Tocqueville today

by Roger Kimball

A consideration of Democracy in America, by Alexis de Tocqueville.

What saddens me is, not that our society is democratic, but that the vices which we have inherited and acquired make it so difficult for us to obtain or to keep well-regulated liberty. And I know nothing so miserable as a democracy without liberty.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, in a letter of 1857

A serious life means being fully aware of the alternatives, thinking about them with all the intensity one brings to bear on life-and-death questions, in full recognition that every choice is a great risk with necessary consequences that are hard to bear.

—Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind

Men do not receive the truth from their enemies, and their friends scarcely offer it to them; that is why I have spoken it.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

Alexis de Tocqueville was about a month shy of his twenty-sixth birthday when he and his friend and fellow French magistrate Gustave de Beaumont (1802–1866) landed in Newport, Rhode Island, in May 1831. Both were so to speak refugees from French politics. When the Bourbon dynasty fell the previous summer, the two men swore fealty to the new government of Louis Philippe. But neither felt in sympathy with the heavy-handed policies of the “citizen king” whom Daumier parodied to such hilarious effect. The lack of sympathy was reciprocated. Tocqueville was demoted and required to take the oath of allegiance a second time. It was then that he hit upon the scheme of going to America. He and Beaumont petitioned the government for an eighteen-month leave to travel to the United States and study its penal system. After much red tape (there is a reason that “bureaucracy” is a French word), permission was granted, though in the event their trip was cut short and they were obliged to return after only nine months. Their work on the American penal system and its application to France was duly published in 1833. But from the beginning, as Tocqueville noted in a letter, the penal system had been merely a “pretext.” The real reason that he and Beaumont went to America was to see firsthand “what a great republic is”: to immerse themselves in the world’s preeminent democratic regime and ponder its lessons.
They were indefatigable travelers. After disembarking at Newport, Tocqueville and Beaumont went by steamer from Providence to New York City. From there, they traveled to Buffalo, traversed the Great Lakes to what was then the frontier in Michigan and Wisconsin. They spent two weeks in Canada, then wended their way down to Baltimore, stopping along the way in Boston and Philadelphia. They went to Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, to Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans. The final leg of their journey brought them back through Washington to New York. They rode on horses, in coaches, and in steamboats (one of which sank); they stayed in a log cabin; they observed many plain folk and met many eminent personages, including John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, and Sam Houston. They devoured newspapers and broadsheets, and Tocqueville, at any rate, absorbed the lessons of *The Federalist* and Judge Story’s famous commentaries on the Constitution.

Although Tocqueville later said that he did not go to America with the idea of writing a book about his experiences, it is clear from his correspondence that he and Beaumont initially had some sort of collaborative project in mind. Both kept journals (Tocqueville’s was published as *Journey to America*). At some point, the idea of collaboration fell by the wayside. They traveled together, but they kept to separate mental itineraries. In 1835, Beaumont came to the end of his when he published a didactic novel on race called *Marie, ou l’esclavage aux Etats-Unis: Tableau des moeurs américaines.*

Tocqueville spoke warmly about the work of his friend. But whatever the virtues of Beaumont’s book, when it comes to insight into moeurs américaines there are few, if any, books that rival Tocqueville’s own contribution to the subject, *De la démocratie en amérique.* Marie is a period piece; Democracy in America is a masterpiece. It is, as Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop note in the introduction to their sparkling new translation, “at once the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written on America.” [1]

High praise. But Tocqueville inspires superlatives. Lord Acton wrote that “of all writers, [Tocqueville] is the most widely acceptable, and the hardest to find fault with. He is always wise, always right, and as just as Aristides.” Well, Tocqueville was wrong about some things. Not all of his predictions have come to pass. One is amazed, for example, at his judgment that the influence of lawyers forms one of “the most powerful barriers today against the lapses of democracy.” Still, one may endorse the spirit of Lord Acton’s remarks. John Stuart Mill wrote in a review that *Democracy in America* had “at once taken its rank among the most remarkable productions of our time.” And in our own day, Russell Kirk praised Tocqueville as “the best friend democracy has ever had, and democracy’s most candid critic.”

The two go together, friend and critic. In his classic study, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy* (1982; English trans., 1996), the French philosopher Pierre Manent noted that democracy has always had two sorts of enemies: the declared enemies who wish to abolish democracy outright and restore aristocracy or some other regime that enshrines political inequality; and the
“immoderate friends” who seek to extend the central democratic imperative of equality into every realm of life, thus assuring oppressive new inequalities. Both are dangerous; the activities of both shackle freedom, one by design, the other unwittingly. Manent is right that, today, the immoderate friends of democracy are “incomparably more numerous than its enemies.” To love democracy well, he concludes, “it is necessary to love it moderately.”

It is a paradox—I almost said a “Tocquevillean paradox”—of human life that the highest excellences are almost always achieved through moderate, not extreme, zeal. There is something blinding about zealousness, something that overshoots the mark. Eagerness attracts; over-eagerness repels. “Moderation”—what the Greeks called *sophrosune*—is an aristocratic as well as an ancient virtue. It is not, Tocqueville thought, a virtue native to democracy, though he hoped that it might become, by art, democracy’s second nature. That, I believe, is part of what he meant when he said that “a new political science is needed for a world altogether new.” *Democracy in America* is the basic textbook of that new political science.

Tocqueville personally instantiated the conundrum that he wrote about. The Comte Alexis-Henri-Charles-Maurice Clérel de Tocqueville—to give him his full complement of syllables—was himself an aristocrat, the scion of a venerable Norman family. One of his ancestors fought at Hastings with William the Conqueror. Tocqueville remained an aristocrat in temperament; in conviction, he early on became a liberal. “Readers of *Democracy in America,*” Professors Mansfield and Winthrop observe, “have always disagreed over how democratic he was in mind and heart, but it is fair to say that he directed much of his energy to warning reactionaries in his country that democracy was irreversible as well as irresistible.” Tocqueville looked about him and saw that democracy, the wave of the present, was also the fate of the future, at least in the West, in what could then still be called Christendom. Indeed, Tocqueville more than once dilates on his belief that there was something capital “P” Providential about the march of democracy, so that to oppose it would be not merely bootless but impious. (To wish to stop democracy, he wrote, would be “to struggle against God himself.”)

Yet if Tocqueville was a passionate democrat, he was also a circumspect one. He knew what enormities could be perpetrated in its name. His own father had been imprisoned during the Terror, that irrational access of immoderately rational egalitarianism. He was one of the lucky ones: he escaped with his life, though his experiences in prison are said to have turned his hair snow-white at the age of twenty-two. The key to the new political science that Tocqueville envisions is the binocular insight that the democratic revolution is 1) irresistible and 2) “not yet rapid enough to despair of directing it.” There was still time to “attenuate its vices and make its natural advantages emerge.”
To instruct democracy, if possible to reanimate its beliefs, to purify its mores, to regulate its movements, to substitute little by little the science of affairs for its inexperience, and knowledge of its true interests for its blind instincts; . . . such is the first duty imposed on those who direct society in our day.

*Democracy in America* is an attempt to instruct those entrusted with directing society in the rudiments of that duty. The book, Tocqueville explicitly says, is not a “panegyric” to democracy; but it is an invitation to rethink democracy, to make the inevitable palatable. Tocqueville spoke like Edmund Burke when he noted that “it seems that in our day the natural bond that unites opinions to tastes and actions to beliefs has been broken . . . the laws of moral analogy have been abolished.” But he sounds more like one of Burke’s opponents when he warns against those men, even noble souls, whose “idea of evil is indissolubly united with the idea of the new.”

Like Tocqueville himself, *Democracy in America* is irretrievably Janus-faced, which is one reason that it speaks to people across the ideological spectrum. As the editors note, “it is striking that both Left and Right appeal to *Democracy in America* for support of” their contrary policies. The Left sees in Tocqueville a critic of the bourgeois addiction to material well-being and an apostle of civic engagement (at the very end of the book, in his last endnote, Tocqueville names “general apathy” the greatest danger of the age); the Right sees in him a prophet admonishing us about the dangers of big government and doctrinaire egalitarianism. Both are right, but wrong to think they tell the whole story. Tocqueville’s wide appeal, the editors conclude, “should not mask the controversial and unsettling character of the work.”

Of course, “controversial” is a debased word today; it encompasses little more than a certain species of headline-making clichés. Tocqueville is controversial and unsettling in a more permanent sense. He does not shock or outrage us, like the latest “cutting-edge” art offering; on the contrary, like all thinkers who ask fundamental questions, he induces a mood of calm solicitude. If he is “unsettling” it is because he poses important questions for which there are no pat, no settled, answers. What Tocqueville wrote was not a manifesto but an essential reflection on political life—which is to say our life in so far as we exist as social creatures. The questions he asks remain our questions: “On What Tempers the Tyranny of the Majority in the United States,” “Why Democratic Peoples Show a More Ardent and More Lasting Love for Equality than for Freedom,” “How the Americans Understand the Equality of Men and Women,” “Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restless in the Midst of Their Well-Being.” At the end of his introduction to the first volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville notes that his book is not precisely in anyone’s camp; in writing it I did not mean to serve or contest any party; I undertook to see, not differently, but further than the parties; and while they are occupied with the next day, I wanted to ponder the future.
His success in that endeavor accounts for what the editors describe as the “discomfiting sagacity of Tocqueville, always more sensitive than reassuring.”

The first volume of *Democracy in America* was published, to great acclaim, in 1835; Tocqueville wrote it very rapidly, some 180,000 words in under a year. The second volume—which was less of a public success—was not published until 1840. The delay was caused by many things, including Tocqueville’s courtship of and marriage to Mary Mottley, an Englishwoman, and several bouts of illness. (Tocqueville was sick much of his adult life; he died, probably of tuberculosis, in 1859, in his fifty-fourth year). The first volume of *Democracy in America* describes the physical situation of the United States, traces the origins of American democracy in Puritan New England, analyzes the Constitution and the powers it sets forth, and warns about the “tyranny of the majority,” a leitmotif in Tocqueville’s discussion of democracy. Along the way, Tocqueville has many sobering things to say about the sad fate of the American Indian (“the ruin of these peoples began on the day when Europeans landed on their shores”) and blacks under slavery. (Tocqueville is not so much condemnatory as rueful; and his ruefulness is not confined to the whites of America: “Would not one say,” he asks, that “the European is to men of other races what man himself is to the animals? He makes them serve his use, and when he cannot bend them, he destroys them.”)

In the second volume, Tocqueville is more meditative. He steps back to describe the way democracy has affected intellectual life, manners and morals, and political society. In the famous opening section, “On the Philosophic Method of the Americans,” he writes that although there is “no country in the civilized world where [people] are less occupied with philosophy than in the United States,” one can nevertheless descry a distinctly American—and by implication, distinctively democratic—outlook and “philosophic method.”

To escape from the spirit of system, from the yoke of habits, from family maxims, from class opinions, and, up to a certain point, from national prejudices; to take tradition only as information, and current facts only as a useful study for doing otherwise and better; to seek the reason for things by themselves and in themselves alone, to strive for a result without letting themselves be chained to the means, and to see through that to the foundation: these are the principal features that characterize what I shall call the philosophic method of the Americans.

“America,” he concludes, “is therefore the one country in the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed.” Tocqueville is by turns impressed and made anxious by this unwitting “Cartesianism”; it helps account for the vitality of American democracy; perhaps it also helps to account for its roughness, superficiality, and lack of communal spirit. Much of the second volume is concerned with the implications of this tension.

There have been essentially three translations of *Democracy in America*. I say “essentially three” because the first, undertaken by Tocqueville’s English friend Henry Reeve, was twice recast and corrected, first by Francis Bowen in 1862, then by Phillips Bradley in 1945. The Reeve work is fluent, engaging, and subtly at odds with Tocqueville’s complex championship of democracy. “Without wishing to do so,” Tocqueville admonished his friend in a letter, “you quite
vividly colored what was contrary to Democracy and almost erased what could do harm to
Aristocracy.” The second translation, by George Lawrence, was published in 1966; it, too, is fluent
and engaging, but is far more interpretive than literal. The new translation by Professors
Mansfield and Winthrop (who, incidentally, have also collaborated on marriage) strikes just the
right balance between the demands of literal accuracy and readability. They have given us a
Tocqueville for today; but what they have given us today is Tocqueville, with all his richnesses
and stylistic idiosyncrasies (his penchant for short paragraphs, for instance, which was not
respected by earlier translators). The editors have also provided a detailed subject index and have
intelligently annotated the text. Especially in his second volume, Tocqueville tended to let his
thoughts spill forth without bothering to enumerate his sources; this gives his text a peculiar
brilliancy, but it obscures the vast amount of scholarship that went into Democracy in America.
The editors discreetly supply the lack, not only citing Tocqueville’s sources but also noting
important marginal notes in the author’s drafts. (The manuscript given to the printer has not
survived, but Tocqueville’s working manuscripts, these two Harvard professors tell us, “are
preserved at the Beinecke Library at a university located in New Haven, Conn.”)

The Mansfield-Winthrop work will henceforth be the preferred English version of Democracy in
America not only because of the superior translation and critical apparatus, but also because of its
long and masterly introductory essay, itself an important contribution to the literature on
Tocqueville. I have only two nits to pick. One is that the index does not include the text of the
editors’ introduction—a pity because in that remarkable essay they cite many writers and works
that Tocqueville’s readers will wish to have a handy reference for.

I am also sorry that the editors choose to translate inquiét and its cognates as “restive”
(“restiveness,” etc.) instead of the more usual “restless.” As they note, inquiét is a crucially
important term in Tocqueville. It describes the essential condition of the democratic soul, as
contrasted with the “natural immobility” of aristocratic nations. [2] Commenting on their decision,
the editors say that “restive,” “with its connotation of rebelliousness and intent,” seemed better
than “the more random ‘restless.’” The problem is that “restive” is not a special form of
restlessness but something closer to its opposite. It derives from the Latin restare, meaning “to
remain where one is, linger, ‘stay put.’” In a usage note, The American Heritage Dictionary tells us
that “restive” and “restless” are “now commonly used as equivalent terms” (though it adds that
“restive” “implies resistance to some sort of restraint”). But this is merely to codify a solecism.
The Oxford English Dictionary underscores the problem with its definition of “restive”: “1. Inclined
to rest or remain stationary”; “2. Persistent, obstinate, settled or fixed in an opinion or course of
action.” This is not what Tocqueville meant by inquiét. In this essay, I have exercised the reviewer’s
privilege and have silently substituted “restless” for “restive.”

Modern readers who first encounter Democracy in America are almost always amazed by
Tocqueville’s contemporaneity, his relevance to America now. One example: although the stability
of American democracy means that elections present “no real danger,” Tocqueville notes that one
“can still consider the election of the president as a period of national crisis.”

Long before the appointed moment arrives, the election becomes the greatest and so to speak sole business preoccupying minds. The factions at that time redouble their ardor; in that moment all the factitious passion that the imagination can create in a happy and tranquil country become agitated in broad daylight. . . .

The entire nation falls into a feverish state; the election is then the daily text of the public papers, the subject of particular conversations, the goal of all reasoning, the object of all thoughts, the sole interest of the present.

And then? “As soon as fortune has pronounced . . . this ardor is dissipated, everything becomes calm, and the river, one moment overflowed, returns peacefully to its bed.”

How does he do it? How does he manage to sound like a contemporary pundit, only better? After all, when Tocqueville wrote, Andrew Jackson was president; there were only twenty-four states; the nation-defining events of the Civil War and the end of slavery lay decades in the future, to say nothing of the events of the twentieth century. How is it that so much of what Tocqueville has to say seems to apply as well to the United States circa 2000 as to the United States circa 1830? Tocqueville himself would not have been surprised. Toward the beginning of the first volume of Democracy in America, in a chapter called “On the Point of Departure and Its Importance for the Future of the Anglo-Americans,” he writes that “peoples always feel the effects of their origins.” Just as one can predict a man’s “prejudices, habits, and passions” by contemplating his situation as an infant—“the man,” Tocqueville says, “is so to speak whole in the swaddling clothes of his cradle”—so, too, with nations. In America, “there is not one opinion, one habit, one law, I could say one event, that the point of departure does not explain.” The early experiences of the colonies—their relatively prosperous and well-educated citizenry, their political independence, their common language, above all their stalwart yoking of what Tocqueville calls the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom (elements that elsewhere are often opposed to each other)—forecast much of their future. Some things never change; some recur. Tocqueville notes with astonishment that among the “bizarre or tyrannical laws” promulgated early on in the colonies was one that “prohibits the use of tobacco.” Plus ça change.

The chief intellectual drama of Democracy in America is the struggle between freedom and equality. Equality works to level differences; freedom to increase them. In the name of justice, equality requires us to forgo rank, privilege, even excellence: what is more discriminatory than talent? More unfair than ability? More divisive than brilliance? Freedom, too, appeals to justice: the justice due to achievement, not entitlement. What makes Tocqueville indispensable is his unparalleled appreciation of the fact that the health of democracy—the regime whose “primary fact” is the “equality of conditions”—requires not the triumph of equality but the careful perpetuation of this struggle: victory lies precisely in forsaking conquest. Speaking as the friend of democracy,
Tocqueville constantly warns about elements inherent in democracy that, unchecked, make it inhospitable to freedom. Tocqueville’s admonitions can mostly be grouped under two main headings: warnings about superficiality, and warnings about oppression.

Tocqueville discusses at some length the fact that democracies tend to champion material well-being to an unusual degree. He is not hostile to material well-being—far from it—but he notes that a single-minded pursuit of well-being tends to be curiously self-defeating. “It is a strange thing to see with what sort of feverish ardor Americans pursue well-being and how they show themselves constantly tormented by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest route that can lead to it.” In part this has to do with that restlessness, that inquiétude, that characterizes democratic man. In part it has to do with the fact that the desire for material well-being, when it degenerates into materialism, tends to exacerbate rather than satisfy man’s cravings. Tocqueville speaks of “self-interest well understood” as one antidote to the poison of materialism: it turns out that self-interest is “well understood” only when it encompasses more than the self. Early on in Democracy in America, Tocqueville warns about those “who, in the name of progress, striving to make man into matter, want to find the useful without occupying themselves with the just, to find science far from beliefs, and well-being separated from virtue.” It is an essential part of Tocqueville’s task, not always noticed, to insinuate the transcendent—justice, faith, virtue—into a society whose fundamental constitution both depends upon it and yet tends to discount or repudiate it.

Tocqueville writes that it was “the religious aspect of the country” that first struck him on his visit to America. In France, the Enlightenment had opposed religion to freedom; in America the two were inextricably joined. This, Tocqueville believes, is truer to man’s essential nature:

The short space of sixty years will never confine the whole imagination of man; the incomplete joys of this world will never suffice for his heart. Alone among all the beings, man shows a natural disgust for existence and an immense desire to exist: he scorns life and fears nothingness. These different instincts constantly drive his soul toward contemplation of another world, and it is religion that guides it there. Religion is therefore only a particular form of hope, and it is as natural to the human heart as hope itself. Only by a kind of aberration of the intellect and with the aid of a sort of moral violence exercised on their own nature do men stray from religious beliefs; an invincible inclination leads them back to them. Disbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity.

Equality, the central democratic imperative, brings “great goods.” But it also encourages a kind of spiritual isolationism (Tocqueville calls it “individualism”) that tends to erode the binding force of religion. The result is a moral vertigo that exchanges freedom for unanchored worldliness.
When authority in the matter of religion no longer exists... men are soon frightened at the aspect of this limitless independence. This perpetual agitation of all things makes them restless and fatigues them. I doubt that man can ever support a complete religious independence and an entire political freedom at once; and I am brought to think that if he has no faith, he must serve, and if he is free, he must believe.

Religion was an essential leavening ingredient in American democracy; the development of democracy encourages an unwitting “Cartesian” isolation that cuts men off not only from one another but also from their spiritual roots. What seems at first like the progress of freedom threatens to be a march into sterility. The origins of democracy thus not only allow us to predict its mature features but also supply an indispensable source of renewal.

Tocqueville’s analysis of the superficialities to which democracy is heir has its complement in what we might call the masterpiece of his masterpiece, his analysis of democratic forms of oppression. There are two main forms, the tyranny of the majority and democratic despotism.

Majority rule is practically synonymous with democracy. But the majority can tyrannize not only over minorities, but also, more insidiously, over itself. The idea, Tocqueville writes, that “in matters of government the majority of a people has the right to do everything” is “impious and detestable.” Although the origin of all political power in a democracy lies ultimately with the will of the majority, “justice... forms the boundary of each people’s right.” This means, for example, that one should not obey an unjust law. The “sovereignty of the human race” trumps the “sovereignty of a people” and provides a moral measure for majority rule. In American society, the tyranny of the majority shows itself above all in the tendency to delegitimize ideas not sanctioned by majority opinion. People are often surprised that Tocqueville should have remarked that “I do not know of any country where, in general, less independence of mind and genuine freedom of discussion reign than in America.” After all, is not America the land of the free? But this restrictiveness, now as much as in the 1830s, is a predictable coefficient of the tyranny of the majority. “In America,” Tocqueville notes, “the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Inside those limits, the writer is free; but unhappiness awaits him if he dares to leave them. It is not that he has to fear an auto-da-fé, but he is the butt of mortifications of all kinds of persecutions every day.” Here we have, avant la lettre, a definitive description of political correctness.

It was in his analysis of “democratic despotism” that Tocqueville, in Russell Kirk’s words, made “his supreme achievement as a political theorist, a sociologist, a liberal, and a conservative.” In two key chapters toward the end of volume two of of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville discusses the novel ways in which despotism would be likely to establish itself in democratic regimes. It would, he writes, be different from tyrannies of the past, which tended to be “violent but restricted.” In democracies, despotism “would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without tormenting them.” The “individualism” that encourages democratic man to eschew political engagement and withdraw into himself and his private concerns—that “makes a
public virtue of indifference”—also makes him susceptible to a “tutelary” despotism whose most insidious feature is its mildness.

It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood; it provides for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living? . . . [This power] extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one’s acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.

If Tocqueville’s analysis of the tyranny of the majority seems like a proleptic warning about political correctness, his discussion of democratic despotism sounds a pertinent tocsin about the encroachments of the nanny state. But here, too, Tocqueville’s doubleness of vision reasserts itself. He is doubtless correct that, because “it is easier to establish an absolute and despotic government in a people where conditions are equal than in any other,” despotism is particularly to be dreaded in democratic ages. Nevertheless, attempts to counter democratic despotism by resuscitating aristocracy are bound to fail. The task is not to struggle against the egalitarian imperative but to make “freedom issue from the bosom of the democratic society in which God makes us live.” Equality is our fate, but it is up to us whether that equality “leads to servitude or freedom, to enlightenment or barbarism, to prosperity or misery.” In this sense, the greatest danger we face is neither license nor tyranny, but the indifference, the “general apathy,” that democracy nurtures but cannot long abide.

Notes

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1. Democracy in America, translated, edited, and introduced by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop; University of Chicago Press, 722 pages, $35. The University of Chicago press has put two chapters of Democracy in America online: “On the Use That the Americans Make of Association in Civil Life” & “Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restive in the Midst of Their Well-Being” Go back to the text.

2. Tocqueville took the term, the editors show, from Pascal, who together with Rousseau and Montesquieu was one of the three men with whom he “live[d] a little every day.” In a famous aphorism from the Pensées, Pascal described the human condition as inconstance, ennui, inquiétude. In Democracy in America, Tocqueville seems to present inquiétude in a largely positive light; it is interesting to ponder, therefore, the extent to which Tocqueville shared Pascal’s dour estimation of this trait. Go back to the text.

Roger Kimball is Editor and Publisher of The New Criterion and President and Publisher of Encounter Books. His latest book is The Fortunes of Permanence: Culture and Anarchy in an Age of Amnesia (St. Augustine’s Press).