

Becoming a Connoisseur of Liberty: Tocqueville on Democratic Taste

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Everyone familiar with Tocqueville's work in *Democracy in America* knows his argument that liberty depends on several factors in American society. Some argue that liberty depends chiefly on institutions such as local government, associational life, and juries.¹ Others argue that liberty depends on citizen virtue for Tocqueville.² Still others suggest liberty depends primarily on the role of religion.³ While I agree that liberty depends on all these factors, I argue that the literature is missing a key part of Tocqueville's argument—liberty also depends on taste.

Many have suggested that democratic society lacks taste completely. The critique of taste often takes two forms. One is the view expressed by European thinkers of American democratic society. Comparing European and American society, the argument is that taste disappears in America. For example, Levine (2009) has recently argued that this has been a familiar trope throughout history that the new American society had no taste compared to their European counterparts. In his historical account of the stages of European travelers' views of America through four periods from the Indians to America as representative of technology, Levine argues that Europeans saw America as emblematic of modernity and the future, and therefore a representation of what Europe would become. However, in America they did not see the social, political, and cultural values that had been characteristic of Europe for centuries:

Nineteenth-century European thinkers typically saw America as the epitome of the self-interested individualism of the new commercial society and as representing the centralization of power by the new middle-class democratic regime. First, America was said to embody the disorder caused by collapsing institutions. The authority of all previous standards—experience, age, birth, genius, talent, and virtue—was undercut in America. Second, America represented a growing obsession with money. It was because of this that all other

¹ See for example: Avramenko and Gingerich (2014), Carrese (1998), Dzur (2010), Engster (1998), Gannett (2003, 2005), and Kraynak (1967).

² See for example: Avramenko (2011), Bellah (2008), Craiutu (2005), Krause (2002), Lawler (1995).

³ See for example: Avramenko (2012), Galston (1987), Hinkley (1990), Kries (2012), Mitchell (1995), Zuckert (1981, 1992).

standards of human value were ignored. Third, America represented unchecked equality. The new type of man preferred equality to liberty, as Tocqueville and Mill warned. Finally, the new form of government represented the power of the majority...rule of the majority stifled creativity and individuality (31).

Levine's categorization of the European critique of and disdain for America centers on concerns of aesthetic. Americans are seen as lacking aesthetic appreciation of the world around them.

The other version of the critique of democratic taste, often attributed to Bourdieu (1984) and his work on France, is that while taste still exists in democracy, it exists only as a debased form of the Kantian aesthetic. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu famously argues that taste in democratic society is incapable of making distinctions in the aristocratic, aesthetic sense. Instead, "taste functions as a marker of class."⁴ The wealthy decide what is tasteful according to what they can purchase, rather than aesthetic judgement. Taste reinforces social inequalities: "That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences."⁵ He argues that elites in society drive tastes and classes emerge because not everyone can attain these tastes that are based primarily on affluence.

Thus, taste functions as imitation. Taste is not about genuine differences in preference, but rather that people prefer what they are instructed to prefer. The quality of the goods consumed is irrelevant. Taste is about maintaining appearances:

...ordinary popularization cannot, by definition, admit to being what it is, and the imposture it presupposes would necessarily fail if it could not rely on the complicity of consumers. This complicity is guaranteed in advance since, in culture as elsewhere, the consumption of 'imitations' is a kind of unconscious bluff which chiefly deceives the bluffer, who has most interest in taking the copy

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, (Mass.: Harvard University Press): 1984, 2.

⁵ Bourdieu (1984), 7.

for the original, like the purchasers of 'seconds,' 'rejects', cut-price or second-hand goods, who need to convince themselves that 'it's cheaper and creates the same effect.'⁶

The masses' drive to have the proper taste creates a market for consumer goods that are merely imitations. Bourdieu argues that taste creates the idea of "spontaneous generation" as though each individual has a role in creating it, while most people are actually imitators, not capable of having genuine, unique preferences or the ability to discern and the faculty to judge quality and beauty. Bourdieu argues that taste as preference functions the same way in democratic politics. Though much of democracy is based on individual participation and the role of public opinion, he argues that public opinion is not personally generated but created by the very surveys that try to measure it.⁷ Further, he finds that democratic society problematically associates political aptitude with cultural taste. Taste creates distinctions between people that are not about genuine difference in ability to judge in Bourdieu's argument.

I argue that taste is neither lacking nor aberrant in democratic society, rather it functions in a different way. In the original Kantian understanding, taste means having an aesthetic awareness that allows one to distinguish between better and worse, higher and lower. For Kant, aesthetic judgment is part of the human being's ability to reason according to a priori principles. The pleasure one feels from something that is beautiful is derived from perceiving its relationship to reason. Kant's understanding of taste is genuine aesthetic awareness of the sublime. Taste in the way Kant understands it does not exist in America, in Tocqueville's view. He argues that Americans have no art or literature.⁸ On the other hand, he recognizes a different

⁶ Bourdieu (1984), 323.

⁷ Bourdieu (1984), 413.

⁸ See Vol II, Part I, Chapters 11 and 13.

kind of taste at work in American society—the taste for freedom. This taste for freedom in democracy is not new, in fact, Tocqueville had recognized a taste for freedom in aristocratic France. However, the taste for freedom manifests itself differently in democratic society. It depends on distinctive democratic preferences, habits, and a society in which to exercise the judgement learned through these habits. Though the democratic taste Tocqueville sees is not the Kantian aesthetic that was characteristic of aristocratic society, it still functions as an ability to discern after having an apprenticeship in its ways. I argue that while aristocratic aesthetic involved the ability to discern better and worse beauty and sublimity, democratic taste allows Americans to distinguish between better and worse people as part of the goal of liberty through self-government.

My paper will proceed in three parts to explain how taste functions in democratic society. In the first part, I will discuss taste understood as preference. Tocqueville argues that American life is dominated by a taste for well-being. This preference manifests itself in other preferences—tastes—that are different from those expressed in aristocratic society, namely commerce, public opinion, and equality. In part two I will discuss how these tastes as preferences can contribute to the taste for liberty in society when cultivated through an apprenticeship in the taste or can become debased if they become passions. Finally, in the last part of the paper I will discuss how the apprenticeship of liberty develops the skill of connoisseurship of people that is key for the democratic citizen's ability to self-govern. I argue that healthy taste in democratic society cultivates connections between people and develops democratic citizens into connoisseurs of people who are self-governing because of their distinctive, democratic taste for liberty.

I. Taste Begins with Preference

Tocqueville uses the language of Americans having a “taste for” [*goût de*] throughout his text.⁹ In describing the differences between aristocratic and democratic taste, Tocqueville uses *goût* to mean several things, namely to refer to taste as preference and taste as something that must be cultivated over time—as connoisseurship. This consistency in terms is helpful, however, because these changes in taste understood as preference demonstrate the overarching change that has taken place in taste understood as connoisseurship between aristocracy and democracy. The kind of taste Bourdieu is concerned with is not the reality of taste in Tocqueville’s view of democracy in America. Taste defined as aesthetic and understood as marking class distinctions is a thing of the aristocratic past. The taste Tocqueville sees in America is a connoisseurship of people; it is relational rather than distinctive. Each of these tastes that are characteristic of society demonstrate how the connoisseurship of people begins. Taste begins with preferences because these distinctly democratic preferences are the starting points for a theory of democratic taste that brings people together rather than divides them.

We can best begin to understand Tocqueville’s idea of the unique democratic taste for liberty through the ways in which Tocqueville talks about taste as preference. The most illustrative of these changes in preference is that of the shift from the taste for luxury in aristocracy to the taste for well-being [*bien-être*] in democracy. Whereas aristocratic taste had been for luxury which entails the pursuit of the aesthetic, the taste for luxury in democratic times

⁹ The French dictionary *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 6th Edition (1835) from the same year that Tocqueville published *Democracy* defines taste in the following ways: for an odor, for eating food, aesthetic taste for discerning beauty, as individual preference, and finally the way something is made.

comes to mean the taste for well-being and the pursuit of commerce.¹⁰ Tocqueville explains the difference between aristocratic aesthetic and democratic taste best when he says: “It would be a waste of my readers’ time and of my own to explain how the general moderate standard of wealth, the absence of superfluity, and the universal desire for comfort, with the constant efforts made by all to procure it, encourage a taste for the useful more than love of beauty...they want beauty itself to be useful.”¹¹ Aristocrats have a taste for things like literature and art, beauty, the sublime, luxury, distinction, and freedom while Americans have a taste for things like commerce, equality, trade, well-being, uniformity, but also freedom.

The first shift in preference that is characteristic of the change in democratic society from aristocratic society is the shift from a preference for art and beauty, to a preference for commerce and the useful. When conditions became equal and professions were no longer defined by birth, the taste for well-being became dominant and with it the necessity of commerce. The possibilities for bettering oneself were endless. The Americans became a commercial people because satisfying the desire for luxury that was now possible for everyone could be satisfied quickly through commerce. Whereas agriculture, the primary source of subsistence in aristocratic society, was a slow pursuit that was inconsistent in its dividends, commerce allowed people to make money quickly:

Our man has formed a taste for physical pleasures; he sees thousands around him enjoying them; he himself has tasted some too, and he is very keen to acquire the means to enjoy them more...To cultivate the ground promises an almost certain reward for his efforts, but a slow one...Democracy therefore not only multiplies the number of workers but also leads men to adopt one type of work rather than

¹⁰ Tocqueville puts it: “A passion for well-being is, as we shall see, the most lively of all the emotions aroused or inflamed by equality, and it is a passion shared by all. So this taste for well-being is the most striking and unalterable characteristic of democratic ages.” DA, 448.

¹¹ DA, 465.

another. It gives them a distaste for agriculture and directs them into trade and industry.¹²

Democratic taste is not about knowing a subject deeply and appreciating its transcendence, as with aristocratic aesthetic, but about making money quickly and the means that are most useful to obtaining well-being. An aesthetic for art could only be learned through the study of art; this aesthetic taste for art was not accessible to everyone because they did not have leisure time to indulge such luxury. It was based on distinctions. The pursuit of commerce, Tocqueville argues, is accessible and appealing to everyone in democracy:

In democratic countries where money does not carry its possessor to power, but often rather bars him from it, rich men tend not to know what to do with their leisure...In democracies nothing has brighter luster than commerce; it attracts the attention of the public and fills the imagination of the crowd; all passionate energies are directed that way. There is nothing to stop the rich going in for it, neither their own prejudices nor those of anyone else. The rich in democracies never form a body with its own mores and way of enforcing the same; no opinions peculiar to their class restrain them, and public opinion urges them on. Moreover, the great fortunes found in a democracy are almost always of commercial origin, and so it takes several generations for their possessors entirely to lose habits of business.¹³

Commerce catches the eye with its “bright luster,” just as good art or good music might interest an observer. However, though commerce captivates the masses, it still requires a kind of study over generations for success in the same way that becoming proficient at playing music is only developed over time. Commerce is constantly innovating to be more efficient.¹⁴ Tocqueville argues that commerce does not produce a class, but instead produces a way of thinking, a habit.

¹² DA, 552.

¹³ DA, 553.

¹⁴ See DA, 553: “I once met an American sailor and asked him why his country’s ships are made so that they will not last long. He answered offhand that the art of navigation was making such quick progress that even the best of boats would be almost useless if it lasted more than a few years.”

Just as commerce cultivates habits in business, it also cultivates relations between people. The taste (preference) for commerce is key to fostering altruism through the principle of self-interest well-understood. This idea demonstrates how the democratic taste for commerce, when cultivated can encourage the connoisseurship of people. Tocqueville argues that Americans see the value in providing small amounts of extra effort toward helping one another in their daily lives because they can see how helping the common good is also in their private interest.¹⁵ Beginning with their own interests, commerce encourages democratic individuals to see how those interests relate to the interests of others. They see that to satisfy their private interests to the fullest, they need to help others satisfy theirs, therefore improving the common good.

Tocqueville also discusses the shift in taste understood as preference for authority from specific to abstract authority. In aristocratic times, the taste for authority was based on a recognition of distinction. Thus, they respected familial authority, the authority of class, and the authority of religion. In democracy, however, Americans reject authority in the concrete sense of one person or institution being in power over them, but they accept the abstract power of the “they” or the people, because each of them is part of the people: “We must make a clear distinction between two things: equality makes men want to form their own opinions, but it also gives them a taste for and a conception of a power in society which is unique, simple, and the same for all.”¹⁶ One way that the preference for abstract authority cultivates relationships between people that can lead to liberty in self-governance for Tocqueville is through the

¹⁵ See DA, 510: “It is difficult to force a man out of himself and get him to take an interest in the affairs of the whole state, for he has little understanding of the way in which the fate of the state can influence his own lot. But if it is a question of taking a road past his property, he sees at once that this small public matter has a bearing on his greatest private interests, and there is no need to point out to him the close connection between his private profit and the general interest.”

¹⁶ DA, 450.

newspaper. Newspapers appeal to a people that conforms to one another's opinions. Because it relays thoughts that people have that are similar, newspapers are key in facilitating the formation of associations between people.¹⁷

Finally, Tocqueville describes the shift in taste understood as preference from society demarcated by classes to society defined by equality. In aristocratic society, each person knew their place in society. Classes and social positions were fixed. In democratic society, however, formal class distinctions have been eliminated and instead equality of conditions prevails. Tocqueville often discusses this preference for equality as a passion. It drives democratic citizens to want sameness:

There is indeed a manly and legitimate passion for equality which rouses in all men a desire to be strong and respected. This passion tends to elevate the little man to the rank of the great. But the human heart also nourishes a debased taste for equality, which leads the weak to want to drag the strong down to their level and which induces men to prefer equality in servitude to inequality in freedom.¹⁸

Tocqueville notes how strong the taste for equality is in democratic society and cautions that this taste must be balanced with the taste for freedom, as I will discuss in the next section. Still, being equal in social position also allows democratic citizens to choose whom they associate with rather than being forced into association through class. Tocqueville demonstrates how a preference for equality can cultivate the "art of freedom"¹⁹ in democratic society by teaching

¹⁷ In a chapter titled "On the Connection between Associations and Newspapers," that Tocqueville says: "Only a newspaper can put the same thought at the same time before a thousand readers" DA, 518.

¹⁸ DA, 57.

¹⁹ See DA, 354 where Tocqueville talks about freedom as an art that must be learned by the freed slaves: "We have pointed out how the northern states managed the transition from slavery to freedom. They keep the present generation in chains, emancipating those of the future; by this means Negroes are introduced only slowly into society, and while that man who might make ill use of his independence is restrained in servitude, the one who is emancipated before he is master of himself has still time to learn the art of being free." See also DA, 290 when Tocqueville discusses the value of religion for democracy: "I have just pointed out the direct action of religion on politics in the United States. Its indirect action seems to me much greater still, and it is just when it is not speaking of freedom at all that it best teaches the Americans the art of being free."

people how to unite. The idea of democratic taste understood as a connoisseurship of people is embodied in how people join together based on shared interests rather than shared classes. It is through connecting based on taste that Tocqueville believes associations can form in society.

Tocqueville shows us that while democratic taste is not aristocratic, aesthetic taste, it has its own value as American, democratic taste that represents democratic people's cultivated skill in associating with one another and maintaining their freedom.

II. Freedom's Apprenticeship: The Development of Democratic Taste²⁰

Taste for Tocqueville is not an inherent and inevitable good for political life. Taste can be cultivated and become beneficial for political life or it can be left to develop into a passion and be problematic for politics. Tocqueville saw both the potential and problematic of taste in aristocratic France and democratic America.

In the *Ancien Régime*, Tocqueville's argument is that the Revolution destroyed freedom initially because it abruptly uprooted institutions that had promoted freedom for centuries. In a chapter titled "Of the Kind of Freedom That Existed under the Old Regime and Its Influence on the Revolution" Tocqueville describes how the aristocracy had promoted freedom in society because of its apprenticeship over centuries:

One must still regret that, instead of bending the nobility under the yoke of the law, we have slaughtered it and alienated it. In acting thus, we have deprived the nation of a necessary part of its substance, and given liberty a wound that can never be healed. A class which led for centuries had acquired, during that long, uncontested experience of greatness, a certain pride of heart, a natural confidence in its strength, a habit of being respected, which made it into the most resistant part of the social body. It not only had manly mores, it increased the virility of the other classes by example.²¹

²⁰ The phrase is Tocqueville's: "It cannot be repeated too often: nothing is more fertile in marvels than the art of being free, but nothing is harder than freedom's apprenticeship." DA, 240.

²¹ Alexis de Tocqueville. *The Old Regime and the Revolution, Volume I*. ed. and trans. François Furet, and Françoise Mélonio (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press) 1998, 173. Hereafter (AR, page).

The aristocracy was responsible for protecting local liberty from the tyranny of the king. They had centuries of experience running their local parishes. The lords had been responsible “to divide the taxes, repair churches, build schools, convoke and preside over the parish assembly,” but as the French government centralized in the time leading up to the revolution, the lords no longer served these duties that had been essential for local freedom.²² The lords were independent of the king; they had their own power and used it to manage and protect their individual parishes. Their role as mediator between king and people was the lord’s apprenticeship in liberty.

Tocqueville asserts that the aristocrats understood the necessity of apprenticeship for good taste. The preferences of aristocrats described above were developed over time rather than the democratic preference of wanting things instantaneously. When discussing the lack of art and literature in American society, Tocqueville describes the craftsmanship required for art in aristocracy in order to achieve “things very well made and lasting.”²³ In order to keep this kind of skill level in their products, craftsmen could only produce for a few at high because of the time required to make the pieces. He makes a similar argument about literature in aristocracy: “As neither they nor their fathers have ever needed to be engrossed in material drudgery, several generations will have cultivated things of the mind. They will have learned to understand literature as an art, to love it in the end for its own sake, and to take a scholarly pleasure in seeing that all the rules are obeyed.”²⁴ Aristocrats have a taste for literature because their knowledge of it has been developed over *generations*. They have had a long apprenticeship in learning its rules

²² AR, 114.

²³ DA, 466.

²⁴ DA, 472.

and discerning its quality. Similarly, aristocrats had an apprenticeship in maintaining liberty within their class and their families. Generation after generation passed onto the next how to run an estate, facilitate the needs of their town and people, and serve the king.²⁵

Taste in aristocratic France became debased, however, when it developed into an unthinking passion. The taste for freedom becomes debased in Tocqueville's argument when it no longer is cultivated through apprenticeship. As I argued, Tocqueville describes the role of taste in the *Ancien Régime* as a taste based on preference for the aesthetic. The French had always had a taste for freedom.²⁶ However when they attempted to transition to democracy based on their aesthetic tastes, and Tocqueville notes that love of literature was problematic for the new pursuit of liberty in revolution:

These new qualities were so well incorporated into the old foundation of French character that we have often attributed to our nature what derived purely from this unique education. I have heard it argued that the taste, or rather the passion, that we have shown during the past sixty years for general ideas systems, and big words in political matters, came from I don't know what special attribute of our race, from what is called a bit pompously the French mind: as if this supposed attribute could have appeared all at once at the end of the last century, after having been hidden during all the rest of our history. What is unique is that we have kept the habits we took from literature while losing almost completely our old love of letters.²⁷

The translation of aesthetic knowledge into a form of government created a centralized government with very little place for the individual. By creating a government based on

²⁵ See for example when Tocqueville compares the democratic family to an aristocratic one: "In aristocracies, therefore, the father is not only the political head of the family but also the instrument of tradition, the interpreter of custom, and the arbiter of mores. He is heard with deference, he is addressed always with respect, and the affection felt for him is ever mingled with fear" DA 587.

²⁶ Tocqueville notes several times in the *Ancien Régime* how the French had always had a taste for freedom, even in their aristocratic institutions. He discusses "local freedoms" that disappeared with the onset of the Revolution (AR, 146). Tocqueville, an aristocrat himself, also says: Some may accuse me of displaying too strong a taste for freedom, which, I am assured, is hardly of concern to anyone in France today. I ask those who reproach me thus to take into account that in my case this habit is very old. It was almost twenty years ago that, speaking of another society, I wrote almost exactly what I am now about to say" (AR, 87).

²⁷ AR, 202.

aesthetic, the French failed to create institutions that would allow people to relate to one another. Instead they created institutions that only allowed people to work with the state. And interestingly, Tocqueville notes that while the new idea for free government began with aesthetics, the meaning of these aesthetic sources was lost in the transition.

The French apprenticeship in freedom was one based in beauty, the sublime, and luxury, and it caused them to only be able to create a centralized government that reduced individual liberty. Tocqueville argues that centralization occurred in Paris because it was the site of French consumerism and from this followed industry and finally politics:

Instead of being only a commercial town, a place of consumption and pleasure, Paris had become a town of industry and manufacturing; a second fact which in the end gave a new and more formidable character to the first...As all government business was attracted to Paris, industry rushed in too. As Paris became more and more the model and arbiter of taste, the unique center of power and art, the principal location of national activity, the industrial life of the nation retreated there and became more concentrated.²⁸

Parisian preferences—tastes—centralized the business of the entire country to the city that had fostered those tastes. Rather than taste as preference cultivating the ability to self-govern for the French, it cultivated the passion for generality in the form of the state. The ability to form free institutions was tainted by aristocratic tastes in Tocqueville's account. The French had always

²⁸ AR, 178.

had a taste for freedom, but they misappropriated this taste into new institutions which did not protect liberty.²⁹

Similarly, Tocqueville argues that while the taste for liberty is natural in democratic society, that is, there is an inherent preference for it, preferring liberty is insufficient. Rather, this taste for liberty is an art—it must be cultivated. Just as the aristocratic tastes for art and for the luxury of an estate had to be learned over time, democratic taste does not become a skill without an apprenticeship. Tocqueville characterizes the difference between aristocracy and democracy primarily as this difference between aristocrats developing preferences over time and democrats wanting instant gratification. This is where the new democratic idea of taste becomes central for Tocqueville’s argument. Looking for the idea of taste in the places where it was common in aristocracy, such as art and literature, in democratic society will demonstrate a debased sense of taste. American society does not have an apprenticeship in these forms of taste. Democrats do not have an apprenticeship in that which is sublime, but in that which is useful. Democratic tastes must be shaped through a kind of apprenticeship in freedom: “For the heart needs an apprenticeship of custom and education to appreciate the refined pleasure derived from distinguished and fastidious manners; once the habit is lost; the taste for them easily goes too.”³⁰ Tocqueville asserts that the “art” of the taste for freedom must be cultivated in private life, and thus will act as an apprenticeship for public life.

²⁹ Tocqueville describes the lack of freedom in centralized government saying: “One must never lost sight of this, if one wants to understand the history of our revolution. When the love of the French for political freedom awoke, they had already conceived a certain number of ideas in regard to government which not only did not easily accord with the existence of free institutions but were almost always opposed to them. They had accepted as the ideal society a people without any aristocracy other than government officials, a single and all powerful administration, director of the state, guardian of individuals. In wishing to be free, they did not intend to depart in the slightest from this basic idea; they only tried to reconcile it with the idea of freedom...It is this desire to introduce political liberty among ideas and institutions which are foreign or opposed to it, but for which we had already acquired the habit or conceived the taste, that for sixty years has produced so many vain attempts at a free government, followed by disastrous revolutions” AR, 216.

³⁰ DA, 608.

The taste for freedom is a natural, but impermanent, result of the equality of conditions.

Tocqueville calls taste here, instinctive:

The men living in the democratic centuries into which we are entering have a natural taste for freedom. By nature they are impatient in putting up with any regulation. They get tired of the duration even of the state they have chosen. They love power but are inclined to scorn and hate those who wield it, and they easily escape its grasp by reason of their very insignificance and changeableness. These instincts will always recur because they result from the state of society, which will not change. For a long time they will prevent the establishment of any despotism, and they will furnish fresh weapons for each new generation wanting to struggle for human liberty. Let us, then, look forward to the future with that salutary fear which makes men keep watch and ward for freedom, and not with that flabby, idle terror which makes men's hearts sink and enervates them.³¹

I have quoted Tocqueville at length here because in describing what a taste for freedom entails, he is also providing a description for why it is natural but not permanent.³² The idea that freedom is both natural to people but requires skill to practice seems contradictory. The idea of taste helps Tocqueville explain what he means by this complication. The taste for freedom is not a passion. Though it comes naturally, it can be challenged by the other tastes that equality also produces, most importantly the taste for well-being.³³ These debased tastes are stronger than the taste for freedom because they become more like passions. Freedom, on the other hand, is a preference that has to be thoughtfully considered and carefully maintained. In a section on “Influence of the Laws upon the Maintenance of a Democratic Republic in the United States” within a chapter on “Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic” Tocqueville suggests three ways in which the taste for freedom can be cultivated and maintained: federal power,

³¹ DA, 702.

³² For more on Tocqueville's concerns about the permanence of freedom see the argument in Joshua Mitchell (1995) *The Fragility of Freedom*.

³³ Alan Kahan (2001, 2013) makes a similar argument that the taste for liberty is the only thing that can successfully counter the taste for well-being.

communal institutions and the organization of the judicial power.³⁴ In particular, the communal institutions “moderate the despotism of the majority and give the people both a taste for freedom and the skill to be free.”³⁵ In this section, I will follow Tocqueville’s outline in arguing that the institutions of democratic life such as federalism, communal institutions such as the family, religion, and associations, and the judiciary power in the form of juries and lawyers serve to cultivate the taste for freedom.

Local Government: The Township

The first institution that cultivates the taste for freedom is the township.³⁶ Tocqueville calls the township a “school” for freedom because “they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it.”³⁷ The local government is where people have the most access to government and therefore the most opportunity to govern themselves through participation in the town hall meeting. In the township, each person can participate in a job, be recognized for their work, and influence others who have positions. Political power is attainable in the township governance structure. Tocqueville also notes that there is “continual activity which keeps society on the move without turmoil.”³⁸ There need be no idle hands in the township government. Because people know each other and the locus of power is small, the township also functions as an association where people can and have to work together. The township is also an apprenticeship because governing within it is a skill that is developed over time. Tocqueville calls the township “ancient.”³⁹ The township serves as an apprenticeship in

³⁴ DA, 287.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For more on local government and its importance to democracy in Tocqueville see Gannett (2003), Gannett (2005)

³⁷ DA, 63.

³⁸ DA, 69.

³⁹ DA, 63.

freedom because people learn the laws by participating with them and learn to have a society because they participate with each other.

The Family

There are a number of private, communal institutions that Tocqueville sees as important for the development of liberty in democratic citizens. First is the institution of the family:

In Europe almost all the disorders of society are born around the domestic hearth and not far from the nuptial bed. It is there that men come to feel scorn for natural ties and legitimate pleasures and develop a taste for disorder, restlessness of spirit, and instability of desires...When the American returns from the turmoil of politics to the bosom of the family, he immediately finds a perfect picture of order and peace. There all his pleasures are simple and natural and his joys innocent and quiet, and as the regularity of life brings him happiness, he easily forms the habit of regulating his opinions as well as his tastes. Whereas the European tries to escape his sorrows at home by troubling society, the American derives from his home that love of order which he carries over into affairs of state.⁴⁰

The family brings order to democratic life. Because it is chosen rather than imposed, the family moderates the passion for activities that might promote an unhealthy or immoral society. For example, the family might moderate political passions that could turn into revolutions.

Not only are tastes moderated through the family, but taste creates family by bringing people together in marriage. Families are created because individuals have similar preferences or tastes: “when each chooses his companion for himself without any external interference or even prompting, it is usually nothing but similar tastes and thoughts that bring a man and a woman together, and these similarities hold and keep them by each other’s side.”⁴¹ The family both creates and is cultivated by the taste for liberty by bringing people together rather than dividing them. Taste helps people realize their commonalties, rather than their differences.

⁴⁰ DA, 291-2.

⁴¹ DA, 596.

Tocqueville also notes that the relationships within the family are chosen and natural in democracy rather than forced. “The relations between father and sons become more intimate and gentle...often more of confidence and affection.”⁴² Relationships between children similarly are chosen rather than established by tradition: “Not interest, then, but common memories and the unhampered sympathy of thoughts and tastes draw brothers, in a democracy, to one another. Their inheritance is divided, but their hearts are free to unite.”⁷⁹ Because social positions are not predetermined, even in the family, democratic citizens have to foster the skill of connecting to other people. In the case of the family, connecting to one another provides an outlet from political frustrations, and keeps order in political life. In this way, taste contributes to the ultimate bond in private life—the family—while also preserving freedom in public life.

Religion

Another communal institution that facilitates the taste for liberty in democracy is religion.⁴³ Religion serves to moderate the taste for well-being by forcing individuals to think outside of themselves and their interests without challenging their taste for well-being: “The main business of religions is to purify, control, and restrain that excessive and exclusive taste for well-being which men acquire in times of equality, but I think it would be a mistake for them to attempt to conquer it entirely and abolish it. They will never succeed in preventing men from loving wealth, but they may be able to induce them to use only honest means to enrich themselves.”⁴⁴ Religion not only affords democratic citizens an opportunity to contemplate the

⁴² DA, 587.

⁴³ For an extended analysis on the role of religion in Tocqueville see Antoine (2003), Avramenko (2012), Baron (1982), Campagna and Thoma (1998), Galston (1987), Goldstein (1975), Graebner (1976), Green (2003), Hinckley (1986, 1992), Johnston (1995), Kelly (1995), Kessler (1977, 1994), Kissam (2007), Knee (1990), Mitchell (1995), Novak (2007), Stephens (1951), Strout (1980), Tessitore (2002), Wach (1946), Yenor (2000), and Zuckert (1981, 1992).

⁴⁴ DA, 448.

divine, religion connects also people to one another. Going to service every week encourages democratic individuals to step outside of their private lives and engage with one another outside the home. Yet, religion is still separate from the state. Further, religious doctrine also encourages people to be kind and helpful to one another. Religion helps democratic citizens connect. Finally, religious doctrine is not learned overnight, but has been cultivated over generations.⁴⁵ Still, religion does not cause a taste for liberty, but its role is key for Tocqueville in reminding Americans of their taste for liberty.⁴⁶ Religion teaches freedom by fostering a robust society outside of the formal institutions of government.

Associations

Finally, no discussion of communal institutions that teach liberty to citizens in democracy would be complete without associations. The most important form that this “apprenticeship in freedom” will take is a familiar trope in Tocqueville’s work—associations.⁴⁷ Associations provide individuals with a mechanism to accomplish tasks in public life without the help of the government. Tocqueville argues that learning to associate is key for Americans because otherwise they will be incapable of accomplishing anything without government and therefore will have little independence.⁴⁸ It is through connecting based on one another’s shared

⁴⁵ This is perhaps why Tocqueville demonstrates a particularly affinity for Catholicism. There is an apprenticeship in this religion. See Volume II, Part I, Chapter 6: “Our contemporaries are naturally little disposed to belief, but once they accept religion at all, there is a hidden instinct within them which unconsciously urges them toward Catholicism. Many of the doctrines and customs of the Roman Church astonish them, but they feel a secret admiration for its discipline, and its extraordinary unity attracts them” DA, 450.

⁴⁶ “Religion, which never intervenes directly in the government of American society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions, for although it did not give them the taste for liberty, it singularly facilitates their use thereof” DA, 292.

⁴⁷ For more work on Tocqueville and associational life see: Galston (2010), Gannett (2003), Putnam (2000) and XX.

⁴⁸ “But among democratic peoples all the citizens are independent and weak. They can do hardly anything for themselves, and none of them is in a position to force his fellows to help him. They would all therefore find themselves helpless if they did not learn to help each other voluntarily. If the inhabitants of democratic countries had neither the right nor the taste for uniting for political objects, their independence would run great risks, but they could keep both their wealth and their knowledge for a long time. But if they did not learn some habits of acting together in the affairs of daily life, civilization itself would be in peril” DA, 514.

enjoyments that Tocqueville believes associations can form in society: “Thus the most democratic country in the world now is that in which men have in our time carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the objects of common desires and have applied this new technique to the greatest number of purposes.”⁴⁹ Tocqueville suggests that there is no distinction of taste between classes.⁵⁰ He is envisioning that the masters and the workers in industry both enjoy the same kinds of food, the same drink when the work day is over.⁵¹ The rich and poor are connected by their common taste for love of well-being—making money and not “sinking.”⁵² By beginning with their private interests, democratic individuals can then see how those interests relate to the interests of others and then improve the common good as a whole. In this way, associations teach people the value of self-interest well understood. They help rebuild the links destroyed in the transition from aristocracy to democracy but do so through the lens of the dominant taste in democracy—well-being. The key is that for Tocqueville, the bonding between citizens in private society begins with what they are interested in, what they have a taste for. They must begin here so that this behavior becomes habit for political life. Conversely, those who unite in political life will bring that habit to bear on their actions in private life.⁵³ Tocqueville argues that Americans see the value in providing small amounts of extra effort toward helping one another in their daily lives because they can see how helping the

⁴⁹ DA, 514

⁵⁰ “Where physical pleasures are concerned, the opulent citizens of a democracy do not display tastes very different from those of the people, either because, themselves originating from the people, they really do share them or because they think they ought to accept their standards. In democratic societies public sensuality has adopted a moderate and tranquil shape to which all are expected to conform. It is as hard for vices as for virtues to slip through the net of common standards” DA, 533.

⁵¹ In his recent book, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (2012), Charles Murray asserts that Tocqueville’s argument about taste as preference is no longer true. Murray argues that taste is based on class.

⁵² DA, 552.

⁵³ See DA, 521: “In this way politics spread a general habit and taste for association. A whole crowd of people who might otherwise have lived on their own are taught both to want to combine and how to do so.”

common good really is in their own private interest.⁵⁴ Working together in private life cultivates freedom by teaching people to work together without the aid of government. Associations teach democratic citizens the art of self-government, of freedom.

The judiciary is the last institution Tocqueville lists as necessary for the apprenticeship in freedom. Tocqueville introduces the idea of the judiciary as a way to “temper the tyranny of the majority.” He first praises the role of lawyers for their ability to cultivate order, much like the family. Tocqueville places order in opposition to passion: “Men who have made a special study of the laws and have derived therefrom habits of order, something of a taste for formalities, and an instinctive love for a regular concatenation of ideas are naturally strongly opposed to the revolutionary spirit and to the ill-considered passions of democracy.”⁵⁵ The judiciary helps maintain order in democratic society because the law requires years of study. Their profession is mediated by time. Lawyers cannot successfully make an impassioned case, they have to base their logic in the law which is only learned through study over time. They rely on the stability and tradition of the law as opposed to social upheaval. Lawyers support liberty by being a “counterbalance to democracy” and its negative inclinations.⁵⁶ Finally, lawyers serve as an intermediary between the government and the people: “If their tastes naturally draw lawyers toward the aristocracy and the prince, their interest as naturally pulls them toward the people.”⁵⁷ The lawyer serves as a link between the people and the government, mediating their self-

⁵⁴ See DA, 510: “It is difficult to force a man out of himself and get him to take an interest in the affairs of the whole state, for he has little understanding of the way in which the fate of the state can influence his own lot. But if it is a question of taking a road past his property, he sees at once that this small public matter has a bearing on his greatest private interests, and there is no need to point out to him the close connection between his private profit and the general interest.”

⁵⁵ DA, 264.

⁵⁶ DA, 268.

⁵⁷ DA, 266.

government and understanding of the law. Lawyers are part of the apprenticeship in liberty because they set the example for discerning self-government in their practice of the law.

Similarly, juries are another way that democratic citizens can learn about freedom and self-government:⁵⁸

As most public men are or have been lawyers, they apply their legal habits and turn of mind to the conduct of affairs. Juries make all classes familiar with this. So legal language is pretty well adopted into common speech; the spirit of the law, born within schools and courts, spreads little by little beyond them; it infiltrates through society right down to the lowest ranks, till finally the whole people have contracted some of the ways and taste of a magistrate.⁵⁹

People have individual responsibility for deciding the interpretation of the law when serving on a jury. Tocqueville also notes how juries create sympathy between the jurors and the accused in having to judge their peers.⁶⁰ This relationship brings the juror a sense of the law, but it also serves to create a bond between the juror and the accused. The juror can see the similarity between himself and the person he is judging. They are both democratic citizens, equal under the law. The juror learns to deliberate when he is deciding the fate of someone so much like himself. Further the juror learns to connect with the rest of the people on the jury in the process of deliberating about the law. Serving on a jury reminds citizens of their duties to their country and to others. The jury encourages democratic citizens to deliberate about the law and connect to their fellow citizens—both the accused and their fellow jurors—and therefore is an essential part of the education in liberty.

⁵⁸ For more on the institution of the judiciary, specifically the jury in Tocqueville's thought see Carresse (1998), Dzur (2010) and XX.

⁵⁹ DA, 270.

⁶⁰ Tocqueville says: "Juries teach men equity in practice. Each man, when judging his neighbor, thinks that he may be judged himself." DA, 274.

The taste for liberty is not inevitable. Those familiar with Tocqueville's work might read these ideas about apprenticeship in democracy and be confused because Tocqueville also often notes that democratic citizens do not have the patience for apprenticeship because it requires time to learn. This is why he says Americans do not have good art or literature like the aristocracy. Americans want things quickly and produced in mass. Tocqueville cautions that the tastes or preferences created by equality of conditions will degenerate into passions if they are not shaped through institutions:

Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that their excessive taste for these same pleasures hands them over to the first master who offers himself. Greed for prosperity then turns against itself and unconsciously drives away the very thing it wants...When the taste for physical pleasures has grown more rapidly than either education or experience of free institutions, the time comes when men are carried away and lose control of themselves at sight of the new good things they are ready to snatch. Intent only on getting rich, they do not notice the close connection between private fortunes and general prosperity...Such folk think they are following the doctrine of self-interest, but they have a very crude idea thereof, and the better to guard their interests, they neglect the chief of them, that is, to remain their own masters⁶¹

The negative passions that equality could engender are familiar subjects of discussion in Tocqueville's work. Tocqueville feared that without the apprenticeship in liberty, certain impulses driven by a passion for equality would become dominant in society. Tocqueville warns against the preference for public opinion becoming a tyranny of the majority⁶² and halting the

⁶¹ DA, 539.

⁶² "If ever freedom is lost in America, that will be due to the omnipotence of the majority driving the minorities to desperation and forcing them to appeal to physical force. We may then see anarchy, but it will have come as the result of despotism" DA, 260.

development of new ideas,⁶³ the preference for commerce creating an excessive individualism,⁶⁴ and finally the preference for equality leading to centralized government and more equality in political life than liberty.⁶⁵ For Tocqueville, the taste for freedom though natural, must be developed through apprenticeship over time. In doing so, he recognizes that democratic citizens will develop a connoisseurship of liberty. They will develop the ability to govern themselves by working with others in society.

III. Conclusion: The Art of Democratic Taste as a Connoisseurship of People

Tocqueville understood that democratic taste could never be aristocratic taste, but he saw value in it nonetheless. Tocqueville gives us the language to discuss how the changes in taste from aristocracy to democracy are essential to democratic society. He demonstrates that Americans have an associational aesthetic or a taste for association with people. He argues: “In democratic countries knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all forms of knowledge.”⁶⁶ I argue that the taste for freedom when cultivated through apprenticeship enables democratic citizens as connoisseurs of people. To be a connoisseur is to have cultivated an understanding of something over time. The word connoisseur has its roots in the French verb *connâitre*, “to know.” *Connâitre* means to know in terms of people, to be familiar with, whereas the verb

⁶³ “Hence democratic nations have neither leisure nor taste to think out new opinions. Even when they are doubtful about accepted ideas they still stick to them because it would take too much time to examine and change them. They hold to them not because they are certain but because they are accepted.” DA, 643

⁶⁴ Tocqueville says: “As social equality spreads there are more and more people who, though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands” DA, 508.

⁶⁵ “There is indeed a manly and legitimate passion for equality which rouses in all men a desire to be strong and respected. This passion tends to elevate the little man to the rank of the great. But the human heart also nourishes a debased taste for equality, which leads the weak to want to drag the strong down to their level and which induces men to prefer equality in servitude to inequality in freedom. It is not that peoples with a democratic social state naturally scorn freedom; on the contrary, they have an instinctive taste for it. But freedom is not the chief and continual object of their desires; it is equality for which they feel an eternal love; they rush on freedom with quick and sudden impulses, but if they miss their mark they resign themselves to their disappointment; but nothing will satisfy them without equality, and they would rather die than lose it.” DA, 57.

⁶⁶ DA, 517.

savoir, which also means to know, refers to knowing facts or knowledge. I argue that just as the notion of aesthetic, aristocratic taste implies being a connoisseur of things like art, and having a developed understanding of authority and distinction, democratic taste implies being a connoisseur of people which is developed by the tastes democracy inspires.

To have a fully developed sense of taste means to be able to make distinctions. The apprenticeship in freedom teaches people to associate with one another, and through this process, democratic citizens become better at discerning whom to associate with. While one might enjoy a glass of red wine the first time one tries it and be naturally drawn to it, having this preference would not also entail being able to distinguish the kind of the wine—whether it is a Merlot, Pinor Noir, or Malbec, for example. One is only able to make these distinctions after trying many kinds of wine over a long period of time. After this apprenticeship in wine, one might be called a connoisseur. The same is true of Tocqueville’s view of democratic taste. The taste for liberty, does not automatically become the skill of being able to govern oneself, this skill is cultivated over time through the institutions discussed in the last section.

What does a fully developed taste for liberty look like for Tocqueville? Being a connoisseur of liberty means being able to make distinctions between people. I argue it means to be a connoisseur of people, to be able to make distinctions between them. Being a connoisseur of liberty in democratic society means being able to make distinctions about whom we vote for, who we work for, and who we associate with both politically and privately—it even means making distinctions about whom we marry. Learning the ability to make distinctions between people are in these ways is key to preserving individual liberty and the liberty of society because making distinctions between people is the key to self-government.

Tocqueville provides examples of how citizens in democracy can act as connoisseurs of liberty by making distinctions between people. Each of the tastes understood as preference I highlighted in Section I also create opportunities for connecting with others in a democratic fashion. For example, the taste for commerce encourages democratic citizens to participate in business and this participation in business teaches them whom to do business with. Americans participate in trade and industry which require face to face interactions as opposed to working the land through agriculture. Most important for Tocqueville is the choice involved in the commercial interaction. He notes that there is no natural link between the worker and his boss: “The industrialist only asks the workman for his work, and the latter only asks him for his pay.”⁶⁷ They are joined together temporarily by their agreement to work with one another.⁶⁸ Whereas in an aristocracy the two parties would have a permanent obligation toward one another, in democratic society, the business aristocracy does not control the lives of its employees: “An aristocracy so constituted cannot have a great hold over its employees, and even if it does for a moment hold them, they will soon escape.”⁶⁹ Democratic employees have a choice about who they work for. The working contract is “freely adopted.”⁷⁰ Tocqueville notes that how the parties treat one another matters more than in an aristocracy because their positions are not fixed. Democratic citizens are connoisseurs of people in whom they choose to work for or work with.

The taste for general public opinion helps Americans decide whom to vote for and who they associate with. Tocqueville notes that American public officials are not to act with the pomp and circumstance of royalty because Americans do not see their government as above

⁶⁷ DA, 557.

⁶⁸ DA, 578.

⁶⁹ DA, 557.

⁷⁰ DA, 579.

them, but as a “necessary evil.” They see themselves as equal to those who lead them, and thus leaders are expected to follow social mores:

The officials themselves are perfectly aware that they have won the right to place themselves above others by their power, only on condition that their manners keep them on a level with everybody else. I can imagine no one more straightforward in his manners, accessible to all, attentive to requests, and civil in his answers than an American public official.⁷¹

Elected officials in democratic society know they have to please those who have elected them because their position is not permanent. They can be voted out of office. This is why, as Tocqueville notes, not everyone will run for office though all citizens are eligible and why “no one can be sure of remaining in office.”⁷² American citizens have experience with governing themselves—they have cultivated their taste for liberty in the ways suggested above. They know when they are not being governed properly and will use their knowledge to decide who should be in office and who should not. Tocqueville argues for example, that fancy clothes will not disguise a candidates’ worthiness:

I believe that in such an age as ours the importance attached to uniforms has been much exaggerated. I have not noticed American officials in the exercise of their duties treated with less respect or regard because they rely on merit alone. I also doubt whether a particular dress makes public men respect themselves if they are not naturally disposed to do so, for I cannot think that they will have more respect for their clothes than for themselves.⁷³

Democratic citizens have been educated in freedom and therefore they judge character rather than appearance—they are connoisseurs of people in elections.⁷⁴ Indeed we saw examples of this kind of discernment in the 2012 presidential election as Mitt and Ann Romney were criticized for

⁷¹ DA, 203.

⁷² DA, 204.

⁷³ DA, 204.

⁷⁴ Political behavior research indicates that voters do take appearance into account, but that other factors tend to be more salient for voters such as “party affiliation, record, policies and personal qualities.” See for example Spezio et. al. (2008) who add appearance as a factor, but recognize that it may not be the most salient.

being out of touch with regular Americans because of their wealth. Ann Romney, in particular, was criticized for her expensive wardrobe.⁷⁵ There is also the now ubiquitous example of politicians committing sexual indiscretions in their private lives and being judged in the context of their public office by the American people. Americans exercise their connoisseurship of people through their vote.

Americans also exercise their connoisseurship of people when deciding whom to associate with. Americans are connoisseurs of people by working together in private society in associations. However, Tocqueville also notes how quickly one can lose one's place among his fellows in this system. Those who go against public opinion and the proper mores will not be killed, but they will experience a death in their public life. Tocqueville describes the power of the majority: "Hence the majority in the United States has immense actual power and a power of opinion which is almost as great. When once its mind is made up on any question, there are, so to say, no obstacles which can retard, much less halt, its progress and give it time to hear the wails of those it crushes as it passes."⁷⁶ Americans are judges of people, they decide whom to associate with, and if a person's opinions go against what has been determined as the proper way to act, they are excluded. Tocqueville compares the discernment of the majority to the decision of prince to punish. Whereas a prince would use physical harm, the majority in American society makes people who do not fit its stipulations suffer a social death:

The master no longer says: 'Think like me or you die.' He does say: 'You are free to not think as I do; you can keep your life and property and all; but from this day you are a stranger among us. You can keep your privileges in the township, but they will be useless to you, for if you solicit your fellow citizens' votes, they will

⁷⁵ See the June 13, 2012 article "Writing Her Own Dress Code" in the New York Times for example which mentions criticism Romney received for her wardrobe choices: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/14/fashion/ann-romney-is-writing-her-own-dress-code.html?_r=0

⁷⁶ DA, 248.

not give them to you, and if you only ask for their esteem, they will make excuses for refusing that. You will remain among men, but you will lose your rights to count as one. When you approach your fellows, they will shun you as an impure being, and even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you too, lest they in turn be shunned. Go in peace. I have given you your life, but it is a life worse than death.⁷⁷

Tocqueville's language here is extreme, but illustrates the point. Americans decide who is in and who is out. However, Tocqueville notes that if this proclivity for public opinion is not trained in the ways discussed above, it can become a passion rather than a skill and therefore will no longer serve to cultivate freedom. This ability to judge whom to associate with can also become tyranny of the majority. Still, we can also think of instances in which this intense ability to decide whose behavior is appropriate and conducive to bonding with is useful for society and for freedom. Those who harm children or animals, for example, are often considered social pariahs. They suffer a social death at the hands of majority opinion.

Americans' preference for general rather than specific authority also makes them connoisseurs of people. They experience an apprenticeship in freedom through many sources of general authority such as religion and the family. This apprenticeship prepares them to discern whom to spend time with, particularly whom to marry, because the marriage decision is one that affects individual liberty and the liberty of society. For example, as I have argued above, Tocqueville talks about the value of the family for maintaining order, stability and freedom in democratic society. In his argument, this order comes from the ability of women to cultivate freedom in the family by creating stability in the home and shaping mores through the family.⁷⁸ However, this skill of cultivating freedom in the family can only be accomplished after girls have

⁷⁷ DA, 255-6.

⁷⁸ For an extended analysis of the role of women in the family see Wolfson (1996) and Mathie (1995), though Mathie disagrees with Tocqueville's analysis of the role of women, calling it "idealized."

been educated in freedom. They only become able to choose—to distinguish between better and worse men—whom to marry after their apprenticeship in freedom in their own families and on the playground:

Long before the young American woman has reached marriageable age, the process of freeing her from her mother's care has started stage by stage. Before she has completely left childhood behind she already thinks for herself, speaks freely, and acts on her own. All the doings of the world are ever plain for her to see; far from trying to keep this from her sight, she is continually shown more and more of it and taught to look thereon with firm and quiet gaze...she judges them without illusion and faces them without fear, for she is full of confidence in her own powers, and it seems that this feeling is shared by all around her.⁷⁹

Because social custom no longer enforces “feminine chastity,” women are taught to protect it themselves. Having been educated to be independent and capable, girls are able to judge, as a connoisseur would, society and determine their place within it. Tocqueville notes that a woman trades this independence for the “bonds of marriage” but it is not a decision made for her, but one she has been trained to make through “the manly habits inculcated by her education.”⁸⁰ She has received an apprenticeship in liberty in her own family so that she is able to decide who to associate with for the rest of her life. “Moreover, the American woman never gets caught in the bonds of matrimony as in a snare set to catch her simplicity and ignorance. She knows beforehand what will be expected of her, and she herself has freely accepted the yoke. She suffers her new state bravely, for she has chosen it.”⁸¹ The American woman is a connoisseur of people because of the apprenticeship in freedom she has received throughout her life. She is able to make a good judgement about whose hand to accept in marriage and therefore does not lose her independence in marriage but chooses a different way of life for herself.

⁷⁹ DA, 590.

⁸⁰ DA, 593.

⁸¹ DA, 593.

As I have argued, Tocqueville understands the value of a distinctly democratic taste for maintaining liberty in society. He demonstrates that democracy fosters certain tastes that are distinct from aristocracy and that these tastes can be cultivated through an apprenticeship in liberty. This apprenticeship in liberty is essential for self-government because it teaches democratic individuals how to connect to one another. The apprenticeship in liberty makes democratic citizens connoisseurs of people. It teaches them how to discern between better and worse people so they can build their private lives through those they choose to connect with in their families, professions, and associations, and public life through those they choose to elect.

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