

## Lonely hearts: Tocqueville and Democracy.

Corações solitários: Tocqueville e a democracia.

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**Summary:** Concerning the heart within the history of ideas, Alexis de Tocqueville is rather unknown - wrongfully. His theory of the democratic heart does not only deliver a privileged view on the pathologies of modern democracy, it also helps to decipher Tocqueville's own theory of democracy. In addition, Tocqueville's heart-reflections facilitate a better understanding of Individualism and Soft Despotism and they illuminate diagnoses and therapies of civic discomforts. Tocqueville's lonely hearts reflect the crisis of the modern world and - in a curious way - they also outline the ambivalent relationship between Tocqueville and democracy. To make it short: The importance of the lonely hearts can hardly be overestimated.

**Keywords:** Tocqueville, Democracy, Soft Despotism, Solitude, Heart, Individualism.

**Resumo:** No que diz respeito ao coração na história das ideias, Alexis de Tocqueville é bastante desconhecido – equivocadamente. A sua teoria do coração democrático não só proporciona uma visão privilegiada sobre as patologias da democracia moderna, como também ajuda a decifrar a própria teoria da democracia de Tocqueville. Além disso, as reflexões sinceras de Tocqueville facilitam uma melhor compreensão do Individualismo e do Despotismo Suave e iluminam diagnósticos e terapias de desconfortos cívicos. Os corações solitários de Tocqueville refletem a crise do mundo moderno e - de uma forma curiosa - também delineiam a relação ambivalente entre Tocqueville e a democracia. Resumindo: a importância dos corações solitários dificilmente pode ser superestimada.

**Palavras-chave:** Tocqueville, Democracia, Despotismo Suave, Solidão, Coração, Individualismo.

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## Introduction

"The heart is a very, very resilient muscle". The moody finding was coined by Woody Allen. Whether he wanted to give comfort or stoke desperation to the feelings in everyday life is hard to say. Rather possible that this laconic remark is his way to summarize the history of political ideas of the heart in a coherent formula. In any case, the heart turns out to be an important topic within (political) philosophy from Plato to Pascal and Augustine to Arendt. It beats as an extremely flexible and resilient muscle, as the other of reason or its very own place. It is remarkable and – as we want to show – also regrettable that the name Alexis de Tocqueville is quite unknown and rarely mentioned when it comes to the philosophical history of the heart. After all, Tocqueville's heart stories offer a privileged access to the Pathology of the democratic heart in modern times and at the same time they provide the secret key to his work and life. The fact that there has been given little attention to Tocqueville in this regard may be traced back to his specific reception history. After enthusiastic reactions of his contemporaries, his work was almost forgotten until the middle of the 20th century. Nowadays Tocqueville is only world-famous in his native country France and in the United States, where he is appreciated as a kind of travel guide through the country and also well-known for his assessments of democratic sentiments.

It was also the United States, where there were published two works in the 20th century, which brought Tocqueville the well-deserved degree of awareness within the German-speaking context – at least temporarily – and which proved his analytical power for the present. We are talking about David Riesman and Robert N. Bellah. Both discover the heart as a secret center of Tocqueville's democracy. During the nineteen-eighties, Robert N. Bellah and his colleagues analyze the American society in a communitarian way. They complain about the loss of social cohesion and offer a revitalization and republicanization of the civic hearts as a solution. In this context, Tocqueville's handwriting/impact is unmistakable. "Habits of the heart" is – not coincidentally – the Tocquevillean title of their critic survey<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> BELLEAH *et al* (1985) are referring to the famous passage at which Tocqueville relates "*les habitudes du cœurs*" to the classic topos of the "*mœurs*", cf. TOCQUEVILLE (1977. p. 460).

Before that, it was David Riesman, who already illustrated the pathologies of the democratic living environment – again in clear connection to Tocqueville. In “The lonely crowd”, Riesman pursues Tocqueville’s analysis of the democratic mass society and continues to illuminate the shady sites of the democratic Hearts (RIESMAN, 1955). It becomes clear that the promise of autonomy, made by democracy, is neglected in the civic struggle for recognition. In democratic everyday life, the citizens do not act in a self-determined, internal way, as Riesman writes, but externally determined. The individual becomes thereby increasingly uniform. What is remarkable in Riesman's analysis is that the *Liberal of the new kind* (TOCQUEVILLE, 1861. p. 433.) – that’s how Tocqueville called himself – becomes a principal witness of liberalism-criticism. No doubt – back in those days, Tocqueville’s republican cardiology has been prominent in the theories of Bellah and Riesman, but nowadays, it is rather unknown.

The following considerations intend to explore Tocqueville's democratic heart in-depth and to examine its strengths and weaknesses. For this purpose, we will first search for the philosophers, who were relevant for Tocqueville’s analysis of the democratic heart. How different Tocqueville’s crisis-diagnosis and therapy-plan can be interpreted, will be shown by concerning with recent interpretation-propositions. In order to understand the pathologies of the lonely hearts, we first concentrate on the interdependence of individualism and soft despotism, which are the central risk factors in the age of equality for Tocqueville. Are the diseases of the democratic heart incurable or can they be treated effectively? As we want to show, Tocqueville considers different methods of treatment with different origins. Even Tocqueville himself leaves us puzzled about the question, whether he wrote his analysis of democracy cold-hearted or with inner sympathy. Are – as he hypothesizes – aristocratic instincts accompanied by democratic ratio, are they in opposition to each other? Finally, the question arises, whether the insight in Tocqueville’s democratic heart offers new solutions for the problem of the unity of his work. Are there perhaps two hearts beating in the chest of the *homme démocratique*?

## Searching for clues

Tocqueville's *magnum opus* "Democracy in America" was published in two volumes (1835/40) and turned him soon into a classic of his century. Who reads Tocqueville's research and keeps in mind the history of origins in the extensive correspondence of the author, will soon realize, that the reflections on the lonely hearts of the democratic man are central in order to understand his complete works. Based on this heart, all major aspects associated with Tocqueville, can be explained: From the tyranny of the masses, to the democratic individualism, to the point of soft despotism, which is the most frightening, intrinsic danger in the age of the equality of conditions for Tocqueville.

The traces that Tocqueville followed have often been discussed. As is known Tocqueville was stingy with information about his theoretical sources. Neither in *Democracy in America* itself, nor within his personal correspondence can be found noteworthy information about his readings (JARDIN, 1991. p. 246; MCLENDON, 2006. p. 669). Obviously, he did not like footnotes. That is why his letter to his friend Kergolay from November 1836 is all the more frequent quoted. Here Tocqueville calls a spade a spade and divulges some interesting names: There is not a single day that goes by, writes Tocqueville, on which he would not concern himself with Montesquieu, Rousseau and Pascal (TOCQUEVILLE, 1977. p. 418). It is also known that during his work on the second volume of "Democracy in America" Tocqueville undertakes an intensive rereading of Rousseau and Pascal. As Pascal is mentioned four times, he is the most frequently cited modern theorist (MCLENDON, 2006. p.669). Pascal's traces have been followed intensively within the Tocqueville research. Primarily they can be found in those text passages of Tocqueville's second volume of "Democracy in America", where he illustrates the shady sides of democracy and the abysses of the lonely hearts. In this context, Pascal is involved as theorist as well as philosophical hero (KALEDIN, 2011. p. 48). In addition to the three classics, of course there are also other influences mentioned, including Tocqueville's leading figure and teacher François Guizot (cf. JARDIN, 1991. p. 76).<sup>4</sup> Tough Tocqueville neither achieves the political success of his teacher nor shares his unlimited trust in the middle class as new

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<sup>4</sup> Concerning the importance of Guizot for liberalism within the first half of the 19th century (ROSANVALLON, 1985).

political class, he still profits of important and thought-provoking impulses and inspirations from the liberal of the old kind. The correspondence shows that Tocqueville was inspired by attending Guizot's famous lectures from April 1829 to May 1830. The topic was the "Histoire de la civilisation en Europe" (GUIZOT, 1985.), the history of civilization in Europe, which analyzes man in all situations of social existence and finally looks into the inner of man himself (JARDIN, 1991. p. 77).

Concerning the matters of heart in Tocqueville's work, there is a clear focus on Rousseau and especially on Pascal. In studies that are more recent there is at least agreement about the immense influence that Pascal's logic of the heart had on Tocqueville. In contrast, the question *how* this influence affects Tocqueville, is a controversial issue. The further Tocqueville moves towards Pascal, the darker become his scenarios about the future of democracy.

## **Two solitudes**

A remarkable suggestion of how to arrange the lonely hearts under the conditions of a democratic individualism was latterly made by Paltieli. Courageously he takes up a stance on established Tocqueville-interpretations, which act on the undoubtedly assumption of a pathological relationship between democracy and heart and argues against them. To him the consonance of solitude and individualism is by no means self-evident. On the contrary. Instead of understanding loneliness as a danger, Paltieli regards it as a positive fact. To him solitude is a necessary pre-condition for intellectual work, which can – under specific circumstances – even be more important than political participation (cf. PALTIELI, 2016. p. 184).

With his positive understanding of loneliness, Paltieli portrays Tocqueville as great disenchanter of republican citizenship. By doing so, he polemically rejects the communitarian appropriation of Tocqueville, which was – as we have already noted – popular in America during the 90ies of the last century. According to Paltieli the grievance about the lonely hearts is out of place. Instead of amalgamating solitude with individualism and interpreting it as danger for democracy, he definitely credits positive effects with loneliness. After all, he assumes, solitude would create an "invisible sphere", which challenges the political regime. In addition, the loneliness would only

become alarming through the engulfment for democratic proposes, this means as specific democratic individualism. It is striking that Paltieli's concept of solitude is predominantly based on Tocqueville's personal experiences. This becomes apparent when he connects "Tocqueville's clearest definition of his idea of solitude" (PALTIELI, 2016. p. 188) with Tocqueville's own, almost violent retreat from his friends, a retreat that would supposedly free him internally and that would empower him to do intellectual work. At this point Paltieli perceives Tocqueville under the influence of romantic and jansenistic ideas. From Paltieli's point of view, solitude gains its political explosiveness precisely because it is by no means originally democratic, but rather external to democracy.

In this interpretation, loneliness becomes a self-chosen seclusion, as – if we believe Paltieli – it is indispensable for intellectual work. In this sense, it would not be loneliness that ruins democracy, but it's disappearance and the democratic use of it. Accordingly, Paltieli portrays a Tocqueville, who allegedly feared the unavoidable loss of solitude as an unhindered and uninhabited place. The culprit is of course quickly identified: it is the democratic conditions. Under such circumstances, Paltieli fears, the appreciation for a philosophical and non-profit use of time and calm is lost. What's even worse: Paltieli also fears that philosophical ghosts like Pascal are threatened with extinction within democracy. And he continues by contrasting today's America with Pascal. He acts on the assumption that nowadays Americans wouldn't render a judgement via lonely soliloquys, but rather by trusting on the power of the masses. In this sense, solitude was some kind of anti-democratic, because it would not depend on others or public opinion (PALTIELI, 2016. p. 195).

Just if loneliness becomes a version of social isolation, which loses every critical or political meaning for self-awareness, the situation turns to be precarious. Suitable to this, Paltieli assumes that individualism is the real threat to democracy. Individualism would denature loneliness by subjecting it to economic calculation and by transforming it into apathy. In his opinion, it is only the democratic transformation of solitude into individualism, which implicates pathological consequences. From this perspective, individualism would be both – mental weakness and cardiac insufficiency. In addition, according to Paltieli's reading, political participation becomes very ambivalent, as it would lead to a loss of solitude and to the dangerous mediocrity of democracy. By putting up such a claim, Paltieli transforms political participation. What

is actually a remedy or some kind of medicine, suddenly becomes a pathogen in his interpretation. Because after all, political participation is subject to the fatal dynamic of public opinion, which replaces the lonely self-determination.

To sum it up: Paltieli creates a scenario, in which solitude has a positive connotation, whereas political participation is associated with the shady side of the democratic public. This opens up an interesting perspective on Tocqueville's lonely hearts, which in fact trivializes or ignores their pathologies in favor of an extensive differentiation between political and philosophical existence. To Paltieli, Tocqueville seems to be the one, who acts out this differentiation with his own biography – namely with his well-known conflict between intellectual existence and political career. From Paltieli's point of view, Tocqueville has resolved this conflict morally in favor of loneliness (PALTIELI, 2016. p. 187). As we will show, Tocqueville's loneliness can also be read differently.

## **Two hearts**

Whereas Paltieli differentiates between two forms of solitude – a natural and a perverted one – in order to understand the lonely hearts and to create some order among the confusion of feelings, the American Tocqueville-researcher Michael McLendon puts the physiognomy of the heart in the center of focus. To him, there are two hearts beating in the chest of democratic man. Looking at the American circumstances, he observes two competing tendencies. In order to name them, he introduces Descartes<sup>5</sup> as a fourth role model and leading figure for Tocqueville – in addition to those, who were already mentioned: Montesquieu, Rousseau and Pascal. Following Descartes, he composes a new prototype of democratic reason. This leads to a democratic soul, in which Cartesian rationality and Pascalian fear are in opposition to each other – with different motivations.

Whereas the rational part leads to the development of self-interest, from McLendon's view, the emotions push the democratic heart to loneliness and amour propre/vanity. Following McLendon, the question, how to motivate such a creature for

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<sup>5</sup> For the relationship of Tocqueville and Descartes (SCHÖSSLER, 2014).

freedom and its necessary institutions despite the confusion of feelings, can only be explained via a complex kind of psychology. Even more: To him, the motivation of democratic man, to perpetuate his freedom, must be traced back to the psychological *status quo*. It is only possible to stop the natural erosion of democracy, if heart and mind, feeling and thinking, can be reconciled. The solution: stemming the affection for equality and strengthening the affects for freedom. At this point, McLendon refers to Tocqueville's basic problem of the democratic age: it is the striking imbalance between equality and freedom (VOSSLER, 1966. p.5).

McLendon pays particular attention to the gap between the ideal of the "equality of conditions" and the actual, real existing inequalities. Day in, day out, the democratic heart has to deal with this provocation. No matter if we are talking about natural, social, material, physical or mental inequalities – all of them hurt the *homme démocratique*. McLendon identifies two different strategies, which the democratic man uses in order to react on the factual inequalities. One of them follows the Cartesian paradigm, the other one is linked to the Pascalian way of thinking. Both of them lead to the well-known Tocquevillean keywords, such as the public opinion, the pursuit of recognition and the focus on private concerns. Due to the Pascalian impulse the democratic man's reaction on envy, jealousy and dissatisfaction, which arise with the illusion of equality, is either a permanent comparison to others, the pursuit of recognition or the wish for public favor.

The Cartesian component pushes the heart in another direction. It is the constant self-exploration of Tocqueville's democratic man, which forces him to focus on the private sphere and which can be regarded as a quasi-involuntary, deterministic answer to the dissatisfying circumstances. What is commonly seen as the birth of individualism within the secondary literature, is according to McLendon's reading the Cartesian answer to the constant comparison. This comparison bases on both: systematic and individual factors. In this context, the pursuit of economic health and place-hunting cooperate with envy and jealousy.

According to McLendon, the Cartesian part of character promises relief to the individual, which is always on go and has to deal with painful feelings that develop in public sphere due to the constant comparisons to each other. This relief consists in the avoidance of social contact, which leads to another crises analysis.



Following McLendon at this point means that the retreat to private sphere, the development of individualism and the collective form of solitude must be understood as strategies of the democratic man, in order to handle the omnipresent competitiveness.

With his dichotomy of heart and mind, McLendon delivers insight into the psychological mechanisms with which the democratic soul tries to compensate the scandal of inequality. But is the relationship between the Pascalian and the Cartesian part really this antagonistic? And is it sure that the Pascalian self necessarily triumphs? One can argue about that. For McLendon, the situation is clear. The future of democracy depends on the future of the democratic heart, more precisely on the question, whether the Pascalian or the Cartesian self dominates. McLendon fears a victory for the Cartesian self. Because such a victory would not only result in collective loneliness and the dreaded retreat to private sphere, it would also torpedo a positive, liberal end of democratic history. Even the much-praised political participation can't stem this danger, although it is an effective solver for some. McLendon exposes it as a futile attempt, with which the democratic man struggles for recognition. What he cannot discover in it at all is altruism or democratic pathos. The Pascalian abysses remain open. In contrast, it is certain, that envy, jealousy, retreat and solitude pave the way for soft despotism. If the Pascalian logic of heart rules, then democracy is doomed to failure.

### **Solitude and freedom**

At an exposed point, Tocqueville reveals the theoretical foundation of his democracy concept: It is Rousseau's formula reduced to the essentials:

“It is possible to imagine an extreme point at which freedom and equality would meet and be confounded together. Let us suppose that all the members of the community take a part in the government, and that each of them has an equal right to take a part in it. As none is different from his fellows, none can exercise a tyrannical power: men will be perfectly free, because they will all be entirely equal; and they will all be perfectly equal, because they will be entirely free. To this ideal state democratic nations tend. Such is the completest form that equality can assume upon earth; but there are a thousand others

which, without being equally perfect, are not less cherished by those nations" (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 570).

This unity of freedom and equality, envisioned in the concept of ideal democracy, is as we have seen, endangered from scratch by the relentless production of inequality among equals. However, what democratic freedom means for Tocqueville is not easy to decipher in the context of "Democracy in America". In his essay "État social et politique de la France avant et depuis 1789" he provides a remarkable definition of democratic freedom, which – according to Tocqueville – would only come into its own during the age of the equality of conditions. This shows that the competition between freedom and equality has its origin in the concept of democratic freedom itself and that it marks – at least to a certain extent – democratic aporia. Tocqueville initially distinguishes between aristocratic-premodern and democratic-modern freedom.

Thereby the historical end of aristocratic freedom is sealed and the quarrel between ancients and moderns is definitely decided in favor of modernity, as now – finally – would exist the "correct" form of freedom. The multiple forms of freedom and privileges are replaced by one common freedom, by one common law for all. If we look at the definition of democratic freedom, it becomes clear that it creates a scenario, in which the individual is only related to itself. This means the individual has lost all natural conditions to the likes of him. Tocqueville shows that in the context of the equality of conditions, legal independence leads to social isolation. For him, the imbalance between freedom and equality is also based on affective reasons.

The democratic man clings to equality with all his heart, equality turns out to be a basic passion in the age of democracy. In opposition to that, his connection to freedom is based on his mind, so to speak externally. It is well known that Tocqueville rates this division as fatal. Not surprisingly, this dichotomy marks the inner crucial test for the democratic age. "Democratic" is individual freedom in relation to aristocratic freedom. It has no political content, it just determines the circumstances of the equals to each other, and does not initially contain the idea of a common political action. Afterwards Tocqueville broaches the issue of democratic freedom in the sense of political participation.

Thereby – at least to a certain extent – political freedom functions as a corrective to democratic private-freedom. As is well known, Tocqueville regards the

political associations, which enable the individual to act as a citizen and to campaign for issues of public utility, as one of the most effective remedies for the danger of a growing individualism and solitude. Yes, there is a well-known text passage, in which Tocqueville admits that the actions of civils in the public sphere have a formative influence on the common “habitudes du cœur”. He believes that civic engagement would enlarge the individual’s heart and that it helps to practice democratic virtue (TOCQUEVILLE, 1992. p. 623).

Not accidentally, communitarian Tocqueville-readings emphasize the healthful effect, which a collective political practice has on civil heart diseases. It seems as if the recovery of the political sphere would curb the individualistic tendencies of democracy. However, in the face of Tocqueville’s republican emphasis, caution is advised. On the one hand, because the dilation of the heart via participation cannot be rated as a republican metamorphosis; on the other hand, because Tocqueville also focuses on the democratic heart when it comes to political action.

Thereby he realizes that where there is light, there is also shadow: As purified the political participation may seem – the feelings and motivations behind it are questionable. After all, the public action underlies feelings based on comparison, competition, and jealousy. There is no final Tocquevillean answer to the question, whether the republican rescue from danger will succeed. On the one hand, he praises the effects of political action, but on the other hand, he discredits the motives. This separation of social functionality and intrinsic motivation can also be seen, where Tocqueville praises the US for the successful fusion of democracy and religion. Again, he registers the political consequences without cherishing any illusions about the motives.

Because even in the religious esprit of the Americans he finds self-interest and economic calculatio. But who can - asks Tocqueville hypocritically - look into the hearts of Americans? Obviously, the pretense is enough for the being, the masquerade, which actually nobody believes in, but which turns out to be socially stable, is sufficient. If loneliness is essential to modern freedom and quasi part of the DNA of modern democracy, the evolutionary history of individualism has to be reconsidered. After all, loneliness is not only a secondary damage to individualism, but also a breeding ground for its development. The splitting of loneliness and

individualism that Paltieli proposes must be reviewed. It is necessary to open the democratic heart once again.

### **Democratic pathologies: Individualism**

Just as for Tocqueville freedom and equality are directly linked to democracy, also individualism is an inherent part of the interior of democracy. Of course, this was already asserted by liberals of the old kind, such as Benjamin Constant or François Guizot. However, Tocqueville does not agree to their unreserved praise of the individual. For him, individualism is rather linked to the critical aspects of democracy. Even if Tocqueville definitively defends modern freedom, he is aware of its deep ambivalence since the first theoretical breath.

What makes individualism questionable is the depoliticization of citizens, which goes hand in hand with their withdrawal into the private sphere and the restriction to their personal environment. In any case, Tocqueville is certain that individualism is a historical new, specifically democratic phenomenon. This phenomenon marks a central moment of erosion of democracy, since an active civic participation is essential to democracy. For this reason, Tocqueville fears a turning away of the individual from the collective. How threatening the dynamic of the retreat to the private sphere actually is, becomes absolutely clear in the second volume of Tocqueville's "Democracy in America".

This is also the first time Tocqueville deals with individualism. Whereas the first volume of 1835 offers an optimistic perspective on the future of democracy, the second volume sounds much more skeptical. The pathological features of democracy, as for example the excessive care of welfare or the sprout of soft despotism, are now clearly noticeable. They draw the threatening backdrop that is built with a proceeding individualism. The effects of an increasing individualization, material orientation and political abstinence reinforce each other reciprocally. But which mechanisms operate in the special case of individualism?

Tocqueville distinguishes individualism, which is clearly of democratic origin, from egoism. Egoism is "a vice as old as the world" (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 574.) and can therefore exist in any form of government or society. Also in terms of

content, individualism and egoism differ significantly. The individualism seems more subtle and threatening than the egoism. Remarkably, Tocqueville's individualism is not only at work in self-reference, but is also linked to the interests of the individual's closest group of people (AUDIER, 2006. p. 491.). Therefore, Individualism can be understood as a preliminary stage of egoism:

Egotism blights the germ of all virtue; individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others, and is at length absorbed in downright egotism (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 574.).

Gradually individualism leads from a strongly individualistic to a pure self-centered society and, not least because of this, it also offers a secure pledge for soft despotism. Due to its specific functional logic, individualism is thus more dangerous than egoism. Not only due to his subtlety, but also mainly because of its tenacity, which appears in the private sphere as well as in the public sphere, individualism is an endurance test for the heart of democratic man. After all, the hearts are faced with two dangers that confuse their emotional world.

It is obvious that this is where collective isolation begins. How drastic the circumstances that Tocqueville fears for his Democrats are, is written in the following:

It must be acknowledged that equality, which brings great benefits into the world, nevertheless suggests to men (as will be shown hereafter) some very dangerous propensities. It tends to isolate them from each other, to concentrate every man's attention upon himself (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 505).

He further emphasizes his remarks:

Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants, and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 575.).

With this withdrawal, with that curvature of the heart on itself, Tocqueville marks the neuralgic point of his heart analysis. Under democratic conditions, to a certain extent, individualism and loneliness thwart any reliable orientation in the past, present and future. It is obvious that – contrary to the remarks of Paltieli – individualism cannot be thought without loneliness. After all, solitude is the reason why individualism receives its full dynamics. “Within the solitude of his own heart” the *homme démocratique* has to suffer a joyless existence. He is neither in company with others nor in himself truly at home (BILAKOVICS, 2012. p. 84).

Ultimately, individualism produces a society of fearful, lonely loners who imperceptible elude any public participation and who are exposed to the danger of a strong manipulation in their isolation. An intellectually productive loneliness that is even conducive to democracy, as assumed by Paltieli, can hardly be found at this point. Neither in relation to oneself nor in relation to others, does loneliness strengthen the *homme démocratique*. Rather it forces a precarious individualization. This interplay of individualization and loneliness has a fatal effect on democracy, which depends – according to the republican reading – predominantly on identification and participation. Democracy is literally hit right in the heart. Tocqueville associates mainly pathological traits with the development of the civic individual. Anyway, Democratization and Individualization do not go hand in hand with each other without question.

### **Democratic pathologies: soft despotism**

It is hard for Tocqueville to find a suitable name for the new crisis figure of democracy. He manages with a classical topos in order to entitle the historical new phenomenon. His term *soft despotism*<sup>6</sup> marks the democratic crisis scenario under conditions of equality.

For in a community in which the ties of family, of caste, of class, and craft fraternities no longer exist people are far too much disposed to think exclusively of their own interests, to become self-seekers practicing a narrow individualism and caring nothing for the public good. Far from trying to counteract such tendencies despotism

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<sup>6</sup> Extensive to this topic RAHE (2009).

encourages them, depriving the governed of any sense of solidarity and interdependence; of good-neighborly feelings and a desire to further the welfare of the community at large. It immures them, so to speak, each in his private life [...] (TOCQUEVILLE, 1983. p. xiii).

This shows how closely individualism and soft despotism are interwoven and how much they benefit from each other. Only through the alienated emotional world, through the ensnared hearts of democratic citizens, does the soft despotism reach its full extent. There is no other political system in which the emotions of the citizens are as politically relevant as within democracy. The feelings decide on victory or defeat of soft despotism and thus command the future of democracy. But how does the soft despotism function and what gives it its extraordinary risk potential?

Its baseness consists - similar to individualism - in its functional logic:

Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness: it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances – what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living? (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p.770)

As unrestricted, patronizing, subtle, barely visible and therefore very dangerous Power structure (DITGEN, 1986. p. 135) Tocqueville's soft despotism presents itself as a phenomenon, which in many ways foreshadows Foucault's power dispositive. Tocqueville's foresight is astonishing. He succeeds in accurately describing a scenario that keeps democratic man in a permanent state of immaturity without coercion or violence. Blind, deaf and emotionally blunted, the *homme démocratique* is imperceptibly robbed of its role as a participating citizen, without realizing or not to mention complaining about it. Of course, the soft despotism is not satisfied with that. The phenomenon continues to expand and intrudes deeper and

deeper into the private sphere. In doing so, the soft despotism not only boycotts the political freedom, but also more and more captures democratic man's personal freedom.

That means the soft despotism attacks him likewise as a citizen and as a person. Tocqueville creates a threatening future-scenario:

I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest – his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not – he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p.770).

With this social texture that alienates democratic men of themselves and from others, the soft despotism exacerbates the pathology of democracy. The system is confronted with upheavals, which frighten Tocqueville himself due to their extent. As iniquitous as the soft despotism may appear, for Tocqueville it is undoubtedly not an outward enemy, not a complete Outside of democracy, but rather installed within itself. The soft despotism can only be established under specific democratic conditions (HERB & HIDALGO, 2004. p. 19).

The causal research to soft despotism leads Tocqueville back to the inner life of democratic man, to the susceptibilities of the lonely hearts to the advances of soft despotism. The phenomenon uses the social isolation and simultaneously accelerates its progress. What makes the situation of democratic men so precarious from the outset is installed in the matrix of democracy itself. Life under equality of conditions forces the individual to struggle incessantly for recognition and demarcation from others. As McLendon shows, under conditions of equality the retreat to private sphere seems to be the only remaining option. How democracy deals with its own crisis and which potential solutions remain is a question, which is frequently discussed within the Tocqueville-research.



There are plenty of speculations. This often involves a crisis management strategy, which could be labeled as reanimation of the participating citizen, a therapy based on the Republican model. Thereby one positions Tocqueville entirely in the tradition of his intellectual father Rousseau.<sup>7</sup> As is well known, Tocqueville laid this trail himself.

### **Republican Therapies: two readings**

To make it short: Despite all connecting factors – The basic idea of Rousseau's *contrat social*, which is the dream of a transformation of the bourgeois with his well-known vices to a virtuous, welfare-orientated citizen, is not adopted as Tocqueville's own.<sup>8</sup> His liberalism does not offer any space for republican metamorphoses. The separation between man and citizen is insurmountable; the dream of the *homme nouveau* is over.

How far one can chase Tocqueville's republican disenchantment, remains to be shown. In any case, bearing in mind this profound liberalism, some interpreters have doubts whether Tocqueville can still be used as a godfather for American communitarianism of the 1980s. Thereby one can definitely find republican traits in Tocqueville's theory. In particularly emphatic text passages, one comes across the idea that the political participation ultimately spurs the hearts of the citizens, that it declares a specific republican heartbeat. Therefore, a heart enlargement according to the republican model is definitely possible for Tocqueville. "The emotions and ideas are renewed, the heart dilates, and the human mind develops only through the mutual action of men with one another." (TOCQUEVILLE, 1992. p. 623 - *own translation*).

A certain pathos for saving democracy through republican leadership is therefore unmistakable. But the illusiveness of republican excitement is deceptive. Because if you look behind the surface of civic engagement with Tocqueville, the small-sized egoistic ambitions and motives of the *Bourgeois* are again visible. Obviously, the

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<sup>7</sup> For an interesting reading on Tocqueville's follow-up to Rousseau : JACQUES (2005, p. 357).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Tocqueville's Rousseau reading is a chapter of its own cf. FERRY (2012). It seems, as if Tocqueville does not take note of the bitter end, which Rousseau bestows to modern republicanism. Otherwise, he could have discovered the closeness to his master here as well, cf. HERB & FREIHEIT (1999).

enthusiasm for the general is ultimately just based on private interests - At best, on well-understood self-interest, but by no means on genuinely civic virtue. No matter, whether the self-interested DNA of the democratic participation is the solution, or rather the problem of democratic individualism: Tocqueville does not want to believe in the purity of the democratic heart anymore.

Tocqueville's skeptical view on the motivations of the democratic citizen to be committed to the public, leads to a dulled hope for a republican future. As many things as Tocqueville and Rousseau may have in common, concerning the ideal of democracy that is that perfect harmony between freedom and equality – when it comes to Rousseau's ambitions to transform man to another, new man via political participation, Tocqueville is distrustful. Again, the individualistic matrix of the Tocquevillean citizen turns out to be very resilient. In fact, he does not have to live a public life. The fact that Tocqueville wavers between trust in republican civic politics and distrust in republican sentiments of the civils shows the inner entanglement of the different receptions in "Democracy in America".

Certainly: For the debate on democracy, Tocqueville has a dialogue with Rousseau and Pascal. But whose arguments are more convincing? By reading Rousseau he finds the ideal of democracy, the unity of freedom and equality and at the same time, he also recognizes the therapies that must be taken into account, if democracy can't keep its promise. Right at this point, at the republican therapy of the sufferings of democratic individual, Tocqueville's Rousseauism is most clearly expressed. But at the same time, it is exactly those Republican-Rousseau moments that Tocqueville casts doubt on with his meticulous heart analysis. One can rightly understand the last part of "Democracy in America", which examines the influence of democratic thinking and feeling on the political society, as Pascal's discourse (JAUME, 2008. p. 354).

This discourse exposes the ambitions of republicanism by showing that even the political actions of the citizens are based on their small-minded motives. Not even in this moment does the Bourgeois have what it takes to be a Citoyen. Thus, the Pascal-Rousseau-complex seems to be resolvable in Tocqueville's history of reception. In the hierarchy of arguments, Pascal has the upper hand. The deeper Tocqueville looks into the lonely heart of democratic man, the more distrustful he

becomes towards the promises of republicanism. The republican idea, to bring together the hearts of the citizens via a common political practice, does not endure for Tocqueville.

### **Two democracies – two hearts**

Let's remember: Tocqueville didn't publish "Democracy in America" at once, but he has written two different (independent) volumes at intervals of five years (1835/40). The volume from 1835 reflects Tocqueville's travel experiences in the United States. The volume of 1840 is created in conjunction with a Journey to Normandy, which Tocqueville undertakes in the intellectual company of Rousseau and Pascal. Whether "Democracy in America" is a coherent book<sup>9</sup> or whether Tocqueville has rather designed two different, two competing versions of democracy (DRESCHER, 1988. p. 77; STROUT, 1969. p. 99; JACQUES, 1984.), is discussed extensively within the secondary literature. Of course those interpretations, which mark a turning point between the two volumes, dominate. In this context, Lamberti popularized the term "deux democracies" (LAMBERTI, 1983. p. 184).

If Tocqueville should really have two democracies in mind – does he then also know two different physiognomies of the democratic heart? What is certain is that the heart is mentioned in the first volume as well as in the second volume – with remarkable changes. The generally registered intensification of the crisis analysis in the second volume from 1840 can also be observed in terms of the democratic heart. A central theory part, which accentuates the ambivalence of the democratic age, only exists in the second volume. The term individualism arising from a worrying analysis of the democratic "Habits of the heart" appears here for the first time as well. The same applies to soft despotism. It is hard to imagine that these changes would not also affect the democratic heart.

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<sup>9</sup> For the assumption of continuity (JAUME, 2008. p. 23 e p. 430). Here the "Great wall of China" between Tocqueville's early and late writings is demolished. They all revolve around the problem of authority and the return of the despot.

No doubt: In order to understand the inner world and external institutions of democratic men, the concerns of the heart are important to Tocqueville from the outset. The nervous heart of the Americans does not remain hidden in the first volume:

“In America the same passions are to be met with as in Europe; some originating in human nature, others in the democratic condition of society. Thus in the United States I found that restlessness of heart which is natural to men, when all ranks are nearly equal and the chances of elevation are the same to all”.(TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 357.)

The influence of the democratic institutions on the hearts of men is mentioned, but without naming the real dangers. Only in the second volume, Tocqueville dares a deep look into the democratic hearts. Not until now are the details of the democratic pathologies revealed. Tocqueville draws the profile of a lonely, withdrawn *homme démocratique* who retreats to the private sphere and gives up his role as a citizen. A profile that above all teaches republican readings to fear. Does Tocqueville link the finding of different versions of the democratic man with the idea of two different natures of *homme démocratique*? One could speculate about that.

For Tocqueville it is absolutely clear that the thoughts and feelings of the democratic man differ completely from the thoughts and feelings of the aristocratic man. Whereas the aristocratic man had a fixed place in the society and could rely on “a chain of all the members of the community, from the peasant to the king” (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 575.), the democratic man is completely on his own and is constantly in danger to lose the connection to his fellow men. To stay in the picture with Tocqueville: “democracy breaks that chain, and severs every link of it” (TOCQUEVILLE, 2002. p. 575.). As there is a turning point between aristocratic world and democratic age and with *homme aristocratique* and *homme démocratique* two completely different natures of man act in their social world<sup>10</sup>, one could also mark a turning point within democracy itself.

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<sup>10</sup> For the *homme démocratique* as *homme nouveau* MANENT (1982. p. 30, 95 e 107). In contrast to this Senett questions every transformation of human nature based on social circumstances (SENNETT, 1979. p. 410).

Namely, one could distinguish between a pure hearted democratic man that is not yet infected by individualism and soft despotism on the one hand and a democratic man, whose heart is already compromised because of the democratic dangers on the other hand. Whether this turning point, however, creates two different natures of the *homme démocratique*, remains questionable. What is undisputable is the fact that the *homme démocratique* does not remain the same after he has lost his heart to the temptations of the democratic dangers. In order to get a better understanding of the development of the democratic man, it is worth taking another closer look at the second volume of "Democracy in America". Here, too, the concerns of the heart form the neuralgic center of the democratic pathologies. This is already expressed in the structure of the second volume, as we have four parts here.

While the first three parts deal with the influence of democracy on the intellectual life, on the feelings and on the manners, the fourth part reverses the causal research. It asks for the effects of the new mentalities on democracy. Obviously, Tocqueville assumes that democracy creates a new type of a specific democratic way of thinking and feeling. How much this new type rules the hearts of the democratic citizens, has become clear in the face of the development of individualism and soft despotism.

## Conclusion

As we saw, Tocqueville's heart stories shatter the republican dream of a future of democracy based on Rousseau's model. The end of "Democracy in America" is marked by Pascal's pessimism. Whether this pessimism also has to do with Tocqueville's personal experiences, has been asked at times. Does Tocqueville possibly not only describe the theoretical scenario of his *homme démocratique*, but also his own experiences? For researchers like Paltieli there are remarkable similarities between Tocqueville's experiences with solitude and the solitude of his *homme démocratique*. In the genealogy between heart and mind, own and foreign, Tocqueville finds himself in an ambivalent relationship to democracy:

I have an intellectual preference [goût de tête] for democratic institutions, but I am an Aristocrat by instinct, that is to say I despise and fear the crowd. I am passionate about freedom, legality, the respect for law, but not about democracy. This is the bottom of the soul. (TOCQUEVILLE, 1985. p. 87 - own translation)

Tocqueville clearly admits to democracy as desirable form of government, as reasonable option, but at the bottom of his heart, he still seems to be attached to the manners and inner life of aristocracy. As he is just as broken inside as his democratic man, democracy causes Tocqueville rather heartache than headache. Yes, he knows the emotional suffering of his democratic man only too well, as he shares the abysses that he diagnoses and prophesies for him. Perhaps that is precisely why he is so good at putting himself in the position of *homme démocratique*: the world, which he creates for his democratic man, is his own world. His correspondence documents, how lonely, melancholic and pensive Tocqueville was. In the world of the *Ancien Régime*, in which everyone is connected to each other due to their inequalities, Tocqueville does not feel at home either. In an intimate confession to his Confidante Madame Swetchine, he writes:

You could not imagine, Madame, the pain and often cruelty I experience in living in this moral isolation, to feel myself outside the intellectual community of my time and my country. Solitude in a desert would seem to me less harsh than this sort of solitude among men. Because, I confess my weakness to you, isolation has always frightened me, and to be happy and even calm, I have always needed, more than this wise, to find a certain concourse around myself and to count on the sympathy of a certain number of my fellows. This profound saying could be applied especially to me: it is not good to be alone. (TOCQUEVILLE, 1983. p. 268)

Let's take Tocqueville's lonely heart seriously. If so, a positive, intellectual productive dimension of solitude, as Paltieli assumes at the fringes of democracy, cannot even be found in Tocqueville's own inner world. Indeed, according to his own account, Tocqueville owes his own melancholy his clear view to the world. The price for the sharp eye, however, is considerable. Thus, melancholy acts paralyzing and forces to that painful self-exploration (KALEDIN, 2011, p.61), which Tocqueville attested his democratic man and that McLendon linked with Pascal.

Perhaps we need to reinterpret Tocqueville's homelessness. If so, the democratic world described by Tocqueville is not a foreign world that he approaches to from the far, as aristocrat with distrustfulness<sup>11</sup>, but it is rather his own world.<sup>12</sup> In that case, we would have to say goodbye to the image of the nostalgic aristocrat, who applies foreign standards to democracy. Rather, we can understand him as a protagonist of the democratic age, as the democratic individual, the *lonely heart* par excellence.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. in contrast: JARDIN (1991. p. 236). Here Tocqueville's longing for the aristocratic society competes against his rational plea for democracy. Lucien Jaume tries to descramble "Democracy in America" with Tocqueville's relationship to his aristocratic milieu of origin as well, cf. JAUME (2008. p. 54).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. JAUME (2008. p. 434), who identifies the author Tocqueville as physician of a society that is in fact alien for him.

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