

**HERTOG POLITICAL STUDIES PROGRAM
2013 SUMMER FELLOWSHIP
WEEK 4 – ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE’S *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*
Washington, DC**

Section 1 – James Ceaser, professor, University of Virginia

Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, translators of the University of Chicago edition of *Democracy in America*, claim in their introduction to the work that it is “at once the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written on America.” In modern parlance, it might be called one of the greatest “two-fers” in the history of political thought. *Democracy in America* surprises and amazes by its breadth and depth, covering almost every important aspect of American life, from politics to economics to culture, and posing some the most penetrating—and troubling—questions about the future of democracy and of civilization. This course will cover selections from this book.

The reading assignments for the first two days are organized by topics and jump around between the two volumes of *Democracy in America*. (*Democracy in America* is really two books, not one, the first published in 1835, the second in 1840.) The readings for the final two sessions for the most part follow volume 2. Page assignments are pegged to the translation by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000). To make sure we are all on the “same page,” please use this translation.

Tuesday, July 9, 2013

11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Brunch and Speaker Charles Murray , author, <i>Coming Apart</i>
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1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. *Democracy in America*

- (Tocqueville’s) Introduction, pp. 3–15
- Varieties of regimes under the modern condition of “democracy”
 - Mild despotism, pp. 661–665 (assigned last week), 671 (begin with “I shall finish”)–676
 - Centralized administration, pp. 82–93
 - Omnipotence (or tyranny) of the majority, pp. 235–250
 - Single-person (or party) despotism, pp. 52–53
 - Liberal democracy (no specific reading)
- Aristocracy, pp. 535–541, 234–35 (begin with “What do you ask of society”)

Questions:

1. How does Tocqueville use the word “democracy?” Be careful, it has a slightly different meaning than our normal use today.
2. What are the purposes or objectives of political science? What “work” is it supposed to do?
3. What drives historical development? Is the path of history inevitable?

4. Characterize each type or kind of rule under the modern condition of democracy.
5. Give the best characterization of the elements of aristocracy, as Tocqueville uses the term. Who rules, how do aristocrats think and feel, what do they value? Which “regime,” aristocracy or democracy, is preferable? Why?

Wednesday, July 10, 2013

9:00 a.m. to Noon *Democracy in America*

- The maladies (dangerous tendencies) of democracy and some of the antidotes
 - Egalitarianism (love of equality), pp. 479–482
 - “Individualism” (better defined as “privatism” or apathy), pp. 482–484, 506–508, 489–492, 496–500
 - Materialism, pp. 506–508, 517–524
 - Fatalism, pp. 469–472, 425–426
- The “causes” of societal forms
 - Point of departure (culture or national character), pp. 27–44 (part of this chapter was assigned last week)
 - Physical causes: geography, climate, demography (no specific reading)
 - Social state, pp. 45–49 (stop mid-page after footnote 3)
 - Laws: constitutional, statutory, civil (no specific reading)
 - Mores, pp. 274–282, 288–298

Questions:

1. Define each malady and how it threatens liberty. For each malady there are a number of possible antidotes, some of which you will not come across until the readings for Day 3 and Day 4. But begin to keep a list.
2. If the dangerous tendencies are as powerful as they sometimes seem, are the antidotes strong enough to counteract them? Is every remedy, over time, likely to be infected by the malady?
3. How does the analysis of the causes help the practical task of the legislator in devising strategies to implement or save a liberal democracy? Which of the causes can humans influence by their choice? You can look here at pages 296–298, and also (unassigned) the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 154, and the next paragraph on page 155.
4. A “hidden” theme is this: in reading the chapter on the point of departure—and now I can tell you this, even though you will not be reading his whole account of the Founding—you will notice that Tocqueville never mentions the Declaration of Independence or the doctrine of natural rights. It is clear as well that he thinks the founding of America can’t be discussed without talking as much about what happened in colonial New England as during the revolutionary and constitutional period (1775–1789). Any thoughts on this? How might Tocqueville criticize the syllabus on American political thought from last week?

Thursday, July 11, 2013

9:00 a.m. to Noon *Democracy in America*

- The effects of democracy on thought (“intellectual movement”), pp. 399–400, 403–424, 426–433, 445–452, 452–458, 433–443

Questions:

1. What is Tocqueville’s plan for Volume 2? How far is it possible to explain or deduce thought, sentiments, and manners from the social state of equality? What are the limitations of this approach, sometimes called “the sociology of knowledge”?
2. Pages 403–424 are the most difficult or dense passages in the book, but they help open up much of Tocqueville’s thinking. Struggle with them, and try to see how successive chapters qualify previous ones.
3. How does democracy influence the practice of the arts and sciences?
4. Perhaps the chapter on monuments is not quite correct. Try reading it as a general description of democracy and aristocracy.
5. Try reading Chapter 15 (on the study of Greek and Latin) as the study of philosophy and the liberal arts, which you have been engaged in this summer.

Friday, July 12, 2013

9:00 a.m. to Noon *Democracy in America*

- The effects of democracy on sentiments and manners, pp. 500–503, 506–508, 510–514, 578–581, 599–604
- The effects of democracy on political varieties (again), pp. 639–646
- A few peculiarities of the American character: frontier and mobility, pp. 268–69; practical knowledge of politics, pp. 291–292; entrepreneurialism, pp. 387–389; religiosity, pp. 278–272
- Family/Gender, pp. 558–567, 573–578

Questions:

1. What is the doctrine of self-interest rightly understood? What is to be said for it, and what are its limitations?
2. What does Tocqueville mean by greatness?
3. *Democracy in America* continually compares democracy and aristocracy. Is there anything we learn about aristocracy that is helpful for guiding life in a democratic age? In what way(s), if any, can aspects of aristocracy be fit into democracy?
4. What is the status today of some of the special characteristics of Americans that Tocqueville identified?
5. Tocqueville’s chapters on the family and women provoke a good deal of controversy. Is everything he says here “dated,” or is there anything you think you may have learned from his account?

12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Semiweekly Group Lunch