

1) When Tocqueville says "we" in the introduction, who is he referring to?

Tocqueville is a Frenchman, and so when he uses "we," he refers to the European, or Parisian. His primary audience was other people from his country, and he's speaking on his insights that he gathered from observing American culture and way of life and shedding light on the changing social landscapes of Europe. This piece also came out in the early 1830s and represents American society from this day in age.

At the points where he uses "we" he is distinguishing between Thoreau's "East" and "West."

2) What does he identify as the most important thing about American civil life?

"I then turned my thoughts to our own hemisphere, and thought that I discerned there something analogous to the spectacle which the New World presented to me. I observed that equality of condition, though it has not there reached the extreme limit which it seems to have attained in the United States, is constantly approaching it; and that the democracy which governs the American communities appears to be rapidly rising into power in Europe." (1)

Tocqueville consistently identifies the "equality of conditions" as the most distinctive aspect of American society and this was something that really hit home for him throughout his piece. Tocqueville had the belief that the equality of conditions shaped nearly every aspect of the American way of living, this idea that every individual was due the same rights; egalitarianism which would lead to initiative, self reliance, and most importantly, innovation.

Now, the existence of slavery in the US during Tocqueville's visit represents a contradiction to this notion, but it's something that he does not ignore in what he writes. He recognized slavery as a critical flaw in the American experiment and says that the onset of slavery is a critical threat in the future of the Union. The existence of slavery highlights deep flaws and contradictions in American society.

3) What are Tocqueville's thoughts about individualism, and why does he care about it? (Summarize and provide supporting quote or quotes with page #)

That it is one of the defining traits of the democratic society. He explored a lot of the nuance that comes with individualism and person-hood, but also makes a stark distinction between egoism and individualism:

"Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. Selfishness originates in blind instinct; individualism proceeds from erroneous judgment more than from depraved feelings; it originates as much in deficiencies of mind as in perversity of heart." (10)

This idea of the innermost social circle being the self is something very core to American society. In India, for example, family members often put themselves inside that inner circle and you're expected to take care of those around you just as much as you care for yourself. Tocqueville then goes on to explain the power of empowered individuals to associate:

"The voluntary association of the citizens might then take the place of the individual authority of the nobles, and the community would be protected from tyranny and license." (5)

Tocqueville believed that one of the solutions to the downsides of individualism was the various associations that Americans created; where he said that individualism could lead to a social fragmentation of sorts.

4) What religion(s) does Tocqueville associate with individualism? What explanation does he provide? (Summarize and provide supporting quote or quotes with page #)

"To attempt to check democracy would be in that case to resist the will of God; and the nations would then be constrained to make the best of the social lot awarded to them by Providence" (3).

I believe that Tocqueville associated individualism with Protestant Christianity: "the post brought knowledge alike to the door of the cottage and to the gate of the palace; and Protestantism proclaimed that all men are equally able to find the road to heaven" (2). He observed that Protestantism had a strong emphasis on individual interpretations of gospel. Tocqueville also recognized how ideology can shape the individual and again combat the negative affects of egalitarianism by moderating public discourse, he talks about this on page four:

"The first of the duties that are at this time imposed upon those who direct our affairs is to educate democracy, to reawaken, if possible, its religious beliefs; to purify its morals; to mold its actions; to substitute a knowledge of statecraft for its inexperience, and an awareness of its true interest for its blind instincts, to adapt its government to time and place, and to modify it according to men and to conditions. A new science of politics is needed for a new world."