergence, Tocqueville’s account of the place of envy in democracy suggests that the decline of deference reflects not just an inflated faith in private judgment, but a sentiment about justice as well. Moreover, in Tocqueville’s view, and in contrast to Mill, deference is underwritten by a high degree of religious uniformity. Finally, Tocqueville would likely question Mill’s assumption that the highly educated will reliably be public-spirited. This point is especially worth considering given current debates over meritocracy in America today.

# Mill’s Account of the Origins of the Decline of Deference in Modern Societies

Mill’s first consideration of why people in modern societies exhibit an unwillingness to defer to claims of intellectual superiority comes in his early essay “Spirit of the Age.” Published in 1831, it displays a mix of optimism and trepidation concerning people’s emerging habits of mind.[[12]](#footnote-12) He regards his time as “pregnant for change,” but also describes it as an age of “intellectual anarchy” in which the multitude are left “without a guide” (*CW* 22:233).[[13]](#footnote-13) Mill thinks that the growth in the practice of discussion and questioning, combined with the elevation of private judgment, make a return to the previous doctrines and hierarchies impossible (*CW* 22:233).

But though Mill affirms that those old modes and orders deserved to be discarded, he nonetheless thinks that the growing disposition of distrust towards claims of intellectual authority has its pitfalls (*CW* 22:231). In particular, he worries that the elevation of private judgment, while in many ways a positive development, risks being pursued to excess and leading people to eschew deference even to legitimate intellectual authority. He illustrates this with a parable of a caravan of travelers who have been journeying in an unknown country under the direction of a guide who, unbeknownst to them, is blind. Upon discovering that the guide is blind, the wisest among the travelers exhorts his fellows to use their own eyes, and anyone insisting on the necessity of procuring a new guide is met with disfavor (*CW* 22: 239). The lesson of this parable is that the casting off of a sclerotic old authority and the shift to a greater reliance on individual judgment risks engendering the dangerous belief that no authority at all is necessary, and no one else’s judgment merits any deference. Implicit in this parable is the emergence of democratic majority tyranny that preoccupies both Mill and Tocqueville. As the authority embodied in the blind guide disappears, it is reclaimed, paradoxically, by those travelers who insist on the undesirability of submitting to any guide at all.

Mill’s contentions in this essay regarding the continued importance of deference to intellectual superiority demonstrate that he thinks that receptivity to guidance by the wise is a permanent necessity. In substantiating this, Mill identifies what he takes to be the limitations of the reasoning power of ordinary people. He prefaces this argument by insisting that he expects “vast improvements” in the social condition of human beings “from the growth of intelligence among the body of the people,” and yields to no one in the degree of intelligence of which he believes them to be capable (*CW* 22:241). Nonetheless, Mill indicates that he does not think that most people will ever have “sufficient opportunities of study and experience” to become “familiarly conversant with all the inquiries” according to which they ought to live their lives. This is because, for the foreseeable future, most people will need to work in order to earn a living, which inevitably sets a limit to the knowledge they can attain (*CW* 22:241).

Mill concedes that proofs of most important moral and social truths are “few, brief, and easily intelligible.” Yet this concession ends up being smaller than it first appears, for he adds that he means those principles are really only “easily intelligible” for those who possess sufficient experience to judge the force of arguments.He acknowledges that there are a great number of other important truths, especially in political economy, that may be brought down “even to the level of the uninformed multitude.” But the difficulty remains: “they must inevitably take on trust…that the arguments really are as conclusive as they appear” (*CW* 22:242-243).

Mill concludes *Spirit of the Age* by observing that it is a necessary condition of humanity that the majority of people “either have wrong opinions, or no fixed opinions, or must place the degree of reliance warranted by reason, in the authority of those who have made moral and social philosophy their peculiar study.” But he then acknowledges that, in his day, the authority that commands this confidence exists “nowhere” (*CW* 22:244). This is because his age is one of transition, “in which the mind…has recently found itself out in grievous error, and has not yet satisfied itself of the truth” (*CW* 22:233). This unsettled state of authority, he insists, should not remain permanent. “Learn, and think for yourself, is reasonable advice *for the day*,” he writes, “but let not the business of the day be done as to prejudice the work of the morrow” (22:245, emphasis mine). Mill’s point is that one ought to think for oneself without ready deference to the judgments of those of superior intellectual attainment only when the principles and ideas that govern society are in a state of conflict. Moreover, this habit of independent-mindedness must not be pursued so zealously that it impedes the deference that Mill in this essay regards as a permanent necessity. Though Mill would go on to temper the elitist views expressed in this early essay, his more mature works retain the conviction that ordinary people must be receptive to the guidance of their putative superiors.

Mill is not advocating for outright paternalism. He makes a key statement on this theme in *Principles of Political Economy*, in a section entitled “On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Class.”[[14]](#footnote-14) In it, Mill considers two different accounts of the proper state of working people. They consist of dependence and protection on the one hand, and self-dependence on the other. Mill rejects the first as untenable given the widespread growth of popular enlightenment, and contends that the ideal it expresses never historically existed. Nonetheless, he does not affirm the second without qualification either. Instead, he advances a dialectical synthesis of the two. Mill grants that the awakening of everyday people’s intelligence will make them unwilling to be “directed….by the mere authority and prestige of superiors.” At the same time, though, he also avers that it is “consistent with this, that they should feel respect for superiority of intellect and knowledge, and defer much to the opinions, on any subject of those whom they think well acquainted with it.” Indeed, such deference is, in his view, “deeply grounded” in human nature. Mill makes clear that everyday people will judge for themselves who is and is not entitled to this deference. (*CW* 3.760-764). Thus, for Mill, ordinary people’s intellectual emancipation is consistent with the willingness to accept the guidance of those possessing intellectual authority. Moreover, in this passage, Mill intimates that cultivation is necessary to achieve this future state, writing that as the working classes are becoming less and less dependent, “the virtues of independence are what they stand most in need of” (*CW* 3:373).

In early works like “Spirit of the Age,” Mill regards the growing unwillingness to defer to intellectual authority as arising mainly from particular historical transformations, rather than permanent features of the modern way of life. Along these lines, in a review of the first volume of *Democracy in America*, Mill pushes back against Tocqueville’s insistence that democracy itself is the source of the growing tendency of modern peoples to rely on their own reason rather than trusting the word of their putative superiors. While he acknowledges that the two phenomena may be connected, he disputes the idea that it is an exclusive connection, and draws attention to other, more temporally contingent factors, such as the great advances of human knowledge and the rapid diffusion of basic education without any corresponding provision for higher studies (*CW* 18:196).

In later works, though, Mill revises his outlook, and begins to grant that the unwillingness to recognize any intellectual authority *does* derive in some significant way from democracy. In his 1840 review of volume II of *Democracy in America*, Mill concurs with Tocqueville’s assessment that the oppressive power of common opinion derives in part from democracy’s egalitarian ethos (*CW* 18:179). This is noteworthy because the other causes Mill pointed to arose from contingent circumstances like cultural and technological change, which suggested that the unwillingness to defer to intellectual superiority might abate as those changes played out. The new turn in his argument, though, suggests that the tendency is more deeply rooted, which implies that it may not admit of so easy of a resolution.

However, while this change in Mill’s thinking marks an area of overlap with Tocqueville, they differ in what they see as the source of democracy’s formative power. Tocqueville’s account focuses on democracy’s social aspects, and specifically the equality of conditions.[[15]](#footnote-15) By contrast, the argument Mill advances in his later writings emphasizes democratic political institutions. He expresses this in *Considerations on Representative Government* in the midst of a discussion of the difficulty of obtaining representatives “more highly instructed” than their constituents are while still holding those legislators accountable to those who elected them. In this passage, Mill notes that an important requisite of a well-constituted electoral body is “deference to mental superiority.” He insists that those who are “sensible of the value of superior wisdom, are likely to recognize it…by other signs than thinking exactly as they do, and even in spite of considerable differences in opinion.” Mill observes, though, that there is “a character of mind that does not look up to anyone; which thinks no other person’s opinion much better than his own, or nearly so good as a hundred or a thousand persons like himself.” He argues that if this is the “turn of mind” of the electors, they will not elect or retain in office anyone who does not mirror their own sentiments (*CW* 19:508).

Mill argues that this unwillingness to look up to anyone can arise from the *regime* *itself* in addition to from the exogenous factors he highlighted in earlier essays, averring that democracy “is not favorable to the reverential spirit.” Yet Mill does not reproach democracy on these grounds, insisting that the fact that democracy destroys reverence “for mere social position” must be counted among the “good…[parts] of its influence.” That is, Mill thinks that democracy renders people less inclined to defer to those with conventional claims to superiority, and so makes it easier for those possessing natural superiority to be recognized.[[16]](#footnote-16) Nonetheless, Mill concedes that by doing this, democracy “closes the principle *school* of reverence…which exists in society” (*CW* 19:508, emphasis in original). This statement indicates that capacity for deference, which Mill elsewhere suggests has a natural basis, nonetheless requires some habituation in order to manifest itself dependably. Mill’s remark also indicates that social life is an important vector for this habituation.

Mill makes his claim about democracy being unfavorable to the reverential spirit without qualification. Summarizing the two criticisms of American democracy that Mill advances earlier in *Considerations* clarifies why this is noteworthy. The first is that the United States’ system of electoral districts gives representation to local majorities, which Mill argues forces “the highly cultivated members of the community” to act as “servile mouthpieces for their inferiors” if they want a career in politics” (*CW* 19:457). The second is that America’s wide extension of suffrage has “imprinted strongly on the American mind, that any one man (with a white skin) is as good as any other,” an outlook which he regards as “connected to some of the more unfavorable points in American character” (*CW* 19:478). He makes this point more directly when he asserts that he does not regard equal voting

…as among the things which are good in themselves, provided they can be guarded against inconveniences. I look upon it as only relatively good; less objectionable than inequality grounded on irrelevant or adventitious circumstances, *but in principle wrong*, because recognizing a wrong standard, and exercising a bad influence on the voter’s mind (*CW* 19:478, emphasis mine).

Thus, Mill thinks that American democracy makes people less inclined to deference by granting citizens decision-making power without attempting to judge their fitness for exercising this power, thus inculcating a mistaken conception of human equality. However, in the passage from *Considerations*, Mill attributes a hostility to “the reverential spirit” to democracy *simply*, rather than to any particular manifestation of it. Indeed, Mill indicates in an essay on Plato written five years after *Considerations* that there is a tendency to “indifference to special qualifications, and to the superiority of one mind over another” which exhibits itself to varying degrees “in *all* popular governments”—Athens as well as Great Britain and the United States (*CW* 11:436, emphasis mine). He adds, though, that it would be a mistake to see this tendency as either incurable or present among every citizen in such regimes. Having considered Mill’s view of the sources of the decline of deference and its potential pitfalls, the next step is to examine how Mill sought to counter this problem.

# Mill’s Strategies for Mediating the Decline of Deference

Mill uses the word “ethology” to describe the systematic science treating the issue of how upbringing and environment affect the formation of individuals (*CW* 8:861). Though Mill’s account of the science of character formation remained in its incipient stage, we can nonetheless find examples in his corpus of ways in which he sought to inculcate the sorts of virtues suitable for citizens of the liberal democracies. Mill sometimes downplays the extent to which deference requires deliberate cultivation.[[17]](#footnote-17) Nonetheless, his claim that democracy, by destroying reverence for “mere social position…closes the principal *school* of reverence that exists in society” indicates an awareness that respect for superior wisdom or expertise requires the right conditions to manifest itself reliably. Mill’s main strategies for inculcating a salutary form of deference include institutional reform, formal education, and an emphasis in his writings on the partiality of human perspectives.

While some scholars contend that institutional reform takes a backseat to change of sentiments and ideas in Mill’s agenda for the future, it is nonetheless the case that institutional reform does have a place in Mill’s thought.[[18]](#footnote-18) The dichotomy is to some extent a false one, for Mill believed that the structure and operation of institutions could shape people’s ideas. One aspect of Mill’s approach to moderating the decline of deference and the corresponding tendency to mediocrity in representative government involves designing electoral institutions in such a way as to ensure that those of intellectual distinction are represented in the political process.

The first institutional reform Mill endorses is for the actual details of policy-making to be removed from the purview of elected representatives and entrusted to expert bureaucrats who those representatives direct and supervise. After directing a “committee of codification” to draft legislation to achieve particular goals, parliament could approve or reject the committee’s resulting bills. According to Mill, such an arrangement would rightfully make legislation “the work of skilled labor and study and experience” while at the same time preserving the principle of government by consent (*CW* 19:432). In this way, he seeks to navigate the tension between the competing desiderata of expert knowledge and popular sovereignty.[[19]](#footnote-19)

However, while Mill wants to preserve a role for specialized knowledge in policymaking, he also wants to amplify the political voice of the intellectually distinguished *as such*, apart from any particular expertise they might have. Along these lines, the second institutional reform Mill advocates for is the adoption of the Hare Plan, an early version of what is today called proportional representation combined with a single transferable vote.[[20]](#footnote-20) In Mill’s time, candidates for office were chosen by a majority of voters in an electoral district, leaving the views of the minority of voters in each of these districts unrepresented. Rather than requiring a simple majority of votes within a district, the Hare Plan altered the unit of representation to consist in a quota obtained by taking the number of eligible voters and dividing it by the number of seats in the legislature. Any candidate attaining the quota would secure a seat, and no more than the number of required votes for attaining the quota would be counted for the candidate. Additionally, citizens could rank order their multiple candidates on the ballot, such that if a voter’s first choice candidate failed to secure the quota, or attained votes in excess of the quota, the citizen’s vote could be transferred to his or her second-choice candidate, and so on. From Mill’s perspective, the Hare Plan’s electoral mechanisms would make political office more attainable for “hundreds of men of independent thought,” who, although lacking in local political influence, “have…made themselves known and approved by a few persons in almost every district of the kingdom” (*CW* 19:456). The Hare Plan would thus remove local majorities’ dominance of the legislative process, which Mill thinks will improve the chances of selecting talented people who would have stood little chance of being chosen by their local districts. As Mill puts it, this electoral system “is the mode of national representation that affords the best security for intellectual qualifications desirable in representatives” (*CW* 19:455-456).

A third institutional reform Mill advocates for in order to counter the decline of deference consists of giving multiple votes to intellectually superior citizens. He indicates that a person’s occupation can indicate whether he or she should be granted multiple votes, although educational attainment would be preferable, provided that the national system of education was standardized (*CW* 19:473-476). He clarifies, though, that plural voting should not be taken so far that those who are advantaged by it outweigh the electoral clout of everyone else (*CW* 19:476). While Mill wants to ensure a voice in government to the intellectually distinguished, he is nonetheless emphatic that, taken as a whole, representatives should be genuinely *representative* of their constituents. Proportional representation and plural voting are intended not to obviate the power of the majority, but to provide a counterweight to it, to achieve the benefits of representative government while avoiding its excesses.[[21]](#footnote-21) As he puts it, a key task of constitutional design “should be for no class to exercise a preponderance of influence over government” (*CW* 19:446).

There are ways in which these mechanisms can be understood as having an impact on citizens’ character as well, though. Entrusting the details of policymaking to a committee of experts would provide an institutionalized affirmation of the importance of expertise in collective life. Proportional representation, by drawing the representatives of the less instructed majority into debate with representatives of the more instructed minority, would not only improve the general discourse of parliament, but would also cultivate the intellectual virtues of the majority representatives and the citizens who would watch their representatives deliberate with each other.[[22]](#footnote-22) Furthermore, Mill contends that the mere existence of plural voting will have an educative effect by stamping “the opinions of persons of a more educated class as entitled to greater weight than those of the less educated” (*CW* 19:508).

Mill’s institutional reforms would likely be of mixed utility in remedying the decline of deference. Making civil servants in charge of drafting laws while giving elected representatives the responsibility to establish goals for and review the work of those civil servants could impart the broader lesson about the merit of relying on experts while still exercising one’s own judgment. Proportional representation does have some potential to increase the range of perspectives represented in the legislature, as well as giving a voice to minorities that an electoral system that privileged local majorities might silence. It is possible, though not inevitable, that those empowered minorities might in some cases be an educated few. Furthermore, proportional representation’s promotion of viewpoint diversity could undermine the stifling power of common opinion that so concerned Mill, and which contributes to an unwillingness to defer to legitimate forms of superiority.

Plural voting, however, does not offer a compelling approach to dealing with the decline of deference. In Mill’s account, plural voting is intended not just to produce better policy outcomes and improve the quality of debate in the legislature, but also to teach citizens that the views of the educated deserve more consideration. For people to actually consent to such an electoral system, though, the latter effect would have to have already been achieved to a large degree, and so the adoption of plural voting seems improbable in any country that is already democratic.[[23]](#footnote-23) Mill does concede that this system is “not likely to be soon or willingly adopted.” At the same time, though, he is sometimes quite dismissive of the difficulties of convincing people of the merits of such an electoral system. He declares “[n]o one but a fool…feels offended by the acknowledgment that there are others whose opinion…is entitled to a greater amount of consideration than his.” Thus, though Mill does not regard plural voting as immediately practical but rather an expression of “what is best in principle,” he does still want it to be implemented at some point in the future (*CW* 19: 474-476).

In addition to institutional reform, formal education is a way that Mill seeks to inculcate deference. In his 1867 inaugural address at the University of St. Andrews, which contains Mill’s most sustained reflections on formal education, he acknowledges that “the amount of knowledge is not to be lightly estimated, which qualifies us for judging to whom we may have recourse for more.” Based on this observation, Mill argues that providing a rigorous and thorough education to all citizens will enable them to make well-informed judgments about who merits their deference.[[24]](#footnote-24) As he puts it, “the elements of more important studies being widely diffused, those who have reached the higher summit find a public capable of appreciating their superiority and following their lead” (*CW* 21:224). Later he expands on this idea, writing that “[t]he most incessant obligation of the human intellect throughout life is the ascertainment of truth.” While he concedes that it is “not given to us all to discover great general truths that are a light to all men and to future generations,” he nonetheless argues that “we *all* require the ability to judge between conflicting opinions that are offered to us as vital truths” (*CW* 21:234, emphasis mine).

These passages from the St. Andrews Address illustrate how Mill’s concern for the cultivation of deference is consistent with his emphasis on independent thought rather than at odds with it. Mill does not want to restore the unthinking and somewhat slavish deference characteristic of hierarchical societies. Rather, his intention is to advance the realization of a society in which people defer to others based on a reasoned assessment of their superiority.[[25]](#footnote-25) Mill’s attempt to inculcate deference through improving *everyone’s* intellectual cultivation appears much more viable than his endeavors to do so through manipulating the electoral system. This is because it provides people with the means to recognize and understand why someone else’s opinion merits special consideration, rather than forcing a hierarchical relationship on them.

A limitation of Mill’s discussion of the positive role of education in this regard is that his account of to whom deference is due is left undeveloped. He indicates at various places that unanimity among the knowledgeable few provides a mark by which people recognize those worthy of deference (*CW* 22:238, 10:79, 19:392). But while this might have merit as a descriptive account of how deference is accorded, as a normative account it is deficient. As Alfred Moore points out, consensus is a flawed standard for determining where deference is owed, because the mere fact of its existence tells us nothing about how it was reached. Consensus may be the result of exacting deliberation, or it may be the result of groupthink.[[26]](#footnote-26)

A final way in which Mill seeks to mediate the hostility to claims of intellectual superiority among democratic peoples is through his consistent emphasis on the partiality of individual human understanding. The attitude that this emphasis promotes is not exactly deference, for it consists not so much in a trust that someone else’s opinion is right as it does in a willingness to question whether one’s *own* view of the truth is correct in every respect, and a consequent willingness to listen to others. Nonetheless, this idea tempers the “epistemic arrogance” that makes people in democratic societies inclined to believe that their own common sense is all they need to make well-formed judgments. One can find remarks throughout Mill’s corpus that underscore the importance of receptivity to the insight of others. In his 1838 essay on Jeremy Bentham, Mill critiques Bentham for having “failed in deriving light from other minds.” He goes on to assert that it is precisely the strongest assertor of the freedom of private judgment who most needs to fortify “the weak side of his own intellect” by studying the opinions of those who think differently (*CW* 10: 90-91).

In an essay on Auguste Comte, published nearly thirty years later, Mill makes a similar point. He notes that Comte, after having undertaken an arduous study of centuries of prior philosophy, adopted the practice of refraining from any additional reading to facilitate the unimpeded development of his own thoughts. Mill concedes that this practice “may be legitimate” when one has done as much work in advance as Comte has, but then goes on to state that “no one should adopt it without being aware of what he loses by it.” What one gives up is “the possibility of arriving at the whole truth on any subject,” for hoping to do so by the “mere force of [one’s] own mind…without aid and correction from one’s contemporaries” is “impossible” (*CW* 10:331).

It is also worth recalling Mill’s remarks in chapter two of *On Liberty* that “correcting and complementing” one’s opinion by comparing it with others is “the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it” (*CW* 18:231-232). As this passage, as well as the preceding consideration of Mill’s criticism of Bentham and Comte suggest, *everyone*, regardless of their purported intellectual superiority, would benefit from cultivating a willingness to learn from others. Mill implies that there is no one so superior that he or she does not need to draw light from “other minds.” Indeed, Mill’s autobiography contains an extended treatment of his *own* experience of rethinking his commitments. By describing how he cast of the dogmatic utilitarianism of his father and Bentham in favor of a revised form of utilitarianism supplemented by romanticism and theories of historical development from continental Europe, he models the behavior that he encourages others to practice. Mill’s chronicle of his intellectual development provides a counter to the epistemic arrogance that he thinks is a latent proclivity among democratic peoples. Because it focuses on the need of all to cultivate an openness to the insights of others, it is likelier to take hold in democratic societies than inegalitarian schemes like plural voting.

# Tocqueville’s Perspective on How to Mediate the Decline of Deference

Like Mill, Tocqueville attributes to people in democratic societies an unwillingness to defer to others, and regards this phenomenon with a mix of trepidation and cautious optimism. Nonetheless, Tocqueville’s understanding of the origins of the situation and how best to deal with it diverges from Mill’s in several ways. Considering their differences on these questions illuminates how Tocqueville would critique Mill’s proposed solutions.

The place of Tocqueville’s account of democratic psychology in his account of why people in democratic societies are resistant to authority warrants particular attention. He introduces this theme in a discussion of why men of talent are rare in American politics. Tocqueville asserts that “what democracy lacks…is not always the capacity to choose men of merit, but the desire and taste to do so.”[[27]](#footnote-27) This unwillingness to recognize and defer to superiority, he says, derives from the fact that “[d]emocratic institutions develop the sentiment of envy in the human heart to a very high degree.” In Tocqueville’s analysis, this is

…not so much because such institutions give everyone the means to equal everyone else as because those means continually prove unavailing to those who employ them. Democratic institutions awaken and flatter the passion for equality without ever being able to satisfy it to the full. No sooner does full equality seem within the people’s reach than it flies from their grasp, and its flight, as Pascal said, is eternal. The people passionately seek a good that is all the more precious because it is close enough to be familiar yet far enough away that it cannot be savored. The chance of success spurs them on; the uncertainty of success vexes them. They struggle, they tire, they grow bitter…*no form of superiority is so legitimate that the sight of it is not wearisome to their eyes*.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Tocqueville sometimes speaks about envy as arising from inequalities of wealth.[[29]](#footnote-29) As the italicized section of the quoted passage makes clear, though, democratic envy extends to *all* claims of superiority and merit. Tocqueville elaborates a political consequence of this when he observes that people can become so attached to equality that they will more readily explain others’ ascent to higher status in terms of criminality than excellence.[[30]](#footnote-30) The envy of superior status that democracy’s impossible-to-satisfy promise of equality engenders is thus an important cause of the decline of deference among people in democratic societies, according to Tocqueville.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Tocqueville’s description of the connection between democracy and envy provides a more nuanced account of why people in democracies are unwilling to defer to authority than what Mill offers. Specifically, Tocqueville emphasizes more than Mill does that the phenomenon is in part the product of a sentiment about justice rather than just an indifference to special qualifications. This helps account for its deep-rootedness and the intensity of its expression. In his review of volume I of *Democracy in America*, Mill does cite the passage about envy. However, he downplays the force of its claims, and points to Tocqueville’s subsequent observations about how social practices in America mitigate this tendency.[[32]](#footnote-32) Consideration of those passages further illuminates Tocqueville’s understanding of the proper response to the problem. Democratic envy does not admit of easy correction, in Tocqueville’s assessment. He calls it as a “secret instinct,” which suggests that people are not aware of their attitude towards talent and how it manifests itself in their political choices.[[33]](#footnote-33) Nonetheless, a few pages after he postulates a connection between democracy and envy, Tocqueville identifies four factors that mitigate democratic peoples’ disinclination to choose people of merit for political office. These include temporary crises, indirect elections, enlightenment, and mores.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In explaining the effect of temporary crises, Tocqueville says that in nations as well as individuals, “it is common to see the very imminence of danger act as midwife to extraordinary virtues…the people, struck by the perils they face, forget for a time their envious passions.”[[35]](#footnote-35) There is little that a wise statesman can do to take advantage of this, though. That may be Tocqueville’s point: during periods of normalcy, people of great merit will not be the norm in democratic politics. He does applaud the way indirect elections of senators improves the quality of people serving in that body, and indicates the desirability of introducing this sort of mechanism elsewhere. Unlike Mill, however, he displays less faith in the extent to which institutional redesign can moderate the decline of deference.

Tocqueville’s identification of “enlightenment” as an attribute of American life that helps mitigate the democratic tendency to envy suggests some overlap with Mill’s endorsement of ensuring universal formal education as a means of making people better able to recognize and appreciate superior wisdom. Tocqueville notes how in New England, where education is widespread, people “have become accustomed to respecting intellectual and moral superiority, and to submitting to it without discomfort” even though they have done away with conventional forms of superiority.[[36]](#footnote-36) Elsewhere, Tocqueville observes that the widespread level of basic education in America has made people “aware of the usefulness of enlightenment and placed them in a position to pass it on to their descendants.” The point here seems to be that when everyone has access to basic schooling, people regard advanced training or intellectual distinction as something to be pursued rather than something of which to be jealous.

Tocqueville downplays the importance of education in the sense of formal schooling, though, stating that he would “not make too much of it.” “True enlightenment,” he says “is primarily the fruit of experience, and if Americans had not gradually become used to governing themselves, their book-learning would not be of much use to them today.”[[37]](#footnote-37) By “experience” Tocqueville means experience with collective life, including both civil society and local politics. Tocqueville states that “[a]s soon as common affairs are dealt with in common, each man sees that he is not as independent of his fellow men as he initially imagined and that, in order to obtain their support, he must often lend them his cooperation.” He also notes that when the public governs, “several of the passions that chill and divide hearts are obliged to withdraw into the recess of the soul and hide there.” He goes on to cite pride, contempt, and egoism as examples of such vices. (*DA* 590-591). The positive effects of participation in public life that Tocqueville identifies here, such as an awareness that one is not as self-sufficient as one may want to think, and that one must restrain one’s pride and contempt to secure the cooperation of others, may also help temper democratic people’s envy-fueled unwillingness to defer to superiority. This is likely part of what Tocqueville means when he says mores are one way in which this tendency can be mitigated.

Intimations of a similar view can be found in Mill’s discussion of workplace relations. Mill saw economic liberty as in part a means to the cultivation of character.[[38]](#footnote-38) To this end, Mill argues for the merit of organizing workplaces along cooperative lines rather than hierarchically. He contends that workers’ feelings that they are working *with* others, not working under them, promises “the elevation of the dignity of labour; a new sense of security and independence in the labouring class; and the conversion of each human being’s daily occupation into a school of the social sympathies and practical intelligence” (*CW* 3:792). It is not improbable to expect that working as part of a shared enterprise would give people an awareness of the value of superior knowledge, and the merit of deferring to it.

Another aspect of American society that Tocqueville includes in his discussion of mores, and which he contends is important for making Americans accustomed to respect moral and intellectual superiority, is religion. When he notes the fact that New Englanders have become accustomed to respecting moral and intellectual superiority, he attributes this in part to the fact that education and liberty there are the products of “morality and religion.” Though Tocqueville attributes the genesis of the idea of human equality to Jesus’ teachings, he also states that inequalities of intelligence stem “directly from God.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Thus, Tocqueville might contend that the right beliefs can inculcate an understanding of equality that emphasizes equal human dignity while also disposing people to accept inequalities of talent. As is widely known, Tocqueville emphasizes how shared beliefs accepted on faith and without discussion help bind a group of people together into a cohesive society.[[40]](#footnote-40) Based on this, perhaps common ideas with respect to religion furnish a framework in which inequalities of talent can be understood both by the public and by those who possess them as in service of the common good rather than individual advantage. To be fair, Mill also acknowledges the importance of shared principles, and a common culture (*CW* 10:133-135). He also promotes the adoption of a despiritualized “religion of humanity” that consists of a faith in human purposes ungrounded in anything transcendent (*CW* 10:403-429). Tocqueville would likely counter that one cannot attain the social advantages of shared beliefs if one dispenses with revealed religion.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Behind these differing approaches to how best to respond to the decline of deference among people in democratic societies lies a deeper disagreement about the ultimate goal. Mill wants to ensure the highly educated a prominent voice in politics, both to counteract other citizens’ unwillingness to defer to them and to impart the idea that some people’s views warrant more consideration than do those of others. Tocqueville, by contrast, does not think that the highly educated as a class necessarily have some special claim to rule. This is in part reflective of the fact that he displays less faith than Mill does in the extent to which the views of intellectuals will really differ from those of the rest of society. He argues that social conditions set boundaries to what sorts of ideas are considered acceptable.[[42]](#footnote-42) He also contends that people in democratic societies often pursue “labors of the mind” not for their intrinsic merit but as a means of gratifying the “restless ambition to which equality gives rise.”[[43]](#footnote-43) A consequence of this is that the success of aspiring intellectuals depends on how well they can sell their ideas to their contemporaries. For this reason, they are constrained in the extent to which they can challenge prevailing sentiments.[[44]](#footnote-44) Additionally, Tocqueville notes that people in democratic societies are particularly disposed to formulate what he calls “general ideas.” While he acknowledges that general ideas are necessary and useful to the extent that they “allow the human mind to make rapid judgments about a great many things at once,” it is nonetheless also the case that the notions they provide “are always incomplete, and what they gain in breadth they lose in exactitude.”[[45]](#footnote-45) For Tocqueville, the proper response to the limitations of general ideas is not to reject them outright, but to avoid overreliance on them and remain mindful of their limitations, in part through involvement in the practical realities of governance.[[46]](#footnote-46) Based on this, Tocqueville might caution that engineering the electoral system to ensure a prominent place for the educated in politics risks giving undue prominence to abstract theories that distort the complex realities of sociopolitical life.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Tocqueville would likely also allege that Mill’s decision to amplify the voice of the highly educated in politics assumes without evidence that a necessary relationship exists between moral virtue and intellectual virtue, or that those with knowledge will also be public-spirited. Tocqueville, had he lived to read *Considerations*, might have objected to Mill’s conflation of intellectual superiority and good character, especially given his observation that merit was common among the people he observed in America despite the rarity of advanced education there.[[48]](#footnote-48) Mill himself even acknowledges a distinction between moral virtue and intellectual virtue when he concedes in passing that the former is more important than the latter. He defends his choice to favor the “instructed few,” though, by saying that moral virtue does not admit of being as easily measured as intellectual virtue does. This concession ends up undermining the subsequent thrust of Mill’s argument. His insistence on the importance of increasing the electoral clout of the highly educated presumes that such people will be reasonably public-spirited rather than self-serving, but he provides no evidence for this assumption.

# Conclusion

Deference, with its connotations of respect paid to superiority, may seem ill-suited for societies founded on egalitarian principles. Indeed, Stephen Macedo includes deference alongside “quiet obedience…unquestioned devotion, and humility” as qualities that cannot be counted among liberal virtues.[[49]](#footnote-49) Macedo may be correct if deference is construed as habitual and unthinking submission to another that one regards as one’s superior. Mill’s account of the shaping power of democratic politics provides a compelling account of why an unwillingness to defer unquestioningly to claims of superiority constitutes a permanent feature of democratic society. Moreover, Mill’s treatment of this development highlights its positive potential, to the extent that it holds out the possibility of increasing the recognition of *natural* claims of merit rather than purely conventional ones. Yet the tendency of people in democratic societies to rely on private judgment and trust their own reason does not mean that respect for intellectual superiority is a lost feature of hierarchical societies of the past. Mill’s suggestions for how to inculcate this disposition, even when they miss the mark, hold enduring lessons.

Redesigning political institutions along the lines that Mill recommends will be of limited efficacy for moderating the unwillingness of people in democratic societies to defer to the intellectually distinguished, and may even backfire. Attempts to weight political power in favor of those deemed to be intellectually superior through plural voting schemes are unlikely to impart the view that some people’s opinions warrant more consideration. Such schemes will likely engender resentment, achieving their electoral goals at the expense of social solidarity. Moreover, though he himself fails to grasp the full significance of it, Mill’s recognition of a distinction between intellectual excellence and moral excellence provides an important caution to those today who hold an untroubled faith in meritocratic systems of advancement.

Some form of proportional representation, by contrast, is worth considering, although not necessarily as a way to increase the electoral clout of the educated minority.[[50]](#footnote-50) Rather, it could broaden the range of views represented in the legislature, and thus advance the fructifying clash of opposed perspectives that Mill puts so much emphasis on in chapter 2 of *On Liberty*. By doing so, proportional representation could also ameliorate some of the partisan gridlock that has characterized the U.S. Congress in recent years.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Mill’s vision for how to mediate the tension between expertise and popular sovereignty by reconfiguring the role of elected representatives in the lawmaking process is interesting given that it shows him anticipating the challenges that the growth of bureaucratic governance would pose for democracy. The specifics of what Mill proposes, though, are of uncertain utility. It could affirm the importance of specialized knowledge in collective life. However, restricting legislators to only voting up or down on bills that civil servants draft rests on a questionable distinction between legislation’s broad goals and its particulars. A bill’s details might invite just as much principled debate as its higher-order purpose. Indeed, the space Mill leaves for democratic deliberation here seems quite restricted. One might argue that though involving representatives in the details of legislation may sometimes entail losses in efficiency, it also ensures greater representativeness and accountability. Indeed, one might further contend that because it brings in a wider range of perspectives and bases of knowledge, having representatives discuss the details of legislation will produce substantively better policy outcomes in the long run than if these details were the sole purview of putative experts who had only one paradigm for viewing problems. In any case, Mill’s reconfiguration of elected representatives’ role in policymaking provides an impetus for continued reflection about the ongoing task of mediating the tension between expertise and popular sovereignty.

Mill’s remarks in his St. Andrews Address underscore the importance of a rigorous and thorough education for equipping citizens to evaluate claims of knowledge and wisdom, and thus the potential for such an education to inculcate a form of deference based on reasoned understanding of someone else’s superiority rather than slavish submission. Mill’s affirmation of the importance of formal education remains on the level of generality, though and so gives readers little guidance about how to achieve this goal. By contrast, Tocqueville and Mill’s consensus on the shaping power of practical experience, whether in public life or the workplace, provides more practical guidance. This point illustrates the extent to which our ideas and attitudes can be shaped not just through the overt inculcation of ideas in a formal educational setting, but also via our day-to-day conduct in the world. Of course, the workplace cooperatives that Mill esteems constitute a small minority of businesses existing today. As Barker notes, one can attribute this to a variety of factors, such as the burdens of self-management, concerns about carrying free riders, and competition with traditionally organized firms.[[52]](#footnote-52) But while the specifics of Mill’s vision of the shape that more cooperatively organized workplaces should take may be flawed, the focus on the formative power of one’s workplace experience is worth retaining when thinking about how to shape citizens that will think for themselves while also recognizing and accepting the guidance of those of intellectual distinction. Promoting greater worker involvement in firm governance could offer one way to advance the Millian value of cooperation in the workplace.

Tocqueville’s suggestion that deference to intellectual superiority in democratic society is underwritten by consensus on religious beliefs is an idea that does not translate into pluralistic milieu of contemporary democracies. What we can learn from this, though, is that the distrust of intellectual authority may be a consequence of a waning of shared culture and sense of common purposes. The decline of deference, then, may be best moderated by addressing this deeper cause.

1. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Confidence in Higher Education Down Since 2015," www.Gallup.com, last modified October 9, 2018, accessed January 14, 2020, https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/242441/confidence-higher-education-down-2015.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Chris Hayes, *Twilight of the Elites: America after Meritocracy* (New York: Crown, 2012). See especially 103-137. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thomas M. Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Frederick Rosen observes that Mill’s vision for the future of the laboring class involves them becoming independent while continuing to feel respect “for superiority of intellect and knowledge,” but he does not examine Mill’s methods for cultivating deference. (Rosen, *Mill: Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 171-176). Richard B. Friedman observes that Mill was deeply concerned with the question of authority, which he identified with “deference on the part of some persons to the moral and political beliefs of others.” However, Friedman does not explicate Mill’s account of authority so understood, but rather attempts to demonstrate its continuity with prior utilitarian thought. (Friedman, "An Introduction to Mill's Theory of Authority," in *Mill: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1968), 379-425.) One exception to the neglect of this topic is Alfred Moore, “Deference in Numbers: Consensus, Dissent and Judgement in Mill’s Account of Authority,” *Political Studies*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2014): 187-201. My account of this theme differs from Moore’s in that I analyze what Mill saw as the origins of the decline of deference in democracy, and then consider his strategies for responding to it, while Moore focuses on deference within the context of Mill’s theory of authority. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Chris Barker, *Educating Liberty: Democracy and Aristocracy in J. S. Mill's Political Thought* (Rochester, NY, USA: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I borrow the terms “epistemic humility” and “epistemic arrogance” from Moore, “Deference in Numbers,” 196-197. I build on Moore’s analysis by examining Mill’s account of how democracy generates these two dispositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alan Ryan encapsulates this well when he writes that Mill’s concern with modern society was not so much that we suffer from a deficit of authority or a surfeit of it but rather a deficit of the *right* kind of authority and a surfeit of the *wrong* kind. See Alan Ryan, “Bureaucracy, Democracy, Liberty: Some Unanswered Questions in Mill’s Politics,” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, edited by Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See, for example, Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), and Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For some analyses of this aspect of Mill’s thought, see Bernard Semmel, *John Stuart Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Peter Berkowitz, "Mill: Liberty, Virtue, and the Discipline of Individuality," in *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism*, ed. Eldon J. Eisenach (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 13-47; and Robert Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism: J.S. Mill's Use of Ancient, Religious, Liberal, and Romantic Moralities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), especially 53-55, 75. These studies examine Mill’s concern with virtue in more general terms; I build on them by focusing on Mill’s reflections on how to cultivate the specific character trait of deference. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See, for example, Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues* (Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press, 1990), and William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Mill wrote extensively over a career that spanned several decades, and he refined his ideas on a host of subjects during that time (a fact that he himself acknowledges in his autobiography). One must therefore be cautious when construing views expressed at the beginning of his intellectual life as being representative of his mature thought. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Mill decided not to include “Spirit of the Age” in *Dissertations and Discussions*, an anthology of his work that he published during his lifetime, comparison of key passages in this essay with later works shows that it contains ideas that he retained in some form throughout his life. Additionally, while in his autobiography he laments that this essay was “lumbering in style” and “ill-timed” (*CW* 1:181), he never goes so far as to disavow its contents. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. All references to Mill’s writings in this paper are to *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 32 vols., ed. J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Here Mill is speaking specifically of the relations between manual laborers and the rich at the dawn of industrialization. However, the argument he makes is not about economic relations, but moral and intellectual relations between working people and the upper strata of society, so it is warranted to extrapolate these remarks to the relations between everyday people and the educated elite in modern democracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For an analysis of Tocqueville’s view of the origins of the intellectual habits of democratic people and how best to educate them, see Alec Arellano, “Tocqueville on Intellectual Independence, Doubt, and Democratic Citizenship,” *The Review of Politics* 82 (1): 49-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Similarly, Mill declares in “Civilization” that the progress of democracy is “gradually [putting] an end to every kind of unearned distinction,” a fact which he says will further the improvement of the higher classes (*CW* 19:508, 18:147). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, *CW* 3:764-765, 19:458. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See, for example, Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For more on this aspect of Mill’s thought, see Brandon P. Turner, “John Stuart Mill and the Antagonistic Foundations of Liberal Politics,” *The Review of Politics*, 72, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 25-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For Mill’s discussion of this proposal, see *CW* 19: 453-460. My summary of it is indebted to the one provided by Jennie Ikuta in "Mill as Ambivalent Democrat: The Corruption and Cultivation of Human Flourishing in Democratic Society and Politics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41, no. 7 (2015): 712-714. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See his statement that “[p]eople in parliament are not a selection of the greatest political minds in the country, from whose opinions little could with certainty be inferred concerning those of the nation, but are, when properly constituted, a fair sample of every grade of intellect among the people which is at all to be entitled to a voice in public affairs” (*CW* 19:433). Note also that, though Mill wants to ensure that the educated elite have a special role in government, he repeatedly warns that a government controlled *solely* by such an elite will inevitably lead to intellectual stagnation (*CW* 10:301-303, 315, 13:502). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For an elaboration of this reading, see Ikuta, “Mill as Ambivalent Democrat,” 712. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. As Mill himself writes, “a people cannot be well governed in opposition to their primary notions of right, even though these may in some points be erroneous” (*CW* 19:508). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. So great is Mill’s conviction regarding the importance of educational attainment for citizenship that he avers in *Considerations* that “universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement” (*CW* 19:470). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In this vein, Ryan argues that, for Mill, real authority is recognized through “rational acquiescence.” Ryan, “Bureaucracy, Democracy, Liberty,” 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Moore, “Deference in Numbers,” 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. When Tocqueville speaks of merit [*mérite*] in this chapter, he seems to intend for the term to include intellectual distinction while not being restricted to it. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. (New York, NY: The Library of America, 2004), 226, emphasis mine. Tocqueville repeats this idea in volume II (*Democracy in America*, 627). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*,243-244. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*,253. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Arellano, “Tocqueville on Intellectual Independence,” 56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Democracy in America*, 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Michael Locke McLendon, "The Politics of Sour Grapes: Sartre, Elster, and Tocqueville on Frustration, Failure, and Self-Deception," *Review of Politics* 75, no. 2 (2013): 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Tocqueville also argues that American lawmakers have countered envious sentiments with “the idea of rights.” Consideration of his discussion of the “idea of rights in the United States,” though, suggests that it counters envy of inequalities of wealth, so I have omitted it in my discussion of ways Tocqueville thinks that the envy of superior merit can be tempered. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 359, 272-275. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 350-351. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Rosen, *Mill*, 161, Barker, *Educating Liberty*, 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 496, 627. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 501. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292-300. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* 521.Tocqueville’s judgment that those who pursue intellectual distinction in democratic societies often do so out of a desire for “fame, power or wealth” furnishes another reason for concluding that he would reject Mill’s faith in this class of people as being uniquely public-spirited. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 494-497. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. James Ceaser contends that Tocqueville’s “new political science” sought to limit the influence of intellectuals over public opinion and promote locally situated sources of knowledge and authority. See James Ceaser, "Alexis de Tocqueville on Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual," *The American Political Science Review* 79, no. 3 (September 1985): 656-672. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 225, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. As Barker notes, proportional representation could plausibly end up favoring any number of demographic minorities other than the intellectual elite. See Barker, *Educating Liberty*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Reihan Salam and Rob Richie’s recent New York Times opinion piece endorsing proportional representation on these grounds. Salam and Richie, "How to Make Congress Bipartisan," *The New York Times* (New York), July 7, 2017, A 19, accessed December 5, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/opinion/how-to-make-congress-bipartisan.html. Many countries today use some version of proportional representation, although the specifics differ from what the Hare Plan stipulates. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Barker, *Educating Liberty*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)