

SOME REMARKS ON JOHN STUART MILL'S ACCOUNT OF TOCQUEVILLE'S CONCERN WITH THE MASSES IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

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RESUMO

Este artigo mostra que John Stuart Mill e Alexis de Tocqueville defenderam a existência de uma cultura cívica capaz de contribuir para o florescimento da liberdade, da diversidade e impedir as massas de adquirirem um poder impossível de ser controlado. O argumento principal é que, no início da década de 1840, John Stuart Mill incorporou ao seu pensamento político a ideia de Alexis de Tocqueville de que, para que a democracia tenha um adequado funcionamento, o poder das massas deve ser contrabalançado. Inicialmente, John Stuart Mill tentou encontrar um poder na sociedade para contrabalançar o poder das massas, mas depois ele passou a defender um novo formato para as instituições com o objetivo de garantir a presença das minorias educadas no parlamento e, por meio disto, estabelecer o confronto de ideias que ele julgava tão necessário para prevenir a tirania das massas. No intento de evitar os excessos da democracia, John Stuart Mill deu maior importância à construção das instituições políticas, enquanto Alexis de Tocqueville enfatizou mais o papel da participação na política local. Apesar disto, a dívida do primeiro para com o pensamento político do segundo é imensa.

Palavras-chave: O poder das massas. Controlabilidade. Democracia. J. S. Mill. A. de Tocqueville.

ABSTRACT

This article shows that both J. S. Mill and Tocqueville favoured a civic culture that supported liberty, diversity and prevented the uncontrolled power of the masses. The central argument is that after the early 1840s Mill definitely incorporated in his political thought Tocqueville's idea that, in order for democracy to function properly, the power of the masses should counterbalanced. Initially, Mill tried to find in society a power to rival the power of the masses, but later he advocated a new framework to political institutions which would guarantee the presence of educated minorities in government, and thereby create the opposition of ideas that he deemed necessary to prevent the tyranny of the masses. Intending to prevent the excesses of democracy, John Stuart Mill attributed more importance to the building up of political institutions, while Alexis de Tocqueville emphasized the importance of participation in politics at local level. Despite this, the former owed a lot to the political thought of the latter.

Keywords: The power of the masses. Accountability. Democracy. J. S. Mill. A. de Tocqueville

1 Introduction

In this article, it will be argued that John Stuart Mill (hereafter referred to as Mill) and Alexis de Tocqueville (hereafter referred to as Tocqueville) defended that necessity of a civic culture that supported liberty and diversity as a necessary means to prevent the tyranny of the masses. Initially, in the early 1840s, Mill tried to find a power to rival the power of the masses, fearing that their despotic power would suffocate diversity and lead to stagnation. Later, he

advocated institutions which would guarantee the presence of educated minorities in government that he deemed necessary to counterbalance the power of the majority and consequently prevent the tyranny of the masses. The political theories of the authors at stake are based on the view that the power of masses risked stagnating society by imposing a uniformity of tastes and thoughts that would impede the variety of experiences that was necessary to make individual and social improvement possible.

In the second section, it will be claimed that between 1835 and 1840 Mill devoted himself to the search for a power in society to rival the power of the masses. In the essays he wrote between his reviews of the first and second parts of *Democracy in America*, Mill assigned the role of opposing the power of the masses to various institutions, such as the universities and the hereditary leisured classes. This search for a power to counteract the masses reflected his acceptance of Tocqueville's claim that the despotic propensities of the democratic age would stagnate society by creating a mass sharing the same set of values. In this context people tend to focus on their immediate interests and willingly become indifferent to public matters. This is the kernel of the social disease Tocqueville called individualism.

In the third section, it will be rendered evident that Mill's review of the second part of *Democracy in America* deepened his conviction that the masses as well as the government should be accountable, because, as the major power in society, they could pose a threat to individuality and diversity. Contrarily to what he said in his first review of *Democracy in America*, Mill had come to think that the tyranny of public affected Britain as well as America what made him even closer to Tocqueville's thought.

The fourth section will present an account of the relationship between Mill's and Tocqueville's political theories. It will be shown that both Mill and Tocqueville were concerned with questions such as the role of political participation in the improvement of individuality and society, the problem of the tyranny of the majority, and the relationship between accountability and democracy. Special attention will be paid to J. C. Lamberti's comments on Mill's political philosophy. Lamberti correctly claims that Mill emphasised the role of rationally-built institutions in preventing the excesses of democracy in contrast to Tocqueville, who emphasised the roles of participation and the cultivation of local loyalties. Nonetheless, it will also be argued that Lamberti fails to recognise that Mill's criticism of Tocqueville's explanation of the phenomenon of individualism in modern society is to an extent correct, because Tocqueville did

not explain how democracy operated in conjunction with the new forces of modern industrial society.

The fifth section will show that that Mill's understanding of democracy is profoundly influenced by Tocqueville's concern with the tyranny of the masses. The increasing influence of the middle classes in England led Mill to incorporate Tocqueville's concerns about the threats to individuality and diversity posed by the tyranny of the majority into his political theory. By this time, Mill had come to think that the problem affected Britain as well as America. From the early 1850s, he showed growing interest in designing institutions which would oppose the tyranny of the majority, and paid especial attention to electoral institutions. Mill's ultimate intention was to render the masses accountable by designing electoral institutions to counteract their influence. He emphasised the role of the cultivation of local loyalties while Mill emphasised the role of rationally-built institutions in order to counterbalance the power of the masses. However, Mill's concern with the excesss of democracy can only be properly understood in the light of the influence Tocqueville exerted over him.

2 The power of the masses in Mill's review of the first part of Democracy in America

Mill's definitive account of his concern with accountability appears in *Considerations on Representative Government*. It is important, nevertheless, to appreciate that Mill's emphasis on the importance of keeping government accountable to the people was also present in his earlier expositions of his concept of representation. In his review of Samuel Bailey's *Rationale of Political Representation* (1835), Mill supported Bailey's conviction that governments must be accountable because they exist to impede those who wield power from oppressing the rest, which would be unlikely to happen if they were left uncontrolled (See CW, v. 18e, p. 19).² Mill also agreed with Bailey that, in order to ensure that the interest of the ruling body was attuned to the interest of the people, it was important to give maximum publicity to its proceedings. As he did not think that representatives should be bound to any specific interest in society, Mill argued that strict accountability was essential so that electors could decide who should be rewarded and punished, re-elected and rejected (See BURNS, 1969, p. 283).³ It is important to bear in mind that Mill's opposition to sectional representation was also based on his fear that representatives acting

on behalf of group-interests would tend to overlook the consequences of their actions for society as a whole and become unaccountable.

In his review of the first part of *Democracy in America* (1835), Mill re-asserted the ideas that he had upheld in *Rationale of Representation*, where true democracy existed only when a qualified governing body acted under the control of the people: 'in no government will the interest of the people be the object, except where the people are able to dismiss their rulers as soon as the devotion of those rulers to the interests of the people becomes questionable' (CW, v. 18b, p. 71-72). Mill agreed with Tocqueville that the despotic propensities of the democratic age would ruin society by creating an obedient mass in which the individuals shared the same set of values. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville asserted that in America the majority held powers that far exceeded those it could possess in a monarchy. So, when the majority had 'irrevocably pronounced, everyone becomes silent and friends and enemies alike then seem to hitch themselves together to its wagon' (TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 243). For Tocqueville, genuine freedom of expression reigned in America, but there was little independence of mind because no one could resist the power of the majority. He thought that the tyranny of democratic republics struck the soul crudely because people were allowed to dissent, but if they dared to do so they would be treated as strangers among us (See TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 244).

In reviewing *Democracy in America I*, Mill seemed to be unsure about Tocqueville's description of the tyranny of opinion in America. He asserted: 'but, without pretending ourselves competent to judge whether our author overstates the evils as they exist in America, we can see reasons for thinking that they would exist in a far inferior degree in Europe' (CW, v. 18b, p. 83). Mill assumed that countries endowed with educational institutions and hereditary leisured classes were immune to such evils (See CW, v. 18b, p. 85-86). Nevertheless, the degree to which his later works assimilated Tocqueville's conclusions indicates that in his maturity he accepted the overriding power of public opinion as an evil present in Britain just as much as in America. *On Liberty*, for example, was based on the assumption that public opinion ruled the world (See CW, v. 18d, p. 268). In the time which intervened between the first review of *Democracy in America* in 1835 and the second in 1840, the idea that it was necessary to have a power in society to rival that of the masses emerged in Mill's thought. This recognition represented the start of a shift from his orthodox conception of democracy as empowering the will of the majority to a different

one that purported to take the will of minorities into account as well. The major works Mill produced in this period show his concern with the tyranny of the majority.

In 1836, Mill published the essay *Civilization*, in which he expressed his concerns over the debilitating influences of the age. He believed that individuality was sinking 'into greater insignificance' because the masses were becoming powerful. This was dangerous because genuine civilisation relied on a combination of efforts, which required a self-control and discipline that individuals were no longer willing to bear. Mill was amongst those who thought that the masses could not be prevented from acquiring power, for 'whatever is the growing power in society will force its way into government, by fair means or foul. The distribution of constitutional power can no longer continue very different from that of real power, without a convulsion' (CW, v. 18a, p. 127). The solution he proposed was to make the masses wiser by creating a power to counteract them. He called on the lettered classes to make efforts to facilitate the publication of first-rate literary works of whatever tendency in point of opinion by obtaining authorisation to publish them as quickly as possible so as to make their influence felt in society (CW, v. 18a, p. 138). He called for reforms in the universities to make them centres of free inquiry capable of generating highly cultivated minds and opposing the debilitating influences of the age. Mill also advocated a special role for ancient literature, history, and, in the area 'of pure intellect, the highest place will belong to logic and philosophy of mind'. He intended to counteract the dominant tendencies of the age 'by establishing counter-tendencies, which may combine with those tendencies and modify them' (CW, v. 18a, p.135-6).

In *Coleridge*, published in 1840, Mill accepted Coleridge's idea that governments could have a positive function in society. Mill believed 'that government ought not to interdict men from publishing their opinions, pursuing their employments, or buying and selling their goods, in whatever place or manner they deem the most advantageous' (CW, v. 10, p. 157). However, he agreed with Coleridge that government could make efforts, preferably indirectly, to secure means of subsistence to the people. Thus, Mill rejected the laissez-faire doctrine, according to which governments did best when they did nothing. He did not believe that it was the fault of government if every one did not have enough to eat and drink. However, 'a State must be considered as a great benefit to society, or mutual insurance company, for helping (under the necessary regulations for preventing abuse)' (CW, v. 10, p. 156). Mill upheld Coleridge's conviction that government must be composed from the existing forces in society so as to reflect

the antagonism between the forces of permanence and those of progress. He regarded this antagonism as important because it created a mutual check between rival positions. However, Mill did not entirely agree with Coleridge's doctrine of half-truths, because he did not believe that half-truths were necessarily parts of the totality that combined them.

There is no doubt that the search for a power to rival the power of the masses that is present in *Civilization* and *Coleridge* are a direct consequence of Mill's review of the first part of *Democracy in America*. Therefore, it is correct to assert that *Democracy in America* reflected Mill's acceptance of Tocqueville's claims that the despotic propensities of the democratic age would be detrimental to society.

3 The power of the masses in Mill's review of the second part of Democracy in America

In his second review of *Democracy in America*, which appeared in 1840, Mill praised the methodological achievements of Tocqueville. Mill believed that Tocqueville was the first thinker to treat democracy as something that 'manifests itself by innumerable properties, not by some only; and must be looked at in many aspects before it can be made the subject even of that modest and conjectural judgement' (CW, v. 18c, p. 156-157). Mill and Tocqueville shared the conviction that 'democracy, in the modern world, is inevitable; and that it is on the whole desirable; but desirable only under certain conditions, and those conditions capable, by human care and foresight, of being realised, but capable also of being missed' (CW, v. 18c, p. 158). Mill showed that Tocqueville believed that it was necessary to distribute public business as widely as possible among the people in order to prepare them for the exercise of power over the legislature; it was generally also the only means by which they can be led to desire it (CW, v. 18c, p. 168). Mill also agreed with Tocqueville that involvement in the activities of local self-government, administration, and voluntary associations was essential to stimulate common effort and enlighten the citizen. Being involved in such activities, Tocqueville's citizen realised that 'besides the interests which separate him from his fellow-citizens, he has interests which connect him with them; that not only the common weal is his weal, but it partly depends upon his exertions' (CW, v. 18c, p. 169).

Mill feared no less than Tocqueville that national culture would be impoverished by the overwhelming pressure of public opinion for uniformity. However, Mill thought that Tocqueville

confused the effects of democracy with those of commercial society. Tocqueville defined democracy as equality between citizens, 'the absence of all aristocracy, whether constituted by political privilege, or by superiority in individual importance and social power' (CW, v. 18c, p. 159). For Mill, Tocqueville ascribed to democracy 'several of the effects naturally arising from the mere progress of national prosperity, in the form in which that progress manifests itself in modern times' (See CW, v. 18c, p. 191-192). So, for Mill, the main source of the tyranny of the majority was the tendencies of modern commercial society. The unfettered taste for material well-being that marked the commercial spirit led people to concentrate on their money-making pursuits wherever habits of self-government and participation were not rooted.

Mill recognised that advances in prosperity, especially if due to industrial expansion, sometimes generated a middle-class, multiplying the number of people occupying intermediary positions in society. He did not think, however, that the tyranny of the majority could be considered as merely a consequence of the fact that there were more people occupying intermediary positions in society, and that there was no aristocratic power ruling over it. In order to prove this, Mill showed that most of the problems that Tocqueville attributed to democracy in American society also existed in England. Therefore, they could not be attributed to democracy, understood in terms of an equality of condition, because England as an aristocratic society did not recognise the equality of its members (See CW, v. 18c, p. 196). For Mill, the main problem that affected both the American and the English mind was the influence of the middle classes which were dominated by money-getting pursuits. The middle classes were predominant in America and were about to achieve predominance in England. This was problematic because 'whenever any variety of human nature becomes preponderant in a community, it imposes upon all the rest of society its own type; forcing all, either to submit to or to imitate it' (See CW, v. 18c, p. 196). Hence, it was necessary to have a power to rival that of the middle classes, which would otherwise rule unopposed, causing uniformity and, eventually, stagnation. In relation to the social group that Mill judged best able to oppose the masses, he stated that, 'there can be no doubt about the elements which must compose it: they are, an agricultural class, a leisured class, and a learned class' (See CW, v. 18c, p. 198).

Mill regarded *Democracy in America II* as the most profound book ever written on democracy (See CW, v. 18c, p. 190). More than that, in reviewing it, Mill placed the concern with the tyranny of public opinion at the heart of his political philosophy. It is worth

remembering that Mill's first review claimed that the tyranny of opinion as manifested in America was unlikely to exist in England because there were educational institutions and a leisured class that could counterbalance the influence of the masses. In reviewing *Democracy in America II*, however, Mill now added the agricultural class as one of those elements of society that support views different from those adopted by the middle class opinion. The increasing influence of the middle classes in England led Mill to incorporate Tocqueville's concerns about the threats to individuality and diversity posed by the tyranny of the majority into his political theory. By this time, Mill had come to think that the problem affected Britain as well as America.

After reading *Democracy in America II*, Mill accepted Tocqueville's view that stagnation and immobility were the real dangers to democratic society as a scientifically established truth. For Mill, this was a truth to be defended 'envers et contre tous with tenfold pertinacity'. In accepting it as an established truth that stagnation and immobility were real dangers in democratic society, Mill became indebted to Tocqueville as the most powerful influence in the re-framing of his thought. As the tyranny of the majority was the source of that stagnation, because it stifled individuality and diversity, and imposed uniformity, it should be prevented in order to allow individuals and communities to improve. In his *Autobiography*, Mill admitted that the reading of *Democracy in America I* initiated his shift from an ideal of democracy in which there was no concern with the tyranny of majority to the modified form of democracy which was later set forth in *Considerations on Representative Government* (See CW, v. 1, p. 199). According to Mill, *Democracy in America I* caused this shift because it pointed out in a more specific manner than he had ever seen before both the excellences and the dangers of democracy. He and Tocqueville saw democracy as 'an inevitable result of human progress' whose dangers should be mitigated.

Mill thought that *Democracy in America I* pointed out the direction that his political theory would follow in the future. However, he stressed that 'the consequent modifications in my practical political creed were spread over many years' (See CW, v. 1, p. 201). Mill changed his strategy for counteracting the tyranny of the majority. In the late eighteen-thirties and early forties, he aimed to establish in civil society a power to rival that of the masses. From the early fifties on, Mill showed a growing interest in designing institutions to oppose the tyranny of the majority and paid especial attention to institutions related to the voting process. His concern with the mechanics of voting during that period reflected his increasing doubts regarding the people's

ability to choose suitable representatives. Mill believed it to be important to organise the voting process in a way that allowed everyone to be equally represented: each minority by a minority, the majority by the majority. This resulted in a problem of accountability, because, if the educated minorities were excluded from government, the popular majority would rule unchecked and impose uniformity. Furthermore, a voting process which excluded the educated part of the population would tend to generate a mediocre leadership.

4 The relationship between Mill's and Tocqueville's Political Theories

Both *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government* were attempts to answer questions posed by Tocqueville. Thus, the system of democratic self-government that Mill proposed in *Considerations on Representative Government* was complemented by the 'principle of liberty' developed in *On Liberty* (See BAUM, 2000, p. 271). The latter was designed to protect individuals in the pursuit of their own good in their own way; and the former, to provide an institutional framework that guaranteed the possibility of such pursuit. Mill knew that the 'principle of liberty' that he worked out in *On Liberty* in order to promote diversity and original thinking could not be effective if parliament contained only representatives of the majority. The presence of those who upheld standards different from those widely accepted by the masses was vital to the creation of the antagonism of ideas that made progress possible and rendered the majority accountable. Given that Mill adopted Tocqueville's idea that the tyranny of the majority impoverished society, an assessment of Tocqueville's influence on Mill is important in order to provide a clear understanding of the importance of accountability in Mill's theory of democracy.

When he published his tribute to Armand Carrel in 1837, Mill stated that a new political philosophy had arisen which was superior to those that already existed. He added that *Democracy in America* was the highest expression of that new philosophy (See CW, v. 20, p. 169-215).⁴ Mill never retracted this opinion and, furthermore, he reiterated it in the review of *Democracy in America II*, stating that Tocqueville had established it as a scientific truth that stagnation was the most potent threat to democracy. Despite this, the extent to which Mill was influenced by Tocqueville remains a disputed question. J. C. Lamberti offers an important account of the

relationship between Mill's and Tocqueville political ideas. This section will be dedicated to outline Lamberti's considerations based on the assumption that this is important to ground the clarify of affinities and differences between Mill and Tocqueville to be made in the next section.

Lamberti believes that, despite belonging to different traditions, Mill's and Tocqueville's political thought were complementary (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 188). According to Lamberti, Mill thought that *Democracy in America* was 'the first instance of application of a truly scientific method to politics despite the fact that, therein, Tocqueville presented an aristocratic idealisation of the English constitutional government (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 110). Mill avoided dwelling on this minor criticism because he felt that, apart from a few ideas still tainted by an overly aristocratic view, Tocqueville's conclusions leaned towards radicalism (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 110). According to Lamberti, Mill and Tocqueville believed that, by granting rights to all citizens, democracy instilled a spirit of enterprise and responsibility. It was important to strengthen society by mobilising 'the energies of all and not allowing men to remain isolated from one another' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 110). If men were united, they were less likely to become victims of despotism.

Lamberti also shows that Mill and Tocqueville believed that the fact that the American Constitution gave wide powers to judges was not dangerous to society. They saw no risk in judges basing 'their decisions on the Constitution rather than on law', and in not enforcing any law that they deemed unconstitutional. Both Mill and Tocqueville regarded the judiciary as a counterweight to the otherwise incontrovertible power of the people (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 92). They would not, therefore, be prepared to vest such wide powers in judges in societies where there was no such otherwise incontrovertible power to oppose them. In Lamberti's view, Mill and Tocqueville favoured representative democracy because their main concern was not to make people govern in a particular way, but to find 'ways to make the people choose those most capable of governing, and then to give them enough power to direct affairs in their broad outline but not in detail and not as to means of execution' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 106). But Lamberti also recognises differences between the two authors. He points out that Mill was far less enthusiastic about the applicability of the model of the New England township in England than Tocqueville. For Lamberti, Mill and Tocqueville saw local government as the primary source of political education, but Mill placed a higher value on elections than on direct participation. The reason for this was a simple one: Mill rated the role of rationally-built institutions, such as

electoral ones, higher than the role of local traditions in the implementation of democracy in society.

Lamberti asserts that Mill advocated a rational democracy in which citizens controlled their rulers but did not participate directly in government. The implication was that people were able to judge policies, but were not fit for the business of making them. Lamberti adds that Mill knew Tocqueville's conception of political education remarkably well, but nonetheless did not accept that political life had a value in itself (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 102-103). For Lamberti, Tocqueville saw political freedom as the most important way of combating the evils of democracy, while Mill ascribed the task of preventing the evils of democracy to a vigorous agricultural class along with a leisured class (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 188). The role Tocqueville ascribed to 'towns and associations was to teach individuals anew that they were indeed citizens, as well as to understand that private interests and public interests are inextricably intertwined' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 174). Lamberti does not accept Mill's claim that Tocqueville confused the 'trend towards greater equality with other tendencies of modern commercial society' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 183). For Lamberti, Mill's suggestion that Tocqueville understood equality of condition as something that was different and dissociated from the effects of growing prosperity was wrong. In Lamberti's account, Tocqueville saw them as deeply connected, because equality of condition was a presupposition of individualism which emerged initially as a form of corruption of aristocratic society, and later turned out to be a 'childhood disorder' of the democratic experiences of modern industrial society.

Lamberti believes Tocqueville was aware of the fact that 'the allure of wealth, heightened by the progress of industry, always threatens to dissuade individuals from devoting their time and energy to their responsibilities as citizens' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 187). For Lamberti, the concept of individualism which Tocqueville defended is more complex than the one Mill attributed to him because it combined concerns about the consequences of the withering of intermediary bodies in society, the end of the aristocracy, and the growth of commercial and industrial prosperity. If this is correct, one should then ask why Tocqueville did not object when Mill said that Tocqueville ascribed to democracy effects that he should have ascribed to the emergence of commercial society. Lamberti admits that Tocqueville never answered this question.

According to Lamberti, Mill interpreted Tocqueville's method of social analysis as if it 'were a blueprint for historical development, which as Mill understands it tends in one direction only, towards greater equality and civilisation, where "greater" is taken in almost a quantitative sense' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 187). Lamberti regards this as misconceived because Tocqueville did not see advances in society as a product of a linear evolution, but rather as a result of the exercise of political freedom (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 167). Mill and Tocqueville had different convictions about the ability of democratic governments to run the administration of society, although both were sceptical of the people's ability to adequately choose their own representatives (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 107). According to Lamberti, Tocqueville portrayed Americans as a chosen people 'able to tolerate democracy only because of their exceptional qualities of enlightenment, mores, and political education' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 108). This did not mean that Tocqueville regarded the institutions adopted in America as the only ones or the best ones that a democracy could adopt (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 107). His social analysis allowed for comparisons which could help in the assessment of democratic institutions from elsewhere, but it was necessary 'to distinguish between what was specific to American government and what was characteristic of democracy in general' (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 107). Tocqueville did not present the institutions of America as a model to be indiscriminately adopted by other countries that had different mores and political institutions. Lamberti sees Tocqueville's failure to point out that the greatest threat to liberty in France came from the government, whereas in America it came from society, as the main deficiency of his account of American democracy (See Lamberti, 1989, p. 10).

5 Mill, Tocqueville, and Democracy

Lamberti is correct to say that Mill and Tocqueville held the same views on the role of the judiciary in America, on the necessity of instilling a spirit of responsibility in society, and on the importance of competence in government. Lamberti's claim that Tocqueville failed to specify that the greatest threat to liberty in France came from the government, whereas in America it came from public opinion, is also correct. Tocqueville's deficiency in this respect contrasts with Mill's insight that the enlargement of the 'province of government' prevailed in the Continental nations, while in England and America restraints on mental freedom proceeded much more from

public opinion (See CW, v. 3, p. 799, 935). Tocqueville was certainly aware that public opinion was the main source of the threat to liberty in America, but he did not use his comparative method of sociological analysis to come to a precise assessment of the roles of both state and public opinion in threatening liberty in America and in France. Lamberti's perception that Mill ascribed a more important role to rationally-built institutions than to traditional sentiments in preventing the excesses of democracy, shows how sharp his account is. Most of Mill's political thought and parliamentary activities were devoted to the analysis and implementation of political institutions, especially electoral ones. This is not at odds with Mill's utilitarian faith in the possibility of improvement by means of political reform. He believed that the spirit of liberty should be promoted through voluntary association, and participation in local government, juries, and trade unions. Nevertheless, he thought that the government should be the main agency of national education, because 'the most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves' (CW, v. 19, p. 390). The electoral process, therefore, was important because it determined the configuration of the government. Mill advocated the adoption of electoral institutions that provided due representation for minorities because governments would be able to perform their educational role only if superior intellects were found among their members. The problem was that, for Mill, government was always either in the hands, or passing into the hands, of whatever happen to be the strongest power in society, and superior intellects were not amongst those who constituted the strongest power in nineteenth-century Britain (See CW, v. 1, p. 169).

Mill's later political thought favoured rationally-built electoral institutions because he wanted to ensure the presence of superior intellects into parliament. In other words, he wanted to bring inferior minds in contact with superior minds, 'a contact which in the ordinary course of life is altogether exceptional, and the want of which contributes more than anything else to keep the generality of mankind on one level of contented ignorance' (CW, v. 19, p. 539). The presence of educated minorities in parliament was essential because otherwise it would simply reflect the wishes of the majority, which was both dangerous and impoverishing. Lamberti is also correct to stress that Mill's conception of democracy gave a central role to the mechanisms of accountability. For Mill, a democratic government was above all one which was accountable to people. Democracy, therefore, did not mean primarily 'that the people themselves govern, but

that they have security for good government. This security they can not have by any other means than by retaining in their own hands the ultimate control' (CW, v. 19, p. 651).

Tocqueville made Mill aware that it was imperative to render the masses accountable, for, as the main power in society, they could threaten diversity. Lamberti is not correct to say that Mill treated Tocqueville's method as if it were a blueprint for historical development. Because, Mill did not believe that history advanced in a linear evolution. For Mill, progress was neither a homogeneous movement nor simply related to material achievements. He rejected the idea that it was possible to find causal laws of progress, and did not expect Tocqueville's sociology to offer either a blueprint for history or an abstract model of democracy by which existing democracies could be evaluated. Mill praised Tocqueville's account of democracy precisely because it offered a comparative historical analysis, incompatible with the idea that history was predictable. Lamberti criticises Mill for not having realised that Tocqueville's view that democracy was the source of the tyranny of the majority did not preclude Tocqueville from accepting the view that the dynamic of industrial society was an additional factor which diverted people from public concerns and favoured the tyranny of the majority. Lamberti does not accept Mill's claim that Tocqueville mis-attributed effects caused by the progress of national prosperity to the increasing equality of conditions, and 'bound up in one abstract idea the whole of the tendencies of modern commercial society, and [gave] them the name - Democracy' (CW, v. 18c, p. 191).

In order to determine if Mill's claim is correct, it is necessary to appreciate the association in Tocqueville's thought between democracy understood as equality, the absence of aristocracy, and the tyranny of the majority. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville clarified this association. He recognised that the equality of conditions brought about by democratic societies generated milder manners. In democracies people tended to share the same feelings and therefore felt more empathy for others, while in aristocratic societies the feelings of the higher ranks of society did not coincide with those of common people. In this way, 'there is real sympathy only among those who are alike; and in aristocratic centuries one sees those like oneself only in the members of one's caste' (TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 536). According to Tocqueville, the bonds that linked serf and nobles in aristocratic societies were primarily of an institutional nature. The devotion of serfs to nobles, and the sense of responsibility that the nobles had towards their serfs, had an institutional rather than a personal basis.

In democratic societies, men were unlikely to submit themselves to others, but they did feel compassion when others were suffering. Tocqueville thought that equality generated love for political freedom because it rendered men independent and willing to criticise authorities to which they owed no special deference. Those who acted in an independent manner tended to prefer governments that they had elected, because these were a product of their will (See TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 639). The fact that, once governments were elected, individuals were left isolated before the central power led to their subjection to a paternalist control (See TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 664). For Tocqueville, such subjection was detrimental to freedom because it engendered a new kind of oppression in which citizens were converted into a herd of obedient sheep, totally devoted to their individual and family affairs and withdrawn from public life. Tocqueville had no doubt that modern governments could penetrate the sphere of private affairs more easily than governments of antiquity and the middle ages.

By comparing democratic institutions in France and in America, Tocqueville made an important contribution to political theory. He showed that democracy had emerged in America without the need to fight an already existing aristocracy (See OLDFIELD, 1990, p. 167). Hence, the Americans were lucky 'to have arrived at democracy without having to suffer democratic revolutions, and to be born equal instead of becoming so' (TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 481). But in France, democratic institutions had emerged after a long process of erosion of the political power of the nobility. The French revolution was thus 'only the completion of a long travail, the sudden and violent termination of a work in which ten generations of man had toiled' (MANNENT, 1996, p. 110; See also MERQUIOR, 1991, p. 88). It is important to understand that under the ancien regime, France was already undergoing centralisation. The influence of royal intendants in the administration of the provinces was effective despite the diversity of regulations existing at that time. This centralisation facilitated the later division of France by the Constituent Assembly into departments, disregarding the historic division of France into provinces, and behaving as if France were a land recently discovered (See ARON, 1987, p. 224-232). Tocqueville saw the advance of democracy as the key to understanding modern society. Democracy for him was the 'generative fact', the principle that influenced all aspects of the social and political order. This influence was disruptive from the beginning because it arose out of an attack on the bonds of dependence and the hierarchy of the previous social order (See MANNENT, 1996, p. 123-124). It was also disruptive because it tended to favour the passion for

material well-being which was 'essentially a middle class passion; it grows larger and spreads with the middle class' (TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 507).

As a matter of fact, Tocqueville did not deny that many factors were operating in favour of individualism, and consequently of the tyranny of the majority. He was aware that the pursuit of material well-being was one of them. Nevertheless, Tocqueville believed that democracy remained the ultimate cause of all the factors that contributed to the tyranny of the majority. This is clearly shown by his remark that when 'ranks are confused and privileges destroyed, when patrimonies are divided and enlightenment and freedom are spread, the longing to acquire well-being presents itself to the imagination of the poor man, and the fear of losing it, to the mind of the rich' (TOCQUEVILLE, 2000, p. 507). In other words, it was the impulse towards equality that emerged as a consequence of the increasing centralisation exercised under the ancient regime, which in turn had eroded the ties and loyalties of aristocratic society and had led people to be lured by wealth. Tocqueville seemed to think that industrialisation tended to reinforce the process of standardisation of tastes and opinion that emerged with the destruction of the aristocratic social order. However, he did not explain how democracy operated in conjunction with the new forces present in industrial society. Tocqueville attached great importance to mores and beliefs in analysing the phenomenon of individualism, but did not research the dynamic of industrial society itself, so as to be able to specify how it impinged on the phenomenon of individualism. Nevertheless, Tocqueville was sagacious enough to realise that, in a society where manufacturers had no responsibility for their employees and their dependants 'the policy of laissez-faire, pursued by bourgeois controlled parliaments tended to create a capitalist despotism that would result in a revolutionary movement to establish socialism' (SCHAPIRO, 1942, p. 561). He foresaw that a socialist uprising might represent a huge threat to democracy, either by creating a new despotism or a dictatorial reaction. Mill also feared socialism. In his later thought he proposed small-scale socialist experiments, purporting to favour people's capacity, 'of acting upon motives pointing directly to the general good, or making them aware of the defects which render them and others incapable of doing so' (CW, v. 1, p. 241). In Mill's view, these experiments should be rejected if they led to the tyranny of society over the individual.

6 Conclusion

Between 1835 and 1840, J. S. Mill devoted himself to the search for a power in society to counteract that of the masses. Mill's attempt to find such a power reflected his acceptance of Tocqueville's claim that the despotic propensities of the democratic age would lead to the stagnation of society through the creation of obedient mass sharing the same set of values. Mill shifted from one conception of democracy that gave unrestricted power to the will of the majority to another that purported to give weight to the will of minorities as well. Mill's new conception of democracy built on the characteristics of his existing conception of democracy, such as faith in professional administration and opposition to sectional representation, the notion that it was imperative to render the masses as well as the government accountable because of the threat they pose to individuality and diversity. Mill's incorporation of Tocqueville's sociological theory in his political thought provided him with a theoretical framework capable of encompassing the main concerns that Mill inherited from both Guizot and Coleridge. The clash between different points of view advocated by Guizot, and the self-cultivation advocated by Coleridge, were likely to occur only where institutions favoured diversity - Tocqueville's method provided a basis for the understanding of the importance of diversity. For Tocqueville, the centralisation and atomisation of social life were processes intrinsically connected to the spread of democracy. He believed that these processes left individuals isolated before a central power because they caused the withering of intermediary bodies that would otherwise provide them with means to oppose the central power. The tyranny of the majority was thus, for Tocqueville, a consequence of the emergence of democracy and the erosion of aristocratic society. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, Mill aimed to establish in civil society a power to rival that of the masses. From the early 1850s, he showed growing interest in designing institutions which would oppose the tyranny of the majority, and paid especial attention to electoral institutions. His intention was to secure the participation of the educated few in the representative body, so as to raise the level of the leadership and prevent the majority from imposing uniformity. Mill's ultimate intention was to render the masses accountable by designing electoral institutions to counteract their influence. It is true that Mill emphasised the role of the cultivation of local loyalties while Mill emphasised the role of rationally-built institutions in order to face the power of the masses. However, it is

crystal clear that Mill's concern with the excess of democracy can only be properly understood in the light of the influence Tocqueville exerted over him.

7 Notes

¹ Professores, respectivamente, dos cursos de Filosofia e Economia da Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC) e doutoramentos no University College London(UCL) e na Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (PIMES)

² Hereafter *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, J. M. Robson and others (eds.), 33 vols., (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press and Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1963-1999) will be referred to as *CW* followed by the numbers of the volumes in which each work is inserted and the numbers of the pages.

³ Mill thought pledges should not be required from the candidates.

⁴ Armand Carrel (1800-1836) was a Republican French journalist who died in a duel on 22 July 1836. Mill considered Carrel to be the prototype of the Philosophic Radical: a man of action and a defender of both democracy and liberty, a combination which was not common in France at that time.

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