TOCQUEVILLE AS ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGIST?

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Tocqueville's views on politics, religion and law have attracted many commentators, as opposed to his views on economic topics. In this article I shall try to remedy this situation by presenting and discussing what Tocqueville knew about economics and, more importantly, what economic phenomena he paid attention to and how he analyzed these. I shall in particular make the argument that it may be helpful to explore the affinity between Tocqueville's way of analyzing economic phenomena and that of economic sociology. By the latter I mean the attempt to analyze economic behavior with the help of standard sociological concepts and methods. To Durkheim, for example, economic facts must be understood as social facts, and to Weber economic action can be analyzed as a form of social action. Today's economic sociologists typically talk of economic actions as being embedded in social structure, networks, and the like.

The enterprise of exploring Tocqueville as an economic sociologist has two potential payoffs: it may cast a new light on some of Tocqueville's writings, and it may also add to the tradition of economic sociology. The way that I shall go about this task is as follows. I will first present and comment on what I consider to be Tocqueville's most relevant writings from the perspective of

economic sociology. The ones I have chosen, besides the obvious choices of *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) and *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1856), are Tocqueville's *Memoir on Pauperism* (1835) and his famous speech from 1848 on the right to work. A full treatment of the topic would have to include what Tocqueville wrote on colonialism, slavery, and the Paris-Cherbourg railroad.² Tocqueville's collected works, which are gradually being published, would have to be sifted through as well.

While some readers may think that casting Tocqueville as an economic sociologist is a misguided project, since Tocqueville wrote in another age and anyway has a stature that goes well beyond the possible importance of a subfield of sociology such as economic sociology. This may well be true, but there is also the fact - soon to be discussed - that what Tocqueville has to say on economic topics does not easily fit into the conventional types of economic analysis that are available to us, such as mainstream economics, institutional economics and economic history. One alternative in this situation would be to reconstruct Tocqueville's analysis of the economy in its own terms; another to present Tocqueville as a social scientist who did not deal very much with economic topics but who nonetheless possessed that analytical flair that is the hallmark of great social science, including economics. To properly place Tocqueville in his time represents, no doubt, a very attractive choice, and we will hopefully one day also have a full-scale study of Tocqueville the economist from this perspective. Paying attention to Tocqueville's talent for analytical thought is similarly a very worthwhile enterprise (Elster 1991, 1993, Boudon 2005).

Nonetheless, an argument may be made for also trying to relate Tocqueville's type of analysis of economic phenomena to economic sociology on the ground that there exists a certain affinity between these two types of analyses. Both, in particular, are empirical as well as analytical; they also refuse to isolate what is economic from society at large. Another advantage of exploring Tocqueville as an economic sociologist, as I see it, is that one can relate Tocqueville to an already existing tradition of social thought. This tradition, as already mentioned, may also itself be rejuvenated by coming into contact with Tocqueville's work.

Before proceeding to Tocqueville's work, two preliminary questions need to be addressed. The first of these has to do with Tocqueville's knowledge of economics. What type of economics was Tocqueville familiar with and how did he look at the economists of his time? The second question has to do with the way that Tocqueville's analysis of economic topics has been interpreted in the huge secondary literature that exists today. How, for example, has Tocqueville's analysis of economic topics been interpreted in this type of literature, and what kind of place has this analysis been assigned in Tocqueville's work as a whole? For Tocqueville's personal relationship to economic matters – an interesting but marginal topic – the reader is referred to a footnote.³

As to Tocqueville's knowledge of economics, it has been established that his first encounter with the science of economics probably took place in 1828, when he started to study the work of Jean-Baptiste Say (1776-1832). During 1828 and probably also 1829 Tocqueville read and took notes from vol. 1 of *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique* that have been preserved (and published; see Tocqueville 1989:425-35). On his way over the Atlantic to the United States in early 1831 Tocqueville studied Say again. According to a note by Beaumont, written on the ship, "now with all our energies we are doing political economy with the work of J.B. Say" (Pierson 1996:46). All in all, it appears that Tocqueville must have studied more than just Vol. 1 of *Cours complet*.

Exactly what Tocqueville learned from his study of Say is difficult to establish, but since Say essentially was a popularizer of Adam Smith, Tocqueville was introduced to topics such as production of wealth, division of labor and money (Vol. 1 of *Cours*) and probably also to consumption, population and public finance (Vol. 2). On some points, however, Say's work differed from that of Adam Smith, and one of these was that he attached much more importance to entrepreneurship. This emphasis on entrepreneurship seems also to have inspired Tocqueville, who writes in one of the notes that he took on Say that what is important to the entrepreneur is first of all his capacity to seize things up and make a judgment (Tocqueville 1989:427-28).

Another economist whose work Tocqueville read with much attention has left few traces behind in the history of economic thought. This is Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont (1784-1850), a Catholic thinker and the author of a major work on the role of the poor which Tocqueville read with great interest, Traité d'économie chrétienne. Recherches sur la nature et les causes du paupérisme en France et en Europe et sur les moyens de le soulager et de prévenir (1834). From Tocqueville's personal library at Chateau de Tocqueville, we also know that he owned a work by Adolphe-Jerôme Blanqui (Drescher 1968a:62). Whether Tocqueville had actually read The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith (which existed in several French translations at the time when Tocqueville was born) is not clear, even though there is a small number of references to the ideas of Smith in his work (Himmelfarb 1997:12, 16, n. 17). In one of his letters to Tocqueville, Beaumont also refers to his own collection of works in political economy ("Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Say, Turgot, Senior, Blanqui, etc."; Tocqueville 1969, 1:428).

Two other economists played an important role in Tocqueville's life, and these were John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Nassau Senior (1790-1864). Tocqueville got to know both of these men quite well and also became their friend. Tocqueville met Mill on his trip to England in 1835; and Mill also wrote two famous reviews of *Democracy in America*, one when the first volume appeared and the other when the second volume was published (Mill 1977:48-204). These articles are of much interest and still worth reading. Mill was extremely impressed by Tocqueville, especially by his analysis of political phenomena and his analytical approach more generally. Mill, for example, famously says that it is Tocqueville's analytical method rather than his conclusions that are important. "The value of his work is less in the conclusions, than in the mode of arriving at them" (Mill 1977:156).

Mill notes, but does not comment on Tocqueville's analysis of economic phenomena. Experts on the relationship Mill-Tocqueville have also been unable to find any references to Tocqueville in Mill's economic works, including *The Principles of Political Economy* (Pappé 1964:219). One reason for this, as we shall see later, is that Mill believed in the necessity to analytically separate out economic

phenomena from the rest of society, a stance that Tocqueville quietly but firmly rejected.

Tocqueville's relationship to Mill had its ups and downs, and Mill, for example, was very upset by Tocqueville's nationalism. Tocqueville and Senior, on the other hand, seem to have gotten along fine, from 1833 (when they met) and onwards (Brogan 1991, 1992). Tocqueville and Senior, like Tocqueville and Mill, seem mainly to have discussed political topics and paid little or no attention to economic topics. One example of this is the two volume-set with "correspondence and conversations from 1834 to 1859" between Tocqueville and Senior that Senior's daughter published in 1872, and which contains next to nothing on economics.

There was, however, one economic topic that Senior and Tocqueville discussed in great detail between themselves and that was poverty or "pauperism", as it was called at the time (Mélonio 1989). Tocqueville probably became interested in this topic while in the United States, and his interest deepened during his trips to England (Beaumont and Tocqueville 1970:181-82; Tocqueville 1988). Having been a member of the Poor Law Inquiry Commission of 1832, Senior was an expert on the topic and also a major force behind the famous Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (also known as the New Poor Law). In a letter that is often cited as an example of Tocqueville's ignorance of economics, Tocqueville writes in 1837 to Senior:

"you could not have sent me anything that I should have liked better than your outline of political economy. I have often realized that I lack adequate understanding (notions suffisantes) of this important branch of human science, and I have many times reflected that you were the man most capable of supplying my wants." (Tocqueville 1991, 2:79; trans. Brogan 1992:129; cf. Tocqueville 1967, 1:129)

According to the secondary literature, it is also established that Tocqueville was familiar with at least the following works by Senior: An Outline of the Science of Political Economy, Statement of the Provision for the Poor...in America and Europe and his co-authored report for the English Royal Commission on the Poor Law (Drescher 1968a:62).

If we now turn to the secondary literature on Tocqueville and economics, it should first of all be mentioned that Tocqueville does not at all figure in conventional histories of economic thought. In some of the older works, there is a line or two – but that is all. Charles Gide and Charles Rist, for example, make a quick reference to Tocqueville's opposition in 1848 to the right to work, and Eric Roll mentions *The Old Regime* in a footnote (Gide and Rist 1948:311, Roll 1945:390, n.1). Joseph Schumpeter is a little bit more explicit in *History of Economic Thought*, in which one can read that Tocqueville "painted to a considerable extent in economic colors" (Schumpeter 1954:820). But the reader is also told that "nothing of this spelled any new departure for professional economics".

If Tocqueville has had an important influence among economists, it is much later, on contemporary economists, and in political questions. Friedrich Hayek is the key person in this regard, and it is often noted that he took the title to one of his most famous books – The Road to Serfdom (1944) – from Tocqueville. Hayek regarded Tocqueville as one of the great liberals of all times and he initially wanted to call the Mont Pelerin Society for The Acton-Tocqueville Society (Hayek 1992:233, 247).

Tocqueville is also a favorite to some of today's neo-conservatives and neo-liberals. In 1997, for example, Gertrude Himmelfarb, wrote a positive introduction to Tocqueville's *Memoir on Pauperism* (Tocqueville 1997). Liberty Fund, a conservative think tank that specializes in classics with a liberal bent, has adopted Tocqueville as one of its favorites. And George W. Bush has a few times made very positive references to Tocqueville's vision of a decentralized society in which individuals help each other out, rather than rely on the state (Bumiller 2005).

If we now switch to the secondary literature on Tocqueville, it is clear that this is nearly exclusively devoted to Tocqueville's political thought, his historical work and his life. Tocqueville's analysis of economic phenomena and of economics is now and then touched on as part of these concerns. For the industrial development of the United States, as developed in *Democracy in America*, the reader is for example referred to the important study by Seymour Drescher entitled *Dilemmas of Democracy*. Drescher has also edited an important volume with Tocqueville's writings on socio-economic reform and produced the standard work on Tocqueville and England (Drescher 1964, 1968a:51-87, 1968b). There is finally a recent volume by Eric

Keslassy which is devoted to Tocqueville's liberalism and which is centered around his memoir on pauperism (Keslassy 2000; cf. 2005).

In much of the secondary literature it is noted that Tocqueville did not know very much of economics, and references are made to his scanty reading in this field, mainly the works of Sav and Villeneuve-Bargeron. Sometimes it is noted that Tocqueville was not interested at all in economics. According to Max Lerner, for example, "Tocqueville was no economist and bored by economics" (Lerner 1969:47). George Pierson, author of the magisterial Tocqueville in America, states that Tocqueville "was not interested in material progress" and refers to "his neglect of America material development" as his "great blind spot" (Pierson 1998:762, 764; see also Wills 2004:54). "By instinct and by training the interests [of Tocqueville and Beaumont] lay, not in economics or in mechanical items, but in what seemed to them the superior field of politics and statecraft" (ibid., p. 175). Pierson sums up his view by the saying that the "failure on the part of Tocqueville and Beaumont to interest themselves in the material progress of the American people constituted perhaps their chief weakness as observers" (ibid., p. 175).

François Furet, who regards *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* as the most important work ever written on the French Revolution, makes a similar critique of this work as Pierson of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville was "ultimately" not interested in "economics per se" and "Tocqueville's historical description in *L'Ancien Régime* is thus essentially not concerned with economics" (ibid., pp. 154, 155).

He also says that "the economic analysis [in *The Old Regime*] is always superficial and vague" and that "economics was a dimension of social life that interested him [Tocqueville] only for its interaction with social or intellectual life but never in itself or as a basic mechanism of change" (Furet 1981:151).

These statements by Pierson and Furet about Tocqueville's lack of interest in economics and economic topics are quite strange, given that large parts of *Democracy in America* and *The Old Regime* are devoted to the economic life of the United States and France respectively. I would nonetheless suggest that the reason why Pierson and Furet (and also others) make this type of statements may carry the key to why the enormous literature on Tocqueville is largely silent about

"Tocqueville the economist", to use a phrase by Robert Nisbet (1976:65). The reason, I suggest, is as follows: Tocqueville's way of analyzing the economy is very much his own and differs so sharply from the one in mainstream economics that his analysis is simply not seen as "economic". This goes not only for economists, interestingly enough, but also for non-economists who have commented on this topic. Instead of portraying Tocqueville as ignorant in economics and uninterested in economic topics, I suggest instead that he did not care very much for the way that the economists of his day analyzed economic phenomena, and for this reason stayed away from economics. Or to phrase it differently: Tocqueville had to invent (and did invent) his own analysis of economic phenomena (see Table 1).

Table 1. Tocqueville in the History of Economics

1758	François Quesnay, Tableau Economique
1766	Turgot, Reflections on the Formation and Distribution of Riches
1776	Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations
1798	Thomas Malthus, An Essay on the Principle of Population
1803	Jean-Baptiste Say, Treatise on Political Economy
1817	David Ricardo, On the Principles of Economics and Taxation
1819	Sismondi, New Principles of Political Economy
1834	Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont, Treatise on Christian Economics
1835	Tocqueville, Memoir on Pauperism
1835, 1840	Tocqueville, Democracy in America
1836	Nassau Senior, An Outline of the Science of Political Economy
1838	Antoine Cournot, Researches into the Mathematical Principles of the
	Theory of Wealth
1841	Friedrich List, National System of Political Economy
1843	Wilhelm Roscher, Outline of Lectures on the Economy according to the
	Historical Method
1848	John Stuart Mill, The Principles of Political Economy
1853	Karl Knies, Political Economy from the Viewpoint of the Historical
	Method
1856	Tocqueville, The Old Régime and the French Revolution
1867	Karl Marx, Capital

Comment: Tocqueville wrote his major works at a time when modern economics had not yet come into being and there were several different approaches. Besides the British type of analytical economics, there were also a more historical-institutional approach as well as an attempt to create a

religious type of economics (such as Villeneuve-Bargemont's Treatise on Christian Economics which influenced Tocqueville's Memoir on Pauperism). Tocqueville was primarily influenced by Say and Villeneuve-Bargemont; he had also read Senior and the physiocrats.

The rest of this article represents an attempt to present and comment on Tocqueville's own brand of economics or analysis of economic phenomena. Before engaging in a presentation of his analysis on this account, I would however like to cite two items that may point the way in an exploration of this type. One of these can be found in what is the only substantial article (or book) that I have been able to locate that is exclusively devoted to Tocqueville's analysis of economic phenomena: Michael Hereth's "The Loss of Freedom through Devotion to the Economy: An Attempt to Understand the Role of the Economy in the Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville" (Hereth 19; see also the knowledgeable discussion in Steiner1998:162-83). One of Hereth's central points is that Tocqueville, as opposed to John Stuart Mill and many of the 19th century economists, refused to isolate economic phenomena along the lines of homo economicus.4 Tocqueville, Hereth argues, was of the opinion that economic phenomena always have to be seen as part of society.

The second item that may help us to better understand what an analysis of economic phenomena should be like, according to Tocqueville, can be found in a letter that he wrote in 1834 to Louis de Kergorlay, one of his oldest friend and a distant cousin. The general context of the letter is that Tocqueville and his friend were thinking of starting a journal, and Tocqueville wanted to address the question of its general direction. The relevant passage reads as follows:

"While all the efforts of political economy these days seem towards materialism, I would like the journal to accentuate the most immaterial side of this science; that it would try to introduce into it ideas, the role of emotions in prosperity and happiness; that it would try to rehabilitate spiritualism in politics and make it popular by having it serve what is useful." (Tocqueville 1977:361-62; my trans.)

At this point of my argument it should be clear why I think that one can cast Tocqueville as an economic sociologist. That Tocqueville can be seen as a sociologist (as well as, say, a historian and political theorist) has been accepted for quite some time in contemporary social science, especially after Raymond Aron's famous

lectures on Tocqueville as a sociologist in the 1960s (Aron 1968, 1990:240 ff.). The only thing that needs to be added to Aron's argument, as I see it, is that while Aron, and many sociologists after him, have emphasized Tocqueville's general sociology and his political sociology, we should also draw attention to his economic sociology.⁵

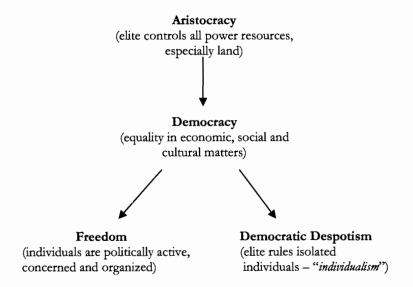
DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA AND THE NEED FOR A NEW SCIENCE OF ECONOMICS?

In the author's introduction to Democracy in America Tocqueville famously says that "a new science of politics is needed for a new world", and with this statement he meant that the United States with its democracy differed so much from Europe that new concepts and ways of analysis had to be invented in order to capture the new world (Tocqueville 1990,1:7). Tocqueville does not announce the need for a new science of economics, but it can be argued that economic life in the new world that he visited in the early 1830s was as different from its equivalent in Europe as its political system. This is precisely the part of Democracy in America that has not been acknowledged with full force in the secondary literature on Tocqueville, but which I will try to give an expression to in this article. Tocqueville was very sensitive to the meaning of words and often used them in other ways than was commonly done, something that the word "democracy" illustrates. He also constructed new expressions to capture novel phenomenon such as "the tyranny of the majority", to use another well-known example from Democracy in America. Both of these strategies are also used by Tocqueville in his attempts to a capture the new forms of economic life that he encountered in the United States.

There exist different ways of approaching Tocqueville's analysis of the economy in *Democracy in America*. One may, for example, follow the lead of Seymour Drescher and try to show how Tocqueville describes the process of industrialization in the United States (Drescher 1968:51-87). Here I will follow another approach and try to stay closer to Tocqueville's own terminology and analysis. The reason for this is that what I consider the most precious in Tocqueville's analysis, is precisely the alternative economic analysis that he tried to develop, in his effort to understand the new economic world of the United States.

Tocqueville presents his analysis to the reader of *Democracy in America* in two ways. There is first of all the general structure of the work: the reader is introduced to the geography of America in the opening chapter, then to the legal-constitutional structure of the country, and finally to its habits and customs, or *moeurs* as Tocqueville calls them. Secondly, there is the analytical scheme of the book, according to which human societies evolve from "aristocracy" to "democracy". The central question for the future in any democracy, we are also told, is whether there will be "liberty" or some form of "democratic despotism" (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The Basic Conceptual Scheme of Tocqueville's Democracy in America



Comment: While a small elite controls all power resources in what Tocqueville calls an "aristocracy" in Democracy in America, there is a levelling of economic, political and social conditions in a "democracy". Unless the individuals in a democracy are politically active, there will be "democratic despotism", as opposed to "liberty", in a democracy. As an example of democratic despotism, Tocqueville would later mention the rule of Louis-Philippe during 1830-1848.

In this article I will follow Tocqueville's scheme of the transition from aristocracy to democracy, rather than his logic of exposition in *Democracy in America*. Nonetheless, since Tocqueville starts out his

work with a chapter entitled "Exterior Form of North America", I will begin by taking a look at the role of geography in Tocqueville's analysis of the United States, including its economy.

Tocqueville, first of all, emphasizes the enormity of the continent that the Europeans had seized from its native inhabitants; it was a vast, magnificent continent, just waiting for the Europeans to be developed. South America may on the surface seem much more brilliant than North America, but is for a number of reasons less suitable for development. This does not mean that Tocqueville believed that the geography of a country decides its social structure, say along the lines that Montesquieu had argued. In a well-known passage in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville explains how he views the relationship between the customs (moeurs), the legal-constitutional structure of a country, and its geographical nature. Each of these, he says, are important, "but if they were to be classed in their proper order, I should say that physical circumstances are less efficient than the laws, and the laws infinitely less so than customs (moeurs) of the people" (Tocqueville 1990,1:322).

The thrust of Tocqueville's argument is that customs or *moeurs* represent the most important cause, and that they can trump a poor geography as well as bad laws. He adds that, "so seriously do I insist upon this head that, if I have hitherto failed in making the reader feel the important influence of the practical experience, the habits, the opinions, in short of the customs (*moeurs*) of the Americans upon the maintenance of their institutions, I have failed in the principal object of my work" (*ibid.*, pp. 322-23). Among what Tocqueville in this quote calls "institutions", he also means economic institutions.

Before leaving the theme of nature and the economy in *Democracy in America*, it should be noted that Tocqueville's justification of the conquest of the new world is largely cast in terms of economic development. We are told that the Indians "occupied [the land] without possessing it", and the reason for this is that "it is by agricultural labor that man appropriates the soil, and the early inhabitants of North America lived by the produce of the chase (*ibid.*, p. 25). Neither did the original inhabitants make a good use of many of the other geographical features of the country for economic progress, such as the American coasts which are "so admirably

adopted for commerce and industry" (*ibid.*). The Indians just happened to inhabit "the abode of a great nation yet unborn" (*ibid.*).

The second logic of *Democracy in America*, besides its exposition chapter by chapter, has to do with the analytical ordering of the work in terms of the transition from aristocracy to democracy. I have selected a few of the topics that have to do with this transition in the United States for their relevance to the economy, and in presenting those, I also want to draw the reader's attention to Tocqueville's terminology (see Table 2). The reason for mentioning some of Tocqueville's expressions is that they express his attempt to capture something novel and hitherto unknown, namely the economic life of a democracy. Three that I will return to are: "heroism of trading" (une sorte d'héroisme dans leur manière de faire le commerce), "passions for physical well-being" (la passion du bien-être matériel) and "interest properly understood" (la doctrine de l'intérêt bien entendu).

Table 2. Characteristics of the Economic Life and Morality in an Aristocracy versus a Democracy

ARISTOCRACY

DEMOCRACY

landed elite equal participation in industry, trade and

farming

inherited wealth wealth is temporary

idealistic morality economic interests are openly acknowledged

master-servant bond employer-employee relationship luxury comfort and mass consumption

work is dishonorable work is honored

profit-making discouraged profit-making is seen as positive safety and stability valued risk-taking sought out and enjoyed

Comment: In Democracy in America Tocqueville presents the economic life of a democracy (the United States in the early 1800s) and in the process of doing so, he also contrasts it to the economic life of an aristocracy.

Society, Tocqueville argues, was once agricultural in nature and a small elite controlled all economic, political and religious power. It is now, however, in the process of changing to a society that is industrial-commercial in nature and in which all types of powers are

increasingly being shared. Important milestones in this development from aristocracy to democracy are the Reformation, the rise of the bourgeoisie in the cities and the French Revolution – events that broke the religious, economic and political monopoly of the nobility.

When society changes from being an aristocracy to a democracy, its general morality also changes and becomes more explicitly economic in nature, according to Tocqueville. In aristocratic society morality of the type that encourages the individual to make grand sacrifices, is held up as a noble and inspiring vision. That people have their own economic interests, and usually try to realize these, is not openly acknowledged, but goes on in secrecy. In democratic society, in contrast, the official morality is more prosaic, but also more honest in that it openly acknowledges that people do have economic interests and that they do want to realize these. In the United States Tocqueville found to his surprise that people believed that in order to realize their economic interests, they had to be honest, good and even altruistic in some cases. This doctrine he termed "self-interest properly understood".

Another difference between economic life in an aristocracy and in a democracy has to do with the distinction between what Tocqueville terms "luxury" and "comfort" (Tocqueville 1990:2, 51, 131-33). The former is indulged in by an aristocratic elite, while the latter belongs to the democratic masses (cf. Crowley 2003). Tocqueville illustrates the difference with the example of a watch. While aristocrats in France had handmade, expensive and high-quality watches, common people in the United States had cheap, massproduced and low-quality watches. Tocqueville's new world, in other words, is a consumer culture.

The attitude to work also set an aristocratic society apart from a democracy. In Europe, as well as in the South of the United States, Tocqueville says, work is looked down upon since it is carried out by commoners and by slaves. The way that someone shows that he belongs to the elite is precisely by *not* working. While an aristocracy devalues work, it is seen as something positive and honorable in a democracy. Tocqueville was especially amazed by the fact everyone in the United States had a job and that people happily switched from one type of job to another. He also noted with surprise that the U.S.

President got a salary. One of the most powerful parts of *Democracy in America* deals with the different attitudes to work in the South and the North. Tocqueville was very quick to see that the North was overtaking the South economically by virtue of its different work ethic. Traveling down the Mississippi with Ohio on the right (where slavery was forbidden), and with Kentucky on the left (were slavery was allowed), he noted:

"Upon the left bank of the stream the population is sparse; from time to time one descries a troop of slaves loitering in the half-desert fields; the primeval forest reappears at every turn; society seems to be asleep, man to be idle, and nature alone offers a scene of activity and life.

From the right bank, on the contrary, a confused hum is heard, which proclaims afar the presence of industry; the fields are covered with abundant harvests; the elegance of the dwellings announces the taste and activity of laborers; and man appears to be in the enjoyment of that wealth and contentment which is the reward of labor...

Upon the left bank of the Mississippi labor is confounded with the idea of slavery, while upon the right bank it is identified with that of prosperity and improvement; on the one side it is degraded, on the other it is honored." (Tocqueville 1990,1:362-63)

The attitude to profit-making is related to that of work, in the sense that it is looked down upon in an aristocracy (but practiced in secrecy), while it is openly held in esteem in a democracy. In a democracy like the United States people like to take risks and gamble for its own sake, something that goes well with profit-making. One phenomenon that exemplifies this and which Tocqueville came across in the United States, is something that he terms "heroism of trading" (Tocqueville 1990:1, 424 ff.). While aristocrats show heroism in battle, democrats show heroism in business. The example that Tocqueville uses to illustrate heroism of trading is shipping across the Atlantic. While sailors on European ships are cautious and carefully check the weather before they leave harbor, and as a result of this take their time to get across the Atlantic, sailors on U.S. ships are much faster – precisely because they like to take risks and want to race ahead regardless of the weather.

In going from an aristocratic society to a democratic one, Tocqueville also discusses how the relationship of a master to his subordinates changes into that of an employer to his employees (Tocqueville 1990:2,177-85).⁶ The example that Tocqueville uses is that of the relationship between a master and his manservant, and he

notes that while there is a close emotional link between the two in an aristocracy, there is little of this in a democracy. The reason for this is that an employee, who is hired by an employer, knows that the only difference between the employer and himself is that the employer happens to have more money. He knows that they are equal by nature, and it is this knowledge that breaks the intimacy that is characteristic of the master-servant relationship in an aristocracy.

While the transition from an aristocracy to a democracy has many causes, Tocqueville singles out inheritance legislation in the United States as a specifically important one (Tocqueville 1990:1,47-50). In order to maintain a tiny elite that owns all the land, you need primogeniture. In the United States Tocqueville found that (male) children had an equal right to inherit, and this meant that large landed properties were impossible to maintain in the long run. Tocqueville also distinguishes between the physical and the mental effects of equal inheritance, with the former referring to the splitting up of the property and the latter to the destruction of the notion that it is imperative to maintain the family property.

While the ruling elite in an aristocracy always was wealthy, democracy did not necessarily mean that everybody owned equally much or that there were no rich people. When he was traveling across the Atlantic, Tocqueville, for example, became acquainted with a wealthy American merchant, Peter Schermerhorn, and during his travels in the United States he often met rich people. What distinguishes an aristocracy from a democracy, in addition to the source of the wealth, was something else, namely that fortunes were of a longstanding nature. In a democracy, in contrast, fortunes were so quickly made and unmade that no permanent elite could develop.

The idea that wealth was quickly made and lost in the United States has been effectively challenged by U.S. historians, even if it is clear that the European nobility lasted much longer than any mercantile elite ever has, either in Europe or in the United States (e.g. Pessen 1971, 1982, Wills 2004). It is also clear that the situation in the early 1800s in the United States was quite different from the one at the end of the century, when a new type of super-rich elite emerged, the so-called robber barons.

Tocqueville has also often been criticized for not having visited any factories in the United States, in contrast to other European visitors at the time, and, more generally, for not understanding the role of technology and the industrial revolution in the United States. In between working on Vol. 1 of *Democracy in America* and Vol. 2, however, Tocqueville made a short trip to England, where industrialization had proceeded much further than in the United States. As a result, he had a chance to think about the rise of industrial capitalism and also to include his ideas on this topic in Vol. 2. Tocqueville, according to this second volume, was in all brevity very apprehensive about the new "manufacturing class", as he called it. If ever the aristocratic type of society was going to make a comeback, he said, it would be through this type of new manufacturing elite.

If one were to sum up Tocqueville's view of economic life in the United States, there are two features that stand out. First of all, Tocqueville was truly amazed by the fluidity of democratic society, including its economy. People moved around a lot, changed jobs and bought and sold property at a dizzying speed. There was a restlessness and economic effervescence in the United States that Tocqueville tried to capture through such expressions as "trading passions", (passions industrielles) "love of wealth" (l'amour des richesses) and the like (Tocqueville 1990, 2:157, 288).

The second outstanding feature about economic life in a democracy was linked to the threat of a new form of enlightened despotism. The mechanism through which such despotism could come about was as follows. In focusing so strongly on work and making money, the average person could easily come to see politics as a burden and be tempted to withdraw to his personal sphere of friends and family. Tocqueville termed this phenomenon "individualism", and it differed, he said, from "egoism" in that it could only be found in a democracy.

When people retreat from politics, an opportunity is created for some ruthless individual to take power. What makes this seizure of power relatively easy is that the lack of interest in politics normally means that no intermediary powers between the individual and the state exist or that these have been seriously weakened. The road is thereby opened up for a kind of enlightened despotism along the lines of, say, Louis-Philippe during 1830-1848, when everybody in France was trying to enrich themselves and left politics to the king. In the long run, this type of situation would invariably lead to a stifling of economic initiative and an end to economic growth, according to Tocqueville.

Before leaving *Democracy in America*, it can be added that the analysis of the capitalist economy in this work shows many parallels to Weber's argument about modern rational capitalism in *The Protestant Ethic* (Swedberg 2004). Both Weber and Tocqueville depict modern capitalism as extremely dynamic; both see it as having its origin in Puritanism; and both draw attention to the spirit of modern capitalism rather than to its institutions. Interesting differences between the two also exist, and include that Weber focuses on Europe in the 1500s and 1600s, while Tocqueville discusses the United States in the early 1800s. Tocqueville also sees mass consumption as an integral part of modern dynamic capitalism, while Weber emphasizes abstinence in consumption as a way of channelling resources into investments.

THE MEMOIR ON PAUPERISM

Compared to Democracy in America and The Old Regime and the French Revolution, Tocqueville's Memoir on Pauperism is relatively unknown, and some general information on this work is therefore in order. In 1835, after having completed Vol. 1 of Democracy in America, Tocqueville published a small work on pauperism in the acts of the Academic Society of Cherbourg of which he was a member. Tocqueville lived in the vicinity of Cherbourg, and he had also for some time been interested in pauperism and gathered information on this topic during his trip to England in the fall of 1833. Besides these facts, however, we do not know why Tocqueville chose this particular form to present his ideas in.

While the *Memoir* was noticed at the time its publication, it soon disappeared from general view. It was reprinted in France in 1911 and in 1983-1984, but it was especially through its publication in Tocqueville's *Collected Works* in 1989 that it became generally available. Tocqueville had planned a second memoir to appear in 1838, and an incomplete draft of this item (dated 1837) was published

for the first time in 1989 in Tocqueville's Collected Works as well. In the United States, Seymour Drescher included a translation of the first memoir in his anthology Tocqueville and Beaumont on Social Reform in 1968. Drescher's translation was reprinted in The Public Interest in 1983 with an introduction by historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, and these two writings were in their turn reprinted as a small pamphlet in 1997.

The *Memoir* is described by Himmelfarb as "a worthy footnote to [Democracy in America] and a notable contribution to the idea of civil society", but one may argue that its importance goes further than this and extends to Tocqueville's more general view of the relationship between the economy and society (Himmelfarb 1997:14). To this can be added that Tocqueville's analysis of poverty also contains some very important ideas on the central role of private property in a liberal capitalist society. These latter ideas are primarily to be found in Tocqueville's second, unfinished memoir.

The first memoir is divided into two parts. In the first of these Tocqueville presents the reasons why there is poverty or pauperism; and in the second he discusses different types of charity and if these can alleviate it. At the dawn of history, Tocqueville begins, people came together in groups to hunt, and at this stage property was negligible. When human being became sedentary, however, the situation changed, and soon an elite of landowners appeared. But even if most of the land was now owned by a small number of people, everybody had enough to survive, and the reason for this was that everybody worked the land.

Industry, as opposed to agriculture, has as its purpose to produce for people's secondary needs, according to Tocqueville. By this he means items that people do not need for their physical survival, but which they nonetheless can become dependent on. With industry, Tocqueville writes, "needs diversify and multiply", and soon "a universe of new commodities has been introduced into the world" (Tocqueville 1997:22). The problem with industry, as opposed to agriculture, is that when there is a calamity or some economic crisis, workers have nothing to fall back on. When they have no job, they cannot get the necessities they need – and pauperism is the result.

In the second memoir Tocqueville mainly discusses two ways of alleviating pauperism: private charity and what he terms "legal charity" and which today would be called welfare. Tocqueville was very interested in the idea of private charity, which he saw as religious or Catholic in origin. Legal charity, in contrast, he ascribed to Protestantism. In the 1840s Tocqueville also became a charter member of two organizations that were devoted to charity: Annales de Charité (1845-) and Société d'Economie Charitable (1847-).

There are several advantages to private charity, according to Tocqueville. It is temporary; it creates a moral tie between the giver and the receiver; and it puts the receiver in an inferior situation only for a brief time and in secret. Tocqueville's general verdict about private or individual charity is very positive, but he also points out that it cannot handle the problem of pauperism. "It would be imprudent to rely on it" (*ibid.*, p. 38).

Legal charity, in contrast, builds on the idea that the receiver has a *night* to help, and therefore seems "elevating" and "great" (*ibid.*, p. 30). The idea of a right is as a rule also very positive, Tocqueville says. When it comes to alleviating poverty, however, legal charity simply does not work. It creates an incentive for people to remain poor and to sink into vice, crime and the like, according to Tocqueville. Paupers who receive legal charity end up living "without hope and without fear" (*ibid.*, p. 32).

The reason for the negative effect of legal charity has to do with incentives; it stops people from working and trying to improve their situation. According to Tocqueville, there are "two incentives to work"; one that is related to survival ("the need to live") and another that is related to comfort beyond survival ("the desire to improve the condition of live"; *ibid.*, p. 28). While the former makes everybody work hard so that they can survive, only a minority can motivate themselves enough to work to improve their situation. And since legal charity removes the former incentive, its general effect is to pacify people.

One might think of various ways to solve this difficulty, Tocqueville says, but none of them works. One could, for example, give legal charity only to those who have caused their own misfortune. One could also demand that everybody has to work, in order to qualify for legal charity. But neither of these two measures work, according to Tocqueville. It would be very hard, for example, to find out what has caused somebody's misfortune; and, even if this was possible, it would be difficult to let someone die or starve just because they are in the wrong.

Similarly, there are many difficulties with carrying out the idea that all who get help have to work. The political authorities would have to assume the role of an "industrial entrepreneur" and decide on prices and volumes, something they are not qualified to do (*ibid.*, p. 30). It would also be hard for the local authorities (who are in charge of legal charity) to find work for all the people in need and to pay them.

Tocqueville concludes that legal charity is necessary in a series of situations, such as when people are old, sick, mentally ill or the victims of some catastrophe. Legal charity, as he put it, has to cover "the helplessness in infirmary, the decrepitude of old age, sickness, insanity" and "times of public calamities" (*ibid.*, p. 37). This leaves the unemployed, but to extend legal charity to those who do not have a job would be a disaster, according to Tocqueville. The economy would soon come to a halt and a social revolution might erupt. The first memoir ends with Tocqueville raising the question if there might exist some other way of handling poverty, especially the type caused by unemployment. Could one, for example, slow down the movement of peasants to the cities? Or could the savings of the workers be used?

The second, unfinished memoir attempts to answer this last question. Tocqueville begins his search for a solution by noting that what can prevent pauperism among the peasants is for each to own a piece of land; and that the case of France shows that this is possible. "As I see it," he says, "the problem to be solved is thus the following: to find a way to give to the individual worker the spirit and habits of an owner" (Tocqueville 1989:146). Someone who owns property, Tocqueville explains, looks to the future and is ready to act with energy to better his condition. A person who does not own property, on the other hand, becomes indifferent and it totally dependent on chance.

The rest of the unfinished memoir is devoted to a discussion of how to awaken "the spirit and habits of an owner" among the workers. One way would be for them to own a piece of the industry where they work, but this is something that the current owners would block. Another alternative, which could work in the future but not now, according to Tocqueville, would be for the workers to start their own industries. The only remedy that could work just now, he says, would be to create banks that would combine the roles of savings banks and pawnshops. This way, the workers would be able to get a good rate of interest on their savings; they would also be able to withdraw their savings, when they were in need.

Tocqueville's second memoir breaks off at this point of the argument, and it is generally agreed in the secondary literature that Tocqueville was unable to solve the problem of pauperism to his satisfaction. On some loose leaves intended for the second memoir Tocqueville has also sketched a few additional ways of dealing with poverty; and this is interpreted as a further sign of his failure. While this interpretation seems correct, it should also be added that Tocqueville's two memoirs on pauperism are very important as they stand, in that they complete his analysis of the economy in a democracy. Despite its richness when it comes to the economy, the analysis in *Democracy in America* does not extend to poverty and welfare.

"SPEECH ON THE RIGHT TO WORK" AND THE 1848 REVOLUTION

There are several reasons why one may want to include Tocqueville's speech from 1848 on the right to work in a discussion of the role of the economy in Tocqueville's work. For one thing, it explores yet another solution to the problem of pauperism in a democracy, namely to give everybody the right to a job. Another is that it is in this speech that one can find Tocqueville's most succinct analysis of socialism. And finally, while there is a normative dimension to all of Tocqueville's writings, it is even more pronounced in a public speech of this type.

The background to "The Right to Work", which caused quite a stir in its time and was often reprinted as a pamphlet, is as follows. As a result of the February Revolution of 1848 it was decided to create a new constitution, and Tocqueville was elected to the main committee charged with this task. In early September an amendment to the proposal for the new constitution was introduced, according to which

the Second Republic would recognize the right of all citizens to work. Why this issue was raised in the first place has been explained as follows by an expert on Tocqueville: "The right to work was the great victory the workers expected from the 1848 revolution; for them it had the force of myth, balancing the right to property" (Jardin 1988:418). By September 1848, however, the radical forces that had brought about the February Revolution had been defeated and General Cavaignac was in power. Tocqueville delivered his speech in the debate about the amendment that now ensued. The result of the debate was that the amendment was defeated; the Republic acknowledged the right of every citizen to general assistance, not to work.

In his speech to the Assembly on September 12 Tocqueville first addressed the issue of the way in which the state would have to address the task of providing work for all, if the amendment was accepted. This could be done in two ways, he said: either by the state giving order to the private industry to hire unemployed workers, or by the state going into business itself and hiring workers. In the latter case, the state would have to take on the role normally assigned to "the industrial entrepreneur", and eventually it would also become the only entrepreneur (Tocqueville 1968:180). The result of this would be a kind of Gresham's Law, with bad employment driving out good employment, according to Tocqueville, since the state could not refuse employment and usually demanded less work than private employers did. If the state instead chose to place whoever needed employment with the private industry, all competition would be eliminated. The state, and not the market, would now have to decide the wages and regulate everything.

The right to work meant in other words the introduction of socialism; and a large part of Tocqueville's speech was devoted to a discussion why socialism had to be rejected. Tocqueville argued that there were several reasons why socialism was unacceptable. For one thing, it only appealed to "man's material passions" and ignored his soul (*ibid.*, p. 182). Secondly, socialism meant the elimination of private property, an institution that had been around since the dawn of history. Third, socialism and political democracy do not go together. While socialism extends the sphere of the individual, socialism restricts it. "Democracy and socialism...are not only

different but contrary things" (*ibid.*, p. 187). And last, socialism means that the state takes over from the individual.

Tocqueville elaborated on the reasons why it was unacceptable to grant so much power to the socialist state in an eloquent manner. In such a society human beings would only be seen as economic actors; "the goal assigned to man is well-being alone" (ibid., p. 185). The result would be a society that could be likened to "a beehive or beaver colony...a society of skilled animals rather than of free and civilized men" (ibid.). Since the state saw as its task to eliminate failure from the lives of all individuals, it would also have to assume responsibility for them. "It is the idea that for fear of letting a man fail, the State must always be beside him, above him, around him, in order to guide him, protect him, sustain him, restrain him" (ibid., p. 183). The end result of Tocqueville's critique was not that socialism would lead to a police state, but to "a society without air and almost without light" (ibid., p. 186). Just as Tocqueville feared democratic despotism in capitalist society, he feared what may be called the soft despotism of socialism.

Tocqueville ended his speech by declaring that "the February Revolution must be Christian and democratic" (*ibid.*, p. 192). Christian charity demanded that the state should help all who suffer and have no resources of their own. If one takes this last statement literally, it would mean that Tocqueville had now changed his stance from the one he advocated in his memoirs on pauperism from the 1830s, namely that the unemployed should not be given any aid from the state but that new forms of dealing with poverty must instead be sought. One may, however, also see Tocqueville's statement about welfare being extended to everybody in need, simply as an argument for the original position of the Constitution which the people in favor of the amendment had opposed.

THE OLD REGIME AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OR ECONOMIC LIFE IN AN ARISTOCRACY

Tocqueville's second great book – The Old Regime and the French Revolution (1856) – was part of a larger project that he failed to complete before his death in 1859. Even though the topic is very different from Democracy in America, there is definitely a continuity between the two works. In the foreword to The Old Regime

Tocqueville also refers to some of the central ideas in his first book. For the purposes of this article, *The Old Regime* can be said to complement *Democracy in America* in that it adds an analysis of economic life in an aristocracy (France) to that of the economic life in a democracy (the United States).

The Old Regime can be characterized as a study of the background to the French Revolution, and its main focus is on the political and socio-economic structure of pre-revolutionary France. In his account of the role played by economic factors in this development, as well as of other factors, Tocqueville's emphasis is not on telling the history of what happened; this has already been done, he says, but on giving an analytical account of history or an "analytical narrative", to use a recent phrase (Bates 1998). As in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville is essentially interested in locating and explicating social mechanisms, whether these be social, political or economic.

The theme in *Democracy in America* that Tocqueville comments on in his foreword to *The Old Regime* is the relationship between the economy, on the one hand, and the existence of despotism or freedom, on the other. Economic life can flourish in a despotic regime, Tocqueville notes, and one reason for this is that despots like their subjects to be preoccupied with money-making and forget about politics. The economy in a despotic regime, however, will soon start to decline. "Despotism alone can provide that atmosphere of secrecy which favors crooked dealings and enables the freebooters of finance to make illicit fortunes" (Tocqueville 1955: xiii-xiv). The kind of "vices" that are developed in despotic regimes, he also says, can be cured only in one way, and that is by the introduction of liberty.

Prosperity and liberty are closely related, according to Tocqueville. "In the long run freedom always brings to those who know how to retain it comfort and well-being, and often great prosperity" (Tocqueville 1955:168). One cannot, however, use freedom in a purely instrumental manner; "in fact, those who prize freedom only for the material benefits it offers have never kept it long" (*ibid.*). Liberty, according to Tocqueville, has an intrinsic value "apart from all 'practical' consideration" (*ibid.*). Love of freedom defies logical analysis and will always be incomprehensible to "meaner souls" (*ibid.*).

At the center of Tocqueville's analysis in *The Old Régime* stands the state or rather the process of centralization that took place before the Revolution and made the difference between France before and after the Revolution much less spectacular than what the revolutionaries thought. The state, by virtue of its immense power already in prerevolutionary France, had a huge impact on the economic life of the country; economic events also played a powerful role in unleashing the revolutionary events.

The French state was, first of all, greedy for resources, and it severely unbalanced the social structure of the country in its attempts to pay for its expenses. Its interventions in the economy were often arbitrary and created confusion. The state would, for example, take back a piece of land that it had earlier sold; it also behaved irresponsibly in many other ways. That the state had more or less a monopoly on deciding what should be done in the economy and elsewhere in society, also meant that people were pacified and reduced to waiting for the state to take the initiative. "It was on the administration more than on his personal efforts that the Frenchman relied for the success of his business undertakings, for the regular supply of his daily needs, for the upkeep of the roads he used, and in fact for everything that could ensure his peace of mind and material well-being" (Tocqueville 1955:198).

Two of the most important ways for the state to raise income were through taxation and the sale of offices. The origin of the state's right to taxation – and to centralization as well – Tocqueville traced to the fateful decision of Charles VII in the 1400s to usurp the right of taxation from the estates. Before this day, Tocqueville says, the principle of "no taxation without the people's consent" was generally accepted (Tocqueville 1955:98). Not only were the estates pushed to the side by the decision of Charles VII, it also meant the loss of power for the aristocracy vis-à-vis the state. With the intermediary layers of power gone, it was not long before the state became the most powerful actor in French society.

The French King early instituted a direct land tax, the so-called taille, which would grow over the centuries. Taxes in France, as opposed to say in Germany, were often indirect in nature, according to Tocqueville. From the beginning the nobility was also exempt

from the *taille*; and there existed ways for the middle classes to avoid this and other taxes as well. The peasants, in contrast, were not exempt from any taxes or fees and had to carry the main burden of the costs of the state. One extremely negative consequence of this type of taxation policy, Tocqueville repeatedly emphasizes, is that it led to a segregation of the classes in French society. The nobility was cut off from the peasants as well as the middle classes, and the latter from the peasants. This was one of the main reasons, Tocqueville says, for the great hostility of the peasants to the aristocrats in the Revolution.

The methods that the state used in collecting taxes also led to much discontent and suffering. The state typically picked one peasant to be responsible for collecting the taxes in a community, the so-called Collector. The way that he did this was up to him, but he had to produce a certain sum, and he was liable for this sum with his own property and person. The result was that everybody tried to hide their property from the Collector. It was also easy for the Collector to single out his enemies, settle old scores and the like when he decided on who should pay what. He became hated by everybody and his future was usually destroyed for ever.

Also the sale of offices had a negative impact on the country and blocked economic development. The state soon discovered that the middle classes were eager to buy positions from the state or the local administration, for economic as well as status reasons, and it soon began to sell offices on a grand scale. According to Tocqueville, no other country sold as many offices as France, and what drove these sales was the need of the Treasury more than anything else.

As a result of this type of policy, centralization increased. Local autonomy was soon eliminated; and Tocqueville cites as an example the decision in 1692 to eliminate municipal elections in the cities and put up the municipal jobs for sale (Tocqueville 1955:42). Secondly, by selling so many offices the administration of the country soon became imperiled, something that forced the state to create a second and parallel administrative structure. Real power was now shifted to the so-called *intendants*, who soon decided most things and only had to answer to the Royal Council.

The economic life of the main classes – the nobility, the peasants and the middle classes – was also deeply affected by the trend towards centralization, which in its turn was partly caused by the economic policies of the state. Most importantly, it encouraged the aristocracy to withdraw to the cities and to reject any responsibility whatsoever for the peasants in the countryside. The peasants were left to pay taxes and fees to an absent aristocracy and grew to hate it.

The aristocracy also closed itself off from the middle classes and avoided marriage with commoners (Tocqueville 1955:86). As a result, it became more of a caste than a class, according to Tocqueville. It also cut itself off from the economic power of the middle classes. While it kept its titles and grandeur, the French nobility had little power by the end of the 1700s, with its political strength sapped by the state and its economic strength by the rise of the middle classes. The nobility, as Tocqueville put it, had "ceased being an aristocracy" (Tocqueville 1955:86).

The peasants were left to their own resources in the countryside and had no-one to defend their interests, a situation that was different from the Middle Ages when the nobility had assumed responsibility for the people on their estates. Not only did the peasants have to carry the main burden of the taxes, they also had to do forced labor in their local communities. As a result of these impositions, they became bitter and hateful.

Throughout *The Old Regime* Tocqueville applies a comparative approach, and he notes, for example, that despite all this oppression the French peasants were freer than their counterparts in many countries. Despite what was commonly thought, many peasants in France owned their own land already *before* the Revolution. Tocqueville also comments on the love that the peasant had for his land, investing all his money and energy into it and often paying far too much when he bought it. "When at long last he has gained the possession of this land which means so much to him, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that he sinks his heart in it along with the grain he sows" (Tocqueville 1955:31).

The middle classes were cut off from the peasants as well as the nobility. They did not want to mix with the peasants, and the nobility did not want to have anything to do with the middle classes. People from the middle classes often lived in the cities, since this is where economic life was the least restrained and since there were many exemptions from the taxes in the cities. If the main economic ambition of the peasants was to own a small piece of land, members of the middle classes wanted jobs with the state. Before the Revolution, Tocqueville says, they typically bought an office, and after the Revolution they sold themselves to get one. "It is a great mistake to suppose that the keen desire for office displayed by the modern Frenchman, in particular the bourgeois developed only after the Revolution", according to Tocqueville (1955:91). "This peculiar passion took its rise several centuries before, and since then it has never ceased to grow, thanks to the encouragement given it by the powers-that-be".

Among the many myths about the French Revolution that Tocqueville pierced was also the one that the Revolution had been caused by the economic misery of the country. What actually had happened, according to Tocqueville, was that the economy had *improved* before the Revolution. More than that, people had been the most discontent precisely in those parts of the country where the economic reforms had been the most successful.

Tocqueville referred to the phenomenon that revolutions do not always happen when things go from bad to worse, but sometimes when things improve, as one of those "paradoxes" that history is full of (Tocqueville 1955:176). Anticipating the idea of relative deprivation, Tocqueville suggested that when the hope of people is aroused, their sense of what is possible changes, and this is what explains their "paradoxical" behavior. "Patiently endured so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses man's mind" (Tocqueville 1955:177).

Tocqueville's analysis of the physiocrats or "the economists", as they were called in the 1700s, is of special interest for this article. What is innovative about Tocqueville's analysis of Quetelet, Turgot *et al.* is not so much what he says about their economic ideas, which he largely ignores. It is instead his focus on their political ideas, and the role that these came to play in the Revolution. Tocqueville, in brief,

suggests that we not only study the economic ideas of the economists but also their political vision and how it affects society.

What especially fascinated Tocqueville with the physiocrats, he said, was that it is in their works that you get the best picture of what the Revolution in the long run was all about. The "true character" of the revolution was equality in servitude rather than equality in liberty or what Tocqueville already in *Democracy in America* had called "democratic despotism" (Tocqueville 1955:163). The physiocrats advocated a radical destruction of the old French society with its nobility and court, but had no sense whatsoever for what liberty was all about. They wanted an enlightened state and mass education of the citizens, but no intermediary layers and no freedom for the masses. The ideals of the physiocrats, Tocqueville says, was China with its emperor and educated mandarins. The physiocrats had grown up in a society without freedom, he noted, and had as a consequence no sense for it.

The Old Regime ends with a famous appendix on the situation before the Revolution in Languedoc, one of the parts in France where the state had had much less power, and which for this reason could be held up as a counter example to what happened in the rest of France. Tocqueville paints the economic, social and political life of Languedoc in very bright colors. The power of the estates was still intact in the 1700s and, as a result, there was little estrangement between the classes. Whenever the state sold off local offices in Languedoc, these were immediately bought back by the authorities in Languedoc. There was no forced and unpaid labor, and the peasants were always paid for whatever collective undertakings they engaged in. Taxes were collected in a much less authoritarian manner than in the rest of France; they also followed the land and not the person. Languedoc, in brief, showed what France could have been like, if it had been governed wisely.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON TOCQUEVILLE AND ECONOMICS

My sense is that the material that has been presented in this article should be enough to justify that one talks about Tocqueville's analysis of the economy with as much right as one talks about his analysis of politics, religion, law and so on. I also hope to have shown that there is quite a bit that one can say on this topic, and it should similarly be clear that what I have said in this article by no means exhausts it. Tocqueville makes important analyses of a series of economic phenomena and phenomena related to the economy, in his two major works as well as in some of his minor works. There are, for example, analyses of work, consumption, risk-taking and of commercial society more generally in *Democracy in America*. In *The Old Regime* there are important passages on taxation, the sale of offices and the role of the state in the economy. The *Memoir on Pauperism* discusses poverty and charity, and "The Right to Labor" how to deal with unemployment and what is wrong with socialism. To this can be added that Tocqueville often suggested new ways of looking at traditional economic topics as well as new expressions in his attempt to better capture some economic phenomenon, such as "heroism of trading", "interest properly understood" and "passion for physical well-being".

Tocqueville wrote at a time when economic analysis was still in fluctuation and sociology had not yet come into being, and one may therefore ask what type of paradigm or social science that Tocqueville's analysis of the economy fits the best. His friend John Stuart Mill argued that the way to make economics scientific was to focus exclusively on the profit motive and ignore the rest. Mill added that no political economist "was ever so absurd as to suppose that mankind are really constituted that way, but [that] this is the mode in which science must necessarily proceed" (Mill 1992:139). Tocqueville never confronted the idea of homo economicus, as first propounded by Mill in 1844, but it is clear from his writings that he rejected it (cf. Persky 1995). Tocqueville, as Michael Hereth has shown in his important article on the role of the economy in Tocqueville's work, essentially took the position that economic phenomena must be analyzed as part of the larger social whole. Using a term from Karl Polanyi, which Mark Granovetter has introduced into contemporary economic sociology, one can say that for Tocqueville the economy is always embedded in society and its social structure.

Does Tocqueville's type of analysis fit today's type of economics better than yesterday's? It is clear that many economists today reject the narrow vision of *homo economicus* and try to introduce social elements directly into their models. My answer to this question would be that despite these attempts to broaden the scope of their analyses, Tocqueville's type of analysis differs quite a bit from that of today's

economists. While Tocqueville is as analytical as, say, George Akerlof, Oliver Williamson and so on, he is analytical in a different way. For one thing, he rejects the assumption of rationality; and for another, he works much closer to historical facts.

Does Tocqueville then better fit the mould of economic sociology? I think that an argument can be made for answering this question with a 'yes'. Raymond Aron has made the classical case for Tocqueville as a sociologist, and there is not much that needs to be added to this, in order to make him into an economic sociologist. It is, for example, clear that one can cast Tocqueville's analysis of consumption in *Democracy in America* as an early contribution to the sociology of consumption; his comments on work in the same study, as an early contribution to the sociology of work; and so on. Through the analysis of taxation in *The Old Regime* Tocqueville adds to the insights of what Schumpeter would later term fiscal sociology. One can also find an interesting analysis of the role of the economic dimension of classes in the same work, and so on.

To cast Tocqueville as an economic sociologist means, among other things, to enrich the tradition of this subfield with the insights of Tocqueville. By proceeding in this way, one would add to this growing subfield in sociology and make it richer. But even if this may be true, there is one aspect of Tocqueville's work that does not easily fit into economic sociology, either in its early Weberian form or in its current, North American version. This is Tocqueville's emphasis on liberty and how it is related to the economy. Today's economic sociology refuses, like most sociology, to take a normative stance and has, as a result, failed to examine the link between these two aspects of human life. Precisely for this reason, I would argue, an exploration of what Tocqueville has to say on the theme of liberty and the economy may well constitute Tocqueville's most precious contribution to economic sociology – and perhaps also to economic analysis as a whole.

NOTES

- [1]I am grateful to Philippe Steiner for information on the relationship between Say and Tocqueville.
- [2] For Tocqueville's writings on slavery and Algeria, see the collection by Jennifer Pitts, and on the railroad between Paris and Cherbourg, Vol. 10 of his Collected Works (Tocqueville 1995, 2001). André Jardin discusses Tocqueville's involvement with the newspaper Le Commerce in 1844-1845 (Jardin 1988:388-96; cf. Boesche 1983). See also the recent French anthology with a collection of Tocqueville's "economic texts" (Tocqueville 2005). For Tocqueville's notes from his trips to the United States, England and Ireland, see Tocqueville 1959, 1988.
- [3] Possibly due to his aristocratic upbringing and ethos, Tocqueville appears to have been awkward and not very skilled in handling money. Reflecting later on how he negotiated the monetary aspects of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville described himself as "a great fool in business matters" (Pierson 1996:6). He also made no money whatsoever on the U.S. edition of this work (Zunz forthcoming). It can be added that in their eagerness to get the Government's approval for their plans to go to the United States and study its prisons, Tocqueville and Beaumont offered to pay for their own expenses something they later regretted and unsuccessfully tried to change (*ibid.*, p. 35).
 - Tocqueville's small fortune came from inheritance and his attempt to invest in stocks and bonds in U.S. railways became a failure due to the economic crisis of 1856 and onwards (Jardin 1988:480). One expert on Tocqueville finally describes him as "a comfortable if not affluent *propriétaire* with very little day-to-day interest in maximizing even his own sources of income, and who left hard bargaining with tenants to his wife" (Drescher 1968:67). Tocqueville did not make any economic innovations on his own estate, which he preferred to use for long meditative walks (*ibid.*).
- [4] The links between Tocqueville and the German Historical School have not to my knowledge been explored.
- [5] During the last decade or so there has been a resurgence of interest in Tocqueville's analysis of organizations in *Democracy in America* and much of this work has been cast in terms of social capital (Skocpol 1996, Skocpol and Munson 2000). According to Tocqueville, the Americans used the experience they had gained in working with political organizations also for their economic affairs. While this is a phenomenon that belongs to a discussion of Tocqueville and the economy, I will not pursue it in this article (but see Swedberg 2004).

[6] Here as elsewhere in the text I will use "his" rather than "his or her" in referring to Tocqueville's work since it is usually a male that he has in mind, not a male or a female.

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ABSTRACT: Tocqueville's views on politics, religion and law have attracted many commentators, as opposed to his views on economic topics. In this article I try to remedy this situation by presenting and discussing what Tocqueville knew about economics and, more importantly, what economic phenomena he focused on and how he analyzed these. Special attention is paid in this respect to Democracy in America and The Old Regime and the French Revolution, but also some of his minor writings are discussed. Tocqueville wrote before the emergence of modern economics and there are few points in common between his type of analysis and that of, say, John Stuart Mill or modern economists. There is, on the other hand, I suggest, a distinct affinity between Tocqueville's way of analyzing the economy and that of economic sociology.

