

SOME FEATURES OF A.TOCQUEVILLE'S DEMOCRATIC IDEALS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

ALGUMAS CARACTERÍSTICAS DOS IDEAIS DEMOCRÁTICOS DE A.TOCQUEVILLE NA FILOSOFIA POLÍTICA

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Abstract: This article outlines Tocqueville's research on theoretical and practical political analysis of the West through lessons learned from the collapse of European democratic systems and the exemplary democracy in the United States. It discusses the hopes and concerns about its uncertainty, the contradiction between the perception and implementation of democracy and the tension between democracy as a value and the corruption of democratic institutions. Additionally, it focuses on exploring the proud achievements of democracy through the American "model," affirming the author's belief and expectation in the inevitable triumph of democracy as a human achievement. Tocqueville's notable analyses of the nature of democratic individuals include both positive and negative aspects, encompassing psychology, emotions, desires and even somewhat "wild" instincts within humans, to contemplate and predict all positive

and negative aspects of democracy.

Keywords: Democracy. American democratic lifestyle. Bureaucratic tendencies. Political future.

Resumo: O artigo resume a investigação de Tocqueville sobre a teoria e prática política ocidental através de lições aprendidas sobre o colapso das instituições democráticas europeias e do modelo de democracia nos Estados Unidos; expectativas, bem como ansiedade e preocupação com a sua incerteza, a contradição entre a percepção e implementação da democracia, entre a democracia como valor e a corrupção das instituições democráticas. Além disso, o artigo centra-se na exploração das orgulhosas conquistas da democracia através do "modelo" dos Estados Unidos, afirmando a crença e a expectativa do autor na vitória inevitável e imparável do surgimento da democracia como uma conquista humana. Suas excelentes análises da natureza humana democrática incluem os lados bons e ruins, psicologia, emoções, desejos, boas aspirações e hábitos e, em parte, instintos "selvagens" nessa pessoa, para pensar e prever todos os aspectos positivos e negativos da democracia.

Palavras-chave: Democracia. Estilo de vida democrático americano. Tirania. Futuro político.

1. Introduction

Democracy, in the meaning that supreme power belongs to the people, is one of humanity's greatest aspirations. And the struggle for a progressive, free, just, egalitarian and democratic social order has become a central, pervasive and hot topic in political history, especially modern political history. Conflicts between interest groups, between nations and ethnic groups, whether intense and overt or subtle and hidden in various forms, demonstrate the irresistible appeal of democracy.

However, while many people are enthusiastic about democracy, Tocqueville appears in a rather contemplative and concerned manner. He worries about the inherent weakness of democracy, which lies in the dangerous duality of human nature within democratic individuals; once their “wild instincts” are unleashed unchecked, democracy becomes a harmful poison that kills itself. He sees the absolute power of the “general will” as inherently evil. Majority tyranny, according to him, is always haunted by the risk of uncertainty in democracy. Tocqueville described in countries where democracy turns into oligarchy, where the people are “uniform beings,” above them lies vast, absolute and fragile power...

Therefore, the research on Tocqueville's thought holds profound significance both theoretically and practically in political aspects. It not only helps us understand the human temperament - people within their cultures, within the historical conditions they face - but also helps us discern the true “face” of politics and political culture within political institutions; understanding what genuine democracy is and the deceptive pseudo-democracy. Thus, it contributes to the struggle against totalitarian, oligarchic and totalitarian regimes; it strengthens the political environment. This is also the main purpose that motivates the writer to study his thoughts.

2. Literature review

Tocqueville is a prominent political philosopher of his time, with extremely remarkable political ideas. His name has long been enshrined in history as a “political monument”. His book “On Democracy - De la démocratie,” published in the 19th century, is considered a great contribution that has deeply influenced not only academia but also

attracted widespread interest from politicians and advocates of democracy, freedom and justice.

In the Western world, especially in the United States, he is revered as an idol, with many authors writing about him and bestowing upon him special reverence. Research on Tocqueville by J.J.Chevalier (1900-1983) affirms: “...*Never has there been a loftier spirit reflecting so seriously and insightfully on the issue... governing people for the happiness of the majority without oppressing them, without making them mean*” (Source Tocqueville, 2006: 22). In “*Die Frage der Demokratie*” (Lefort, 1990: 289), Claude Lefort (1924-2010) draws inspiration from Tocqueville's book to assert that the impotence of modern democracy in “self-assertion” is one of the main reasons that could lead democracy to slide into dictatorship. Autocratic leaders and demagogues, totalitarian and totalitarian ideologies easily assume a mission and authority to provide an “escape route” for democracy at the cost that people have to pay in the “age of extremes” in the 20th century. Meanwhile, Raymond Aron (1905-1983) believes that the greatest concern is not the state in general but the welfare state apparatus (Aron, 1967). From Tocqueville's political anthropology perspective, Robert Putnam (1941) introduces the famous concept of “social capital”, whereby a well-functioning democracy depends on the “social capital” of citizens, from functions that provide “vital” reliability and cohesion of associations and civic initiatives (*Putnam, 1995*), etc.

In Vietnam, Western political thought in general, especially ideas about democracy and freedom, has become a rather taboo and sensitive “issue” receiving little attention for research, or if any, it's often within to the “allowed” extent. Therefore, researching Tocqueville's thoughts in Vietnam today, according to the author, remains a “bottleneck”. The most comprehensive work is considered to be the Vietnamese translation of Tocqueville's book “*De la démocratie*” by Pham Toan, published by Tri thức Publishing House in 2004, divided into two volumes (Vol. 1 and Vol. 2). This poses significant challenges for researchers in terms of accessing and objectively evaluating Tocqueville's ideas. Nevertheless, in choosing to study this ideology, the author hopes to contribute to making the spirit of “democracy” more widespread, primarily in the academic field.

3. Methodology

The approach to the research issue is conducted based on logical and historical methods combined with analysis and synthesis, classification and interpretation,

generalization and systematization, to understand Tocqueville's political thought as having relatively independent development, inherent logic and formation from certain historical conditions, with inheritance and mutual influence with other theories.

Data collection and processing are carried out through research methods to clarify relevant concepts and propositions, ensuring that the article does not fall into baseless, vague, subjective reasoning and ensuring accuracy, honesty and objectivity in identifying and evaluating issues.

4. Results and Discussion

Democracy and its corruption

The social upheavals in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century and the practical political life in the United States convinced Tocqueville that the era of aristocratic rule was irreversibly declining and would sooner or later be replaced by democracy. (Tocqueville, 2006, Vol. 2: 500) Democracy, characterized as the political mode where “*power belongs to the majority*” (Tocqueville, 2006, Vol. 1: 470), was perceived by Tocqueville as the future trend and an inevitability that nothing could stop. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 68)

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805 - 1859), an outstanding philosopher from France, was born into an aristocratic family with a tradition of political involvement. His life and work were closely associated with the ups and downs, collapses and turmoil of his era. The glory, bitter tragedies from the democratic revolutions in Europe, along with the aspirations for a benevolent political system that would grant sovereignty to the people and ensure freedom for each individual, led Tocqueville to passionately explore and “connect” with democracy as a historical destiny.

With his remarkable powers of observation and high-level abstract thinking, sensitivity to the changes of the times and exceptional political insight, Tocqueville believed in the triumph of democracy, viewing that triumph as an event driven by the will of the Almighty. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 68) What is surprising and interesting here is that, when speaking of democracy, praising and extolling it, Tocqueville adheres to the principles of freedom. Despite coming from an aristocratic background, he fervently defends the democratic system; in other words, Tocqueville “embraces” democracy not from the heart of a democrat but from the mind of a proponent of freedom. This very characteristic elevates his perspective above the confines of fleeting emotions of love and hate, as well as

momentary whims, not only attracting others with its novelty and differentiation from traditional thoughts but also captivating them with its astonishing honesty and authenticity.

As a lover of freedom and peace, Tocqueville strongly advocated for a transformative process that harmonized stability with revolutionary progress, bridging the old and the new. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 22) He did not place trust in the “guiding” capacity of the democratic institutions that existed and were developing in Europe, due to their instability, although he did not deny that Europe was the cradle of democracy. Turning his gaze across the Atlantic, Tocqueville was truly amazed and impressed by the simple, liberal yet highly professional and mature democratic spirit of the New World - a young and hopeful America. He placed the future hope of humanity in this land. The book “De la démocratie - On Democracy,” which he wrote during his travels in America in the years 1835-1840, to study prison reform measures, presented practical experiences of development and democratic characteristics of the United States, weaknesses of European democracy and proposed an open system of solutions aimed at improving the effectiveness of democracy.

Tocqueville believed that democracy means equality of rights (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 156), it is the oldest, continuous and most enduring event known to mankind. The concept of democracy, meaning supreme power belonging to the Citizen Assembly (ekklèsia), was discovered and invented by the Greeks (Brinton, Christopher, Wolff, 1971: 44-45) in the 5th century BC, to describe the form of political activity considered the most exemplary and progressive. The Athenian state was established on the principle of being elected by the people, the direct participation of citizens in state affairs was considered a fundamental principle; all citizens had the right to participate in political life and were equal before the law. (Phan Thi Hien, 2017: 99). This reality has become a great source of motivation, inspiring the struggle against the feudal order, reforming the political machinery. Montesquieu (1689-1755) considered democracy as a natural characteristic and affirmed: “*Natural law has introduced into the human mind the idea of freedom and equality... And before humans created laws, there existed naturally fair relationships*” (Montesquieu, 1995: 22-23). Whereas J.J. Rousseau (1712-1778) believed that power is the general, unique will belonging to the people, cannot be represented (Dinh Van Mau, Pham Hong Thai, 1996: 92), etc. Therefore, whether democracy will dominate or not, regardless of whether it arises from the ruins of war or is destroyed by revolutionary movements in Europe or born naturally and grows up peacefully as in America.

His work *About Democracy* demonstrates a remarkably profound scientific perspective and insightful political acumen in the study of American society as well as in philosophical contemplation on the idea of democracy and the future prospects of democratic regimes. Tocqueville approached the issue of democracy not with ideological prejudices or partisan bias towards pure democracy, meaning he did not idealize democracy in an extreme way or blindly deify democracy. His view was very clear: *“If we do not fully understand the advantages and disadvantages of democracy, we cannot defend or remedy its shortcomings”* (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 25). Drawing from practical experience with European democratic systems and firsthand observation of the democratic way of life in America, he pinpointed the core issue of democracy as being human rather than institutional. Although institutions are the principles, the soul of democracy - the element that determines its success or failure - is the spirit, the consciousness of human beings (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 79, 770). From this perspective, he focused on analyzing the essence of democratic individuals, including both their virtues and vices, their psychology, emotions, aspirations, noble desires, as well as their habits and somewhat “wild” instincts, showcasing his exceptional talent in analyzing the psychological dynamics, understanding and predicting the human psyche.

Tocqueville asserted: Democracy is power bestowed equally, without distinction of rank (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 156-157) and that is surely a blessing, a great fortune and the most fervent aspiration of humanity. Direct participation in wielding power is the best way for all citizens to care for their homeland and take responsibility for their community. However, within this great blessing, he foresaw its calamity. According to him, the democratic individual always exhibits a dual nature, where its “wild instincts” are unleashed unchecked, democracy becomes a dangerous poison that kills itself. He viewed the tendencies toward selfishness, material indulgence and leveling of conditions as inherent flaws of democracy and these are profoundly dangerous instincts. The pleasure of indulgence becomes a stimulus to promote the flourishing of individualism; indifference is what it produces to separate each other, causing each person to withdraw into themselves, without any connection to others, without caring about the homeland, the community and thus, the floodgates of despotism are wide open for ambitious individuals (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 48, 221). The country falls into disaster when nothing can stop the sweeping waves of corruption, bribery and turmoil, as Montesquieu had warned a century earlier: *“... the republic itself has become a pocket for people to loot”* (Đinh Ngọc Thạch, Phan Thi Hien,

10/2016: 10). It is easy to understand why during the crisis of Athenian democracy, Socrates (470-399 BC) used such heavy-handed language. He said: *“Do you not feel ashamed before the traders, the farmers, the merchants and the peddlers, who always think only of buying cheap and selling dear? Yet the Assembly of the People is formed from these classes of people”* (Niersesians, 1977: 50). Socrates affirmed that ruling is not a pleasure but a responsibility. He emphasized: *“Rulers are not those who flaunt robes and hats, nor those who rely on luck to advance, nor those who attain power through fortune or by violence, deceit, but those who know how to govern”* (Niersesians, 1977: 50). Plato (427-347 BC) viewed democracy as a mixed society, a chaotic blend of gold and bronze. This democratic society not only fails to suppress disorder and lawlessness but also exacerbates it. Everyone has the right to express their opinions, which also means everyone seeks their own benefit. When democracy is not understood, democracy itself becomes a dangerous tool for both rulers and the people (Durant, 1971: 34-38).

With a spirit of facing truth squarely, unafraid of collision, Tocqueville emphasized: no political regime can achieve degeneration and ruin as thoroughly as in democracy (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 225), because, he explained: if in aristocratic regimes, those in power are usually wealthy and primarily driven by the desire for power, in democratic regimes, politicians are often poor and they pursue power mainly for money (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 427). Money corrupts and continually corrupts power, human character; something that Montesquieu previously called the inherent disease of democracy and criticized harshly. He said:

When the morality of democracy is lost, greed penetrates the hearts, corruption pervades all the corners of society. Aspirations are diverted: what was once loved is no longer loved, people still feel free but freedom defies the law. Simple living is seen as lowly. Formerly, the property of each citizen was considered a part of the nation's wealth, but now the common treasury is seen as private property. The republic becomes just a pocket for people to loot and the power of the nation becomes the power of a few citizens, disrupting everyone else. (Montesquieu, 2004: 56)

Trapped in the conditions of equality, where everyone is virtually leveled, indulging in petty, cheap and illicit pleasures, withdrawing into their private lives without regard for anyone beyond themselves and their families, people entrust their destiny to the supreme representative - whom they assume to be their “conscience”, enlightened and wiser than all individuals comprising society, responsible for caring for their fate and guiding them. But instead of the responsibility of a parent they entrusted to prepare the conditions for their “children” to grow up, the holders of power seek to bind those “children” indefinitely to childhood. They decide everything, even the most private matters, from will to action and

ultimately strip citizens of even the right to use their own selves (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 494). The people fall into their own trap, within the terrifying circle surrounding the thoughts and spirits of human beings that they inadvertently set. All are free but enslaved freedom, freedom within predetermined boundaries. Democracy becomes wild and its wildness is born of the wildness in human nature.

There is no gap between despotism and wild democracy. The apathy, political indifference of the masses has “birthed” it and nurtured rulers without conscience. He wrote: “While the vast majority of citizens are preoccupied with private concerns, the tyrants always act as representatives, in the name of the crowd, governing everything according to their own whims; arbitrarily changing laws and suppressing customs”¹ (Tocqueville, 2006, Vol. 2: 222). Tocqueville further asserts that there is no easier path to the concentration of power than through and via democracy (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 225). The concentration of power is nothing but power exercised in a despotic manner. Denis Diderot (1713 – 1788) likened this form of rule to relationships in the animal kingdom, saying: *“In nature, animals prey on each other, while in society, classes oppress each other”* (Luu Kiem Thanh, Pham Hong Thai, 2001: 279); meanwhile, Karl Marx (1818-1883) remarked: *“The sole principle of bourgeois society is contempt for humanity, for the person who has lost its human essence”* (Marx, Engels, 1995: 491). When all political power is concentrated in the hands of a group of individuals or a single representative, the ruler possesses unparalleled power that cannot be held accountable. However, Tocqueville believes that the essence of despotism is fear, it fears anyone intending to unite to create common prosperity. It finds reasons to drive people apart, seeing division as a sure guarantee for its survival. Every change is deemed harmful; it requires “stability” to suppress any actions of citizens so that society always remains in a state of dullness and stagnation (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 177). It maintains that order by stimulating in the hearts of the masses a extreme materialistic pleasure. The pleasure of material indulgence is nurtured by spreading the atheistic materialism, which is especially dangerous for any society but is perfectly combined, becoming a widespread sentiment among the people of democratic nations (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 227). This is easily understood; democracy, which inherently fosters materialistic desires, needs to instill in people's minds the belief that nothing in this world exists except material things. In society, religion often plays a role in restraining deviant

¹ We understand why thinkers from ancient times to Enlightenment philosophers, represented by Plato and Montesquieu, vehemently opposed democracy

pleasures and preventing negative tendencies in humans, but in these governments, it is difficult for it to exist. Thus, by sowing the seeds of materialism in the minds of the people, the rulers have completed their mission of materializing humanity by the passionate pursuit of extreme enjoyment (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 230, 232).

Ruling also means domestication; rulers are very clever in combining the stimulation of material desires to target the physical body and using divisive thoughts, envy and factionalism-errifying spiritual weapons-to completely subdue the will and actions of individuals. When the dissemination of partisan ideas deeply penetrates every layer of society, it creates a terrifying herd mentality to the extent that anyone who wants to resist, to break free from the predetermined boundaries, has only one option: to renounce their citizenship rights and even their dignity (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 489). Psychological violence can be said to be an extremely dangerous weapon in this society because of its “intellectual” nature, surpassing the chains and physical weapons-primitive tools used by ancient despots to strike at the human body. Ignoring the physical aspect, it strikes directly at the human spirit. Through this method, it makes the human will soft, weak and cowardly to the point of completely losing the inherent instinct of resistance and self-defense. The individual begins to doubt both their own strength and power, ready to accept the opinion of the crowd as truth and to admit their own fallacy when the crowd asserts so. Thus, eventually, it turns the entire nation into a timid and industrious herd, with the ruler acting on behalf of the crowd to lead them (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 494-495).

The existence of such a ruling system, according to Tocqueville, is too dangerous, not because of its weakness, but because of its strength, which is unstoppable in its corruption. Morality and talent are enemies to its existence, oppression and plunder make up its power and baseness constitutes its value. With the profundity of a philosopher and the rich experience in political activities, the author paints a portrait that reveals the shameless and despicable nature of the kind of people he calls representatives of the people, using language dripping with bitter sarcasm. He says:

The concern is not that we see the lack of ethics in those in power, but that this lack of ethics leads to greatness. In a democracy, citizens clearly see someone stepping out of their ranks after a few years, having grown rich and powerful. Here, there is a blend of baseness and power, of worthlessness and success, of utility and dishonor. (Tocqueville, 2006, Vol. 1: 429)

He acknowledges that although he does not want personal emotions to influence his assessment and scrutiny of the issue, what is happening cannot hide his disgust and contempt. He bluntly says: *“Intellectually, I highly esteem democratic institutions, but from the heart, I*

am an aristocrat, meaning: I despise and fear the masses. I love freedom, the law, but I do not like democracy” (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 25). He feels deeply saddened by the present and regrets what has passed, which he considers a golden age that can never be returned to. History is cruel, blindly moving forward! Despite the obstacles, it sweeps away everything in its path, nothing survives, nothing is eternal, a reality he perhaps understands better than anyone else (emphasis added by the writer).

As a person who has experienced and engaged in numerous political upheavals of the era, he believes in the inevitable demise of authoritarian regimes, regardless of the form they take² (Tocqueville, 2006, vol.1:491). However, similar to the viewpoint of Montesquieu (Phan Thi Hien, 2017: 101), his direct predecessor, what troubles Tocqueville the most is how to establish a democratic system that ensures equal rights for everyone while preventing the corruption that leads it to slide deeply into authoritarianism, as observed and experienced. To achieve this, according to him, it is necessary to avoid both extremes: one being uncontrolled freedom of thought leading democracy to anarchy and the other being extreme democracy driving humanity into slavery (Tocqueville, 2006, vol.2:451). In the first tendency, people can easily recognize and restrain it, but often this inherent flaw is addressed by stripping individuals of their freedom, thus inevitably leading to enslavement. In conclusion, he asserts that authoritarianism, whether of one individual or in the name of the masses, poses equal danger. Furthermore, in all forms of government, regardless of distinction, disgracefulness is associated with power and flattery is linked with authority. Therefore, the means to prevent humanity from succumbing to corruption is to ensure that no one holds absolute power to exploit it for ignoble ends (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 491). The most feasible escape route for democracy, according to Tocqueville, lies in ensuring political freedom through constitutions and laws that divide and control the manipulation of power by the branches of the state. This must be coupled with the moral citizenship, encompassing the ethical conduct of both the rulers in enjoying their rights and the social obligations they must fulfill. However, it is acknowledged that the inherent flaw of these systems, which is the tendency towards corruption, can never be entirely eradicated; rather, it can only be mitigated by *“limiting the exercise of supreme authority in democratic nations”* (Tocqueville, 2006, Vol. 2: 501).

² Experience shows that not only a lack of the spirit of equality can lead to the authoritarian regime of a ruler, but even extreme ideas of equality, abusing democracy, can be extremely dangerous. And an excessively democratic regime is just a step toward losing democracy

American democracy - the model of the future

There is no vice that does not accompany democracy, Tocqueville asserted so (2006, vol. 1: 474). Yet, what makes Americans a remarkable phenomenon and also what makes their democracy great, is precisely that: American democracy. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 79, 108, 126) American democracy was born in nature, nurtured by religion, matured in customs and thrived in the law (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 79), ensuring its development, survival and prosperity.

Unlike the general evolution of democracy³, the formation of American democracy took a very distinctive path, proceeding entirely naturally; it did not arise from social conflicts between groups, classes, parties, or religions. As Tocqueville puts it: *“The democratic revolution in America did not have any 'revolution' in their country”* (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 79). This is because, in the 17th century, the people - victims of political and religious conflicts in Europe - already carried within them their democratic traditions, nurturing a desire for a life of freedom, abundance and happiness. They arrived in the New World - North America - a vast land of untouched nature, fertile soil and complex terrain, inhabited by wandering tribes untouched by the “taste” of politics⁴, or rather, a pristine continent waiting to be explored (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 526). Such a land was absolutely unsuitable for building a centralized administration, but it was ideal for fostering equality, thereby necessitating the inevitable birth of democracy as if it emerged from nature itself. Additionally, the Americans' desire for wealth rather than a passion for political power (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 534) prevented their democracy from falling into the tragedies experienced by their European forefathers, keeping it in a state of peace, tranquility and serenity.

According to Tocqueville, the success of the democratic system in the United States is not overly dependent on the natural conditions of the land, but rather on the laws and customs of the United States. This is the special reason that explains their greatness and is also the decisive factor. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 570) The laws of the United States protect the supremacy of the principle of separation of powers along with a strong judicial power, which is considered ideal for a sustainable democratic government in America. The federal form allows the United States to exploit the material potential of a large republic

³ *The European democracy before the 19th century*

⁴ *The term "politics" as referred to by Tocqueville implies the tactics of power rather than carrying the broad meaning as Aristotle's: Man as a political animal, meaning the rights and duties of individuals and individuals in community relationships*

while enjoying the security of a small republic; with the local (township) system, the US government mitigates the tyranny of the majority, while providing people with the excitement of freedom and teaching them the art of exercising their freedom; meanwhile, the courts play a particularly significant role in adjusting the biases and distortions of democracy, not obstructing the people's sovereignty but guiding it in the right direction.

Of course, what constitutes the phenomenon of American democracy is not primarily law, but custom (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 572), it's the experiences, ideas and habits of democratic practice among the people that are of particular significance in giving rise to the American democracy and making it prosperous. The notion of the supreme power of the people has deeply penetrated into the practical political life and the principle that gives birth to democracy is the principle that mainly governs human actions; democracy infiltrates into the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, habits and even the subconscious of every American (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 572, 713), it is nurtured in religion and immersed in freedom.

One fact is that democracy is always associated with decay (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 156-157), Americans are no exception. Like other democratic nations, Americans are intensely enamored with materialism, but they are inherently rational (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 222), they early recognized the danger and knew how to restrain it, they used their religion to moralize democracy. Spiritual life holds a special place for most Americans and is the salvation of American democracy (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 224-225). The Christians who came to America were already imbued with ethics and Christian beliefs, they had the habit of working tirelessly to seek happiness and they worked to the point of forgetting themselves for the common happiness of all, hence they always fought against individualism and they defeated it (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 168, 199, 202). Christianity is the cradle of freedom and freedom is the source of rights. Tocqueville argues that the difference of American democracy lies precisely in the excellent combination of religious spirit and spirit of freedom, religion finds in freedom the noble practice of human abilities, freedom finds in religion a comrade in the struggle and victory, that is why American democracy persists and avoids disaster (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 127,129).

Freedom breeds and operates American democracy. In the United States, every citizen has the right to do anything that the law does not prohibit. They are free to openly participate in civil and political organizations without limitations, depending on their purposes. This is the political culture of Americans-a guarantee of the highest rights and

interests for every American, allowing them to enjoy privileges that no other nation achieves. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 378, 382) Moreover, Tocqueville emphasizes that in countries without grassroots civil organizations, there is nothing to prevent the sweep of tyranny. Continuing this perspective, he stresses that in any country where the right to form political associations is forbidden, there is no room for civil societies and civilization is at risk of destruction. Similarly, in a democratic state, the lack of equality or the recognition of one association while banning another will also be a disaster because it will sow prejudice in the minds of the people, doubting the legitimacy of existing social organizations.

The press is not only a means of conveying freedom but also one of the highest expressions of human freedom. The freedom of speech of Americans, manifested through press freedom, is a characteristic trait. In the United States, no newspaper has enough power to sway public opinion because there is no central control over human thought; the only servant of American democracy is the law. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 362) The power of the American press, though not leading public opinion, is immense: It carries political life into every corner and cranny of that vast territory. It keeps its eyes wide open to unveil the secret springs of political action and forces public figures to take their turn on the tribunal of public opinion.” (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 371)

Through civil society, Americans have wielded their social power in a challenging manner (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 2: 378). Since the founding of the nation, in freedom, American citizens have learned to use their governmental power to fight against evil and all the troubles of life, only resorting to state power as a last resort. Of course, Tocqueville also warned of the dangers of unlimited freedom in America leading to anarchy. However, he staunchly opposed the argument that unrestricted civil liberties threatened national peace, disrespect for the law and the potential incapacitation of government. According to Tocqueville, at certain times in the nation's existence, one could see political associations disrupting the state and paralyzing production. Yet, in the broader scope of political life, the freedom to form associations benefits the happiness and tranquility of citizens. It is the only way to prevent democratic society from falling into ruin. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol. 1: 382, vol. 2: 190)

The American democracy “captivated” Tocqueville, despite his admission that he was not a democrat and harbored bitter resentment towards it. Though still filled with doubts, he believed that sooner or later, European democracy would reach the level of

American democracy. (Tocqueville, 2006, vol.1: 79) However, he warned against blindly transplanting the American democratic model into vastly different conditions, especially in politically turbulent nations, which he deemed highly dangerous. The United States boasts the world's best legal system, which Tocqueville considered the cornerstone of its greatness. Any country seeking to learn from American democracy must pay special attention to this. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the essence of democracy lies not in its institutions or laws, but in the people, in the citizens' way of life, their spirit and consciousness. In short, it is a democratic culture⁵ that delves into the subconscious, shaping the habits of the heart and nurturing the moral character and humanity of individuals.

5. Conclusion

Democracy, with its achievements and given issues, was “deepened” analyzed by Alexis de Tocqueville nearly two centuries ago, when the rule of law was still in a “primitive” state, with experiments on the principles of organizing political life, the legal system, the formation of norms by civil society. The fundamental emphases of his research works focused on highlighting the shortcomings, complexities and dual nature of democracy in the process of perception and implementation, forecasting its fate under the impact of rapid, unpredictable changes. Many of his arguments demonstrate a fierce analytical stance, yet fundamentally, the political landscape of the United States in the latter half of the 19th century was vividly depicted by him.

The dirty political “games” hidden beneath the facade of democracy were exposed by him; the dangers of individualism were condemned; the despicable tactics of power were laid bare, striking a fatal blow to authoritarian regimes, totalitarianism, making dreamers of “enslaving the people in the chains of slavery” tremble in fear. With a keen, persuasive analytical pen, the author not only instilled hatred for despotism but also revealed the base nature of the pseudo-democracy. Despite the ongoing debate about him, his discoveries, insights and messages still have a profound impact on the academic community, leaders

⁵ The American people are always keenly aware of their rights and responsibilities. They are willing to sacrifice personal interests for the common good, finding their own glory in the glory of the nation, and harboring a deep love for their country akin to the sacred affection within a family. (Democracy in America, Vol. 1, p. 222)

and the general public; they serve as valuable reference materials in the process of perfecting modern political institutions in the world.

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