

# TOCQUEVILLEAN ASSOCIATION AND THE MARKET

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**Abstract:** In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville highlighted the facility that Americans have with the art of association as well as how important associational life is within American communities. It is through associations that Americans, according to Tocqueville, do everything from celebrate a holiday to build a church. Although much of Tocqueville's discussion of associations focuses on the uses that Americans make of associations, he does spend some time describing how Americans become adept at the art of association and cultivate a habit of associations. This paper adds to the discussion that Tocqueville begins by exploring how markets, especially within advanced commercial societies, facilitate and support associational life as a consequence of the division of labor, the incentives to be moral in market settings, and the ease of communication and heightened access to information within markets societies. These aspects of markets offer market participants greater opportunities to nurture and grow Tocquevillean habits of association.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville highlighted the facility that Americans have with the art of association as well as how important associational life is within American communities. Indeed, Tocqueville (2012: 897) confessed to admiring “the infinite art with which the inhabitants of the United States succeeded in setting a common goal for the efforts of a great number of men, and in making them march freely toward.” It is through associations that Americans, according to Tocqueville, undertook both small and grand projects. It is through associations that Americans did everything from celebrating a holiday to building a church or prison. Tocqueville also acknowledged the industriousness of Americans. As Tocqueville (ibid: 976) remarked, “no people on earth who has made as rapid progress as the Americans in commerce and industry. They form today the second maritime nation of the world; and, although their manufacturing has to struggle against almost insurmountable natural obstacles, it does not fail to make new gains every day.” There a sense in which, however, this observation by Tocqueville presents us with something of a puzzle: how has America developed both a robust civil society and a vibrant commercial society when markets and community are supposedly at odds with one another?

Currently, a large debate exists about the market and whether it undermines or promotes community (Gudeman 1992, 2001; Rothbard 1993; Anderson 1995; Gray 1998, Putnam 2000; Sacks 2002; Badhwar 2008; Storr 2008). Stephen Gudeman (1992, 2001), for

instance, has posited that society consists of two separate spheres – the market and the community – that operate on two different logics (anonymous exchange in the market and mutuality in community) and that are more likely to be substitutes for one another than complements. As the market expands and people begin to focus more and more on profits, the space of community shrinks and is eventually overrun by the space of the market. Elizabeth Anderson (1995) argues in much the same vein. While she concedes that markets have liberated many societies subject to tyrannical regimes and rigid class structures, she nonetheless alleges that markets should be limited lest they spread beyond the job of liberating the poor, and instead lead to the commodification of higher goods (such as relationships and communities). This commodification of higher goods is, she claims, inevitable in a commercialized society. John Gray (1997) echoes these concerns. Adopting free market institutions, Gray (1997: 36) argues, led to “a fracturing of communities, and a depletion of ethos and trust within institutions, which muted or thwarted the economic renewal which free markets were supposed to generate.” Likewise, Jonathan Sacks (2002: 89) writes that “the market ... has subverted other institutions—families, communities, [and] the bonds that link members of a society to a common fate.” The growth of market, according to these scholars, has meant a decline in community.

Robert Putman’s celebrated work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) is probably the most popular criticism of how the growth of

markets undermines community. Putnam argues that commercial society – with its overworked populous and suburban sprawl – has corroded social bonds and trust. Specifically, Putnam emphasizes that the rise of technology that results from growing markets leads to a decline of social capital. This decline of social capital manifests itself in a precipitous decline in participation in social gatherings, as evidenced in his poignant example of waning participation in bowling leagues. Putnam suggests that larger markets—particularly the technological innovations they bring with them—dehumanize and individualize communities, corroding the Tocquevillean idea that civil engagement is indispensable for a healthy democracy.

But this raises an important empirical question: namely, do markets really undermine communities, as these and other critics have alleged? Admittedly, there have been several scholars who have argued the opposite view, i.e. that markets promote rather than undermine community. These range from the classic works of Adam Smith (2007) and Montesquieu (1989) to more recent efforts by Deirdre McCloskey (2006). While it seems clear that Tocqueville regarded commercial and civil society, and so markets and community, as being at least potentially compatible with one another in America—given his acknowledgement of the American penchants for both industry and association—he is mostly silent on the precise relationship between markets and community. Although Tocqueville did spend some time describing how Americans become adept at the art and science of association, and thereby cultivate a

habit of association, only once in those discussions did Tocqueville mention associational life as being strengthened by commercial enterprises, and there only in passing, when he indicates that “commercial and industrial associations” are associations to which almost everyone belongs (Tocqueville 2012: 896).

This chapter argues that commercial life is an important space for developing and cultivating the Tocquevillean habits of association; indeed, it may be necessary for such development. Specifically, this paper adds to the discussion by exploring how markets, especially within advanced commercial societies, facilitate and support associational life as a consequence of the division of labor, incentives to be moral in market settings, and ease of communication and heightened access to information within markets societies. These aspects of markets offer market participants greater opportunities to nurture and grow Tocquevillean habits of association. We, thus, begin with a discussion of Tocquevillean association in *Section II*. In *Section III*, we then describe how Tocqueville believes the habit of association is cultivated and the art of association is developed. In *Section IV*, we argue that markets promote and strengthen the Tocquevillean art of association through the division of labor, through the values promoted in the market, and through the heightened ease of communication and access to information that markets bring about. *Section V* serves as a concluding reflection.

## **II. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSOCIATION IN CIVIL LIFE**

Tocqueville began his discussion of association by first addressing equality. Generally speaking, Tocqueville (2012: 876) explained, equality “provides a multitude of small enjoyments to each man every day” thus causing strong attachments of the people to the value of equality. But, as Tocqueville further suggested in his next chapter, with equality comes “isolat[ion]... from the mass of his fellows and to withdraw to the side with his family and his friends, so that... he willingly abandons the larger society to itself” (ibid.: 882). Democracy allows for greater equality, but with this democratic equality comes what Tocqueville calls “individualism,” where people begin to turn inward and away from their fellow citizens: “Individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions become equal” (ibid.: 883). This phenomenon is rooted in democracy specifically because, as Tocqueville (ibid.) noted, democracy lacks the aristocratic institutions that bind “each man tightly to several of his fellow citizens.” Consequently, in democracy, “devotion toward one man becomes more rare” (ibid.: 884). Tocqueville went on to describe how such individualism dries up the wellsprings of virtue, because each man has the tendency to withdraw into himself rather than to participate in community. This of course can have disastrous consequences, which Tocqueville goes on to discuss at length.

While democracy allows for an extension of our relationships beyond close familial ties, it also requires less of each individual citizen, putting the impetus for association on the individual, rather than from aristocratic rules bonding people

together. Association, then, is critically important as a bulwark against the negative consequences of individualism. "It is clear," Tocqueville (*ibid.*: 895-6) explained, "that if each citizen, as he becomes individually weaker and consequently more incapable in isolation of preserving his freedom, does not learn the art of uniting with those like him to defend it, tyranny will necessarily grow with equality." That is, tyranny encroaches and begins to reign wherever civil associations fade or become altogether absent.

America, for Tocqueville then, is something of a wonder. Typically, democratic government leads to a rise of individualism with very little counterbalance from the spirit of association. But, America in Tocqueville's eyes was an exception. For the people had somehow, almost miraculously, been able to develop bonds with each other so as to deter individualism from subsuming the people, thus preventing an ensuing encroachment of tyranny. "Everywhere that...you see in France the government, and in England, a great lord," Tocqueville (*ibid.*: 896) observed, "count on seeing in the United States, an association." These associations are nearly infinite, because as Tocqueville noted, "Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds *constantly unite* (*ibid.*, *emphasis added*). These associations range anywhere from "religious, moral, serious ones, useless ones, very general and very particular ones, immense and very small ones...to celebrate holidays, establish seminaries, build inns, erect churches, distribute books, send missionaries...create hospitals, prisons, schools" (*ibid.*).

Tocqueville noticed such strong and ever-present associations in America more so than in aristocratic countries, particularly his native France. Tocqueville also noted that the penchant for association that he found in America was much greater than he observed in England (ibid.: 897). Although many American customs and much of their laws are inherited from England, the English do not make “such constant and skillful use of association” as Americans (ibid.). Also, “it is clear that the [English] consider association as a powerful means of action, but the [Americans] seem to see it as the only means they have to act” (ibid.). That said, the American penchant for association was at least partially inherited from the English, with English emigrants to America bringing with them township government and the practice with association that occurs within that political form (Gannett 2003).

Paradoxically, Tocqueville believed that the very same equality that accompanies democracy might potentially lead to great disaster is what nonetheless gives rise to the spirit of association. The American people recognized their own frailty after the Revolution, before and during which they witnessed and experienced great tyranny. In democratic nations where “all citizens are *independent and weak*; they can hardly do anything by themselves, and no one among them can compel his fellows to lend him their help” (Tocqueville 2012: 898, *emphasis added*). Consequently, Tocqueville detailed that they will “all fall into impotence if they do not learn to help each other freely” (ibid.). Without associating, “man will be less and less able to produce by himself alone



the things most common and most necessary to his life" (ibid.: 900). As Americans were acutely aware of what inequality could lead to, they preferred weakly associating out of choice rather than strongly associating out of force. They recognized that their associations must "be very numerous" in order that they have "some power" or ability to bind citizens together (ibid.: 907). In other words, it is the culmination of many weak and equal actors that brings forth a forceful and capable association. Rather than rule by aristocracy, there can be rule through many, equal citizens uniting.

In aristocracies, one member can "adopt a new idea or conceive of a new sentiment" and he can "introduce [it] easily into the mind or heart of those who surround" him, since he holds some power (ibid.: 900-01). This develops naturally because "[s]entiments and ideas are renewed, the heart grows larger and the human mind develops only by the reciprocal action of men on each other" (ibid.: 900). But, "this action is almost nil in democratic countries," where there exists a loose connection rather than tight bonds between people, associations "must be created there artificially ... And this is what associations alone are able to do" (ibid.). Through democratic associations, not only can citizens secure themselves from the tyranny with which they are all too familiar, but they can also provide for their own living.

To summarize, Tocqueville argues that democracy brings with it equality, and with that, individualism. But, the very source of individualism, this equality, also opens the door to its solution, if used properly. If the people within such a government use

their freedom to gather in civil associations, rather than pulling away from each other, they can combat individualism and the tyranny that might follow it.

### III. POLITICAL ASSOCIATION, CIVIL ASSOCIATION, AND THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-INTEREST RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD

Although much of Tocqueville's discussion of associations focuses on the uses that Americans make of associations, he does spend some time describing how it is that Americans become adept at the art of association and how they cultivate this habit of association. One space where the art of association is cultivated is within political association. According to Tocqueville, while civil associations are where the heart of association beats, "political association develops and singularly perfects civil association" (Tocqueville 2012: 912). Indeed, Tocqueville explained that there is a "natural and perhaps necessary relationship between the two types of association" (ibid.). This necessary link between the two is the fact that one cannot exist without the other. In other words, while it is not political association that does the heavy lifting in terms of actually practicing the art of association, it begins the teaching of it, or, in Tocqueville's words, gives "the taste for the habit of association" (ibid.). The political realm is where each citizen learns *how* to associate, even though it is not where most of the important association takes place. Tocqueville, thus, believes that it would be harmful to destroy political association, for it would leave civil association all but

absent. According to Tocqueville (*ibid.*), “where political association is forbidden, civil association is rare.” In fact,

[w]hen citizens have the ability and the habit of associating for all things, they will associate as readily for small ones as for great ones. But if they can associate only for small ones, they will not even find the desire and the capacity to do so. In vain will you allow them complete liberty to take charge of their business together; they will only nonchalantly use the rights that you grant them; and after you have exhausted yourself with efforts to turn them away from the forbidden associations, you will be surprised at your inability to persuade them to form the permitted ones. (*ibid.*: 915).

Consequently, doing away with political associations leaves civil associations all but absent because citizens have not formed the initial taste for and practice of association.

Moreover, civil associations require an individual to bear full risk for his actions, whereas political associations do not. Citizens, Tocqueville claims, “hesitate less to take part in political associations...because in them they are not risking their money” (*ibid.*: 913). But in civil associations, one must risk “a portion of [his] patrimony; it is so for all industrial and commercial companies” (*ibid.*). So, when people are “still little versed in the art of associating and they are ignorant of the principal rules, they fear, while associating for the first time in [a civil] way, paying dearly for their experience” (*ibid.*). In other words, political associations provide risk-free training grounds for the art of association, while civil associations are where the continual practice and perfection of such associations occur over time, with individuals bearing the majority of the risk.

In Tocqueville's rendering, political associations are as important as civil ones because they allow each individual to have a taste of such association. Without them, individuals would not have the taste which motivates them to practice and perfect civil association; it is indeed "a chimera to believe that the spirit of association, repressed at one point, will allow itself to develop with the same vigor at all others..." (ibid.: 915).

To be sure, association must be exercised regularly, like a muscle, in order for citizens to "combat individualism" (ibid.: 918), which is the main problem facing democratic countries. To make his point, Tocqueville employed the doctrine of self-interest, which broadly assumes that each individual acts out of what is best for himself, which also happens to accord with other's actions, making not only himself, but also others around him, better-off. Adam Smith (2005) used this same argument in his famous explanation of the invisible hand. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner," argued Smith, "but from their regard to their own interest" (ibid.: 13). In other words, Tocqueville, Smith, and of course many others such as Montaigne, whom Tocqueville (2012: 920) referenced, all argued that there is some process by which individuals act out of their own best interests which in turn benefits the community at large.

Like Smith's notion of self-interest, the Tocquevillean notion of self-interest focuses on the necessity of feedback from others within the community. Tocqueville began his discussion of self-interest and the art of association with a discussion of

virtue. Virtue in the United States, he argued, is very different from virtue in Europe. For example, Tocqueville (*ibid.*: 920, *emphasis added*) observed that “[i]n the United States it is almost never said that virtue is beautiful. They maintain that it is *useful* and they prove it every day.” Indeed, practicing virtue because it is beautiful may not be the point at all. Instead, “one must say boldly that such sacrifices are as necessary to the one who imposes them on himself as to the one who profits from them” (*ibid.*).

Self-interest, properly conceived, can thus serve as a key driver toward associational life. Tocqueville observed that Americans “do not deny that each man may follow his interest,” but instead Americans must “do their best to prove that the interest of each is to be *honest*” (*ibid.*, *emphasis added*). Tocqueville saw in the Americans “how enlightened love of themselves leads them constantly to help each other” (*ibid.*: 921). Admittedly, pursuing self-interest rightly understood “does not produce great devotions” and “it cannot make a man virtuous” (*ibid.*: 921-2). But, trying to explain or practice self-interest in this way was incorrect in Tocqueville’s estimation. Instead, the doctrine of self-interest rightly understood “suggests small sacrifices every day...but it forms a multitude of steady, temperate, moderate, farsighted citizens who have self-control; and, if it does not lead directly to virtue by will, it imperceptibly draws closer to virtue by habits” (*ibid.*: 922). Indeed, self-interest rightly understood means that “[e]ach American knows how to sacrifice a portion of his particular interests in order to save the rest” (*ibid.*). What Tocqueville meant was that everyone pursuing self-interest,

properly understood, does not lead to total and complete selfishness where each man simply rises to his highest level, or falls to his lowest level, on his own, as it were. Instead, it brings everyone together in some sort of spontaneous association that provides a flourishing community.

#### **IV. COMMERCIAL LIFE AS A SUPPORTER OF ASSOCIATION**

As noted above, Tocqueville's discussion of how Americans cultivate the habit of association focused on political association as an arena where individuals develop a taste for association; civil society as a space where they cultivate the more general habit of association; and self-interest rightly understood as what teaches them the value of association. He was, however, mostly silent on how commercial life might support or undermine associational life.

We argue that markets, and commercial life in general, can provide training grounds for learning and practicing the art of association. We do so on three fronts. First, markets allow for a more extensive division of labor, meaning more people cooperate on any given day to produce goods and services in commercial societies than noncommercial societies. Second, the values that are rewarded in markets are typically those useful for association, such as hard work, honesty, and cosmopolitanism. Third, markets bring about ease of communication and access to information through technological advances. While Tocqueville discusses the need for political and civil

engagement and association, arguably, these can and do take place within markets and with the aid of markets. Indeed, the market is not just a place of exchange, it is also a space where people interact, meet, form relationships, and form associations (Storr 2008). Moreover, markets do not encourage individualism of the kind Tocqueville warned about, as critics have alleged, but instead they foster self-interest rightly understood of the sort he celebrated. By showing that such conditions hold within markets, we make the case that markets can promote the art of association.

### **A. THE DIVISION OF LABOR**

Markets make the division of labor possible. Rather than having to be self-sufficient, as is the case where no markets exist, people in societies where markets exist can specialize in one or a few occupations and trade their labor for the goods they need and want, or the money to purchase those goods. Markets, thus, allow for individuals and societies to grow more prosperous because market society allows workers to be more productive (i.e. through the development of greater adroitness as workers focus on a limited set of tasks, time savings as workers do not lose time moving between tasks, and the introduction of labor savings devices). Markets also offer individuals multiple opportunities to work together, and the broader and deeper extent of the market, the greater the range of opportunities. Smith's (2005: 11-12) famous example of the woolen coat detailed the multitude of people who must work together in production to eventually produce this final output good,

The shepherd, the sorter of the wool, the wool-comber or carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, the dresser, with many others, must all join their different arts in order to complete even this homely production. How many merchants and carriers, besides, must have been employed in transporting the materials from some of those workmen to others who often live in a very distant part of the country! How much commerce and navigation in particular, how many ship-builders, sailors, sail-makers, rope-makers, must have been employed in order to bring together the different drugs made use of by the dyer, which often come from the remotest corners of the world! What a variety of labor too is necessary in order to produce the tools of the meanest of those workmen! To say nothing of such complicated machines as the ship of the sailor, the mill of the fuller, or even the loom of the weaver, let us consider only what a variety of labor is requisite in order to form that very simple machine, the shears with which the shepherd clips the wool. The miner, the builder of the furnace for smelting the ore, the feller of the timber, the burner of the charcoal to be made use of in the smelting-house, the brick-maker, the brick-layer, the workmen who attend the furnace, the mill-wright, the forger, the smith, must all of them join their different arts in order to produce them.

Not only is it nearly impossible to recount every single person who takes part in the production process, but it is difficult to discern how all of these people work together, seemingly flawlessly, to turn wool on the back of a sheep into a coat on the back of a person.

Interestingly, Tocqueville railed against the moral consequences brought about by the division of labor: “there is nothing that tends more to materialize man and remove from his work even the trace of soul than the great division of labor” (Tocqueville 2012: 642). Tocqueville, however, did acknowledge several of the monetary benefits of division of labor,

It has been recognized that when a worker is occupied every day only



with the same detail, the general production of the work is achieved more easily, more rapidly and more economically. It has been recognized as well that the more an industry was undertaken on a large scale, with great capital and large credit, the less expensive its products were (ibid. 981).

Indeed, he sees both the greater ease of production and the decreased cost of production as “truths” which have also been “been demonstrated” in the real world (ibid.). Besides the general material benefits that Tocqueville acknowledged, he also sees another area of benefit: the wealthy class, or “the class of masters” (ibid.: 982):

as it becomes clearer that the larger the scale of manufacturing and the greater the capital, the more perfect and the less expensive the products of an industry are, very rich and very enlightened men arise to exploit industries that, until then, have been left to ignorant and poor artisans. The greatness of the necessary efforts and the immensity of the results to achieve attract them.” (ibid.).

However, these material benefits are not enough in Tocqueville’s mind to make up for the moral destruction the division of labor has on these ‘ignorant and poor artisans,’

When an artisan devotes himself constantly and solely to the fabrication of a single object, he ends by acquitting himself of this work with a singular dexterity. But he loses, at the same time, the general ability to apply his mind to directing the work. Each day he becomes more skillful and less industrious, and you can say that in him the man becomes degraded as the worker improves. (ibid.)

And, as division of labor becomes more extended, “the worker becomes weaker, more limited, and more dependent. The art makes progress, the artisan goes backward” (ibid.). We should note that Smith expressed similar concerns about the division of labor. According to Smith (2005: 782), the repetition of simple tasks that occurs under

the division of labor risks making workers “as stupid and as ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.” The skills that the worker acquires in his particular trade, Smith (ibid.) lamented, are “acquired at the expense of his own intellectual, social, and martial virtues.”

Tocqueville’s view of the division of labor was, therefore, a complicated one. On the one hand Tocqueville acknowledged benefits from the division of labor. On the other hand, he viewed the division of labor as destructive to the humane element within markets. He saw this as destructive to the working class specifically because the investors and the businessmen ride on the backs of the workers who allow for cheaper and easier production methods.

Tocqueville’s discussion of the division of labor is striking, especially insofar as the division of labor is widely recognized as bringing about associational benefits (see, for instance, Ricardo 2015 and Mises 2014).<sup>1</sup> Of course, Tocqueville himself argued for association being a main, if not sole, combatant against individualism and ultimately tyranny. So, there appears to be a tension here: Tocqueville argued for association due to its considerable benefits, but he also worried about the moral degradation of the division of labor, which we will argue happens to be a source of association. How can this apparent tension be reconciled?

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<sup>1</sup> In Chapter VIII, Mises makes the case that cooperation due to division of labor is *the* reason we associate. Without Ricardo’s comparative advantage, which induces cooperation, Mises makes the case that association would be absent and society would cease to exist.

Despite Tocqueville's concern (and Smith's), the division of labor does not seem to promote individualism of the sort that Tocqueville warned about, as it fosters self-interest rightly understood of the sort that Tocqueville celebrated. Markets appear to be spaces that promote the habit of association. Of course, in discussing association through its effect on individualism and self-interest, we overlook Tocqueville's concerns about the individual moral degradation supposedly brought about by division of labor (though see Storr and Choi 2019 for a possible response). But, for several reasons, we believe that the division of labor allows for heightened association, which, by extension, could very well reverse the effects of such degradation, if it really was occurring.

First, the division of labor does not increase individualism. Instead, it does just the opposite by increasing the need for people to work together. Again, recall Smith's woolen coat example. For the woolen coat to end up on the back of the day laborer many individuals must practice working together in a multitude of ways. Now envision the even more complex technologies existing today. These arguably need many more stages and steps of production, with many more input goods that must be coordinated between buyers and sellers. This expanded division of labor allows for heightened association due to the even greater need to work together in order to produce more advanced goods. These are not isolated figures who have turned inward away from their fellow citizens. Instead, these are connected creatures who must constantly concern themselves with the wishes and satisfaction of their employers, their suppliers,

their co-workers and their customers. Under the division of labor, the kind of isolated inward-looking individualism that might have been possible where individuals were more self-sufficient is simply not possible. To be sure, the aristocratic institutions that bound individuals together in previous epochs no longer exist. But, the market and the division of labor it facilitates binds individuals together, albeit in a different sort of way. These bonds formed within markets need not be inferior to the kinds of bonds formed within political or civic associations (Storr 2008).

Second, with a higher division of labor, there exists a lower opportunity cost of association. In other words, if we lived in complete autarky, we would spend most of our days growing, harvesting, and producing all of the goods we needed to survive for ourselves. This means that associating, whether in political or civil settings, would have a very high opportunity cost. A hand-to-mouth society has little room for the development of associations, when most time must be spent on finding the next meal or shelter. However, if each individual worked where she was most effective, and traded for what else she needed, there would be a lower opportunity cost of association. In practice this looks like individuals working a daily job, likely producing some sort of specialized good or service, then shopping for goods and services to sustain life, and also attending civil or political association meetings due to the lower opportunity cost of the time saved from what would have been under autarky. The division of labor, as

such, not only brings about advanced production and output but also allows for such heightened association.

Third, while Tocqueville may be correct about the demoralizing aspects brought about by the division of labor, particularly in jobs that require man to “unceasingly and exclusively engage...in the fabrication of one thing” (Tocqueville 2012), this emphasis overlooks the possibility that there might be of compensating differentials which prevent the kind of moral degradation that leads workers under the division of labor to become less industrious. Particularly unpleasant jobs are typically paid a higher wage because there is lower supply of workers available to do such jobs. This is more likely to be true the more advanced the market society. If we allow for freedom of association and freedom of labor movement, meaning people can choose when and where to work, a higher wage will naturally arise in unpleasant jobs, all else equal, that are brought about by the division of labor. Admittedly, compensating differentials only pay a higher wage rate or offer some other benefit; they do not “fix” any moral problems ensuing from degrading or monotonous jobs. They do, however, mean that compensation is higher for those willing to do such jobs.

So, the division of labor inhibits individualism if we believe that it brings people together more than it drives them apart. In part, it does this because it brings about greater ease of association, and in part it does so because it lowers the opportunity cost of associating. Moreover, unpleasant jobs brought about through an extended division

of labor can be mediated by compensating differentials. In the following section, we will discuss how markets foster Tocquevillean self-interest rightly understood amongst other values.

## **B. VALUES IN THE MARKETPLACE**

Commercial settings reward values that are critical to the practice of association, including self-interest, rightly understood. Within markets, people must work together to, say, create a woolen coat. If one trader cheats another, or simply associates in unfriendly ways, he will be “punished” by the market process as his trading partners and customers choose to supply their needs elsewhere. The market process rewards certain values, such as hard work, teamwork, cooperation, and leadership that may not be rewarded in other settings. As Richard Wagner (2016: 197) puts it,

a market order tends to reward practice that conforms to...morality...  
[C]ommercial activity that is consistent with the moral order that, in turn, is complementary with the legal order will yield higher commercial returns than will conduct that runs contrary to that moral order. Such traits as being reliable, energetic, and trustworthy will tend to bring larger commercial return than such traits as being unreliable, lazy and dishonest.

Obviously, these skills could also be learned in a society with no division of labor, such as autarky. That is, if a person is not able to or does not need to trade with others, they have no incentive to be friendly, even though they may very well be. But the market aligns the incentives of producers and consumers alike to foster these values, whereas

individuals in autarkic regimes have relatively little incentive to be friendly and kind to others. The market process rewards “practice that conforms to ... morality” and, thus, incentivizes both producers and consumers alike to act virtuously.

Dierdre McCloskey (2006, 2010, 2016), across her three volumes in the *Bourgeois Era* series, argues that markets make us not only wealthier, but also are compatible with and even depend on certain virtues. As McCloskey (2006) maintains, markets foster the bourgeois virtues, which she considers to be the four classical virtues of courage, justice, temperance, and prudence, and the three Christian virtues of hope, faith, and love. As she explains, people in capitalist societies,

... have more, not fewer real friends than their great-great-great-grandparents in “closed-corporate” villages. They have broader, not narrower choices of identity than the one imposed on them by the country, custom, language, and religion of their birth. They have deeper, not shallower contacts with the transcendent of art or science or God, and sometimes even of nature, than the superstitious peasants and haunted hunter-gatherers from whom we all descend. They are better humans – because they in their billions have acquired the scope to become so and because market societies encourage art and science and religion to flourish... (McCloskey 2006: 28-29).

Because markets promote and reward the bourgeois virtues, these virtues tend to exist in communities with vibrant markets. And, each of these virtues would seem to promote association.

Similarly, Storr and Choi (2019) argue that people in market societies are better connected than people in nonmarket societies. As they suggest, empirical measures that get at Tocquevillean association (e.g. social capital, social cohesion and civic

engagement) are higher in market societies than nonmarket societies. Storr and Choi (2019) also find evidence that markets tend to foster several other traits that undoubtedly aid Tocquevillean association. For instance, they find that those in markets tend to be more trusting and trustworthy, more altruistic, less materialistic, less corrupt, more cosmopolitan than people living in nonmarket societies. Arguably, all five of these traits can increase Tocquevillean association, as they allow for a greater ability to interact, associate, and gather with others. Moreover, because market societies tend to lower costs of associating and transacting with others, they bring about a greater ease and likelihood of association.

Taken together these studies suggest that Tocqueville's concern about the moral degradation that supposedly occurs in markets and, specifically, with the materialism that he observed in the United States was either unwarranted or not properly attributed to the marketplace. Recall, Tocqueville (2012: 943) claimed that "it is a strange thing to see with what kind of feverish ardor the Americans pursue well-being, and how they appear tormented constantly by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest road that can lead to it. The inhabitant of the United States is attached to the goods of this world." This materialism, Tocqueville believed, was behind the restlessness that seemed to plague Americans. There is evidence, however, that suggests that materialism is not a uniquely market phenomenon. Countries that embrace markets to a greater extent, i.e. countries with more economic freedom, for instance, are less materialistic, on certain



empirical measures of materialism (Teague et al. 2020). Additionally, Tocqueville has also acknowledged that property ownership and access to the market can have a positive effect on the ideas and habits of the poor, encouraging them to plan and to work hard (Swedberg 2018: 141).

Tocqueville also discussed the need for self-interest rightly understood, meaning that some underlying set of values must encourage individuals to work in the interest of not only themselves, but for those in their community. In Tocqueville's understanding, businessmen and generally all citizens should attempt to further their self-interest. But, he went further in suggesting that the self-interest of each individual must be aligned somehow with the interests of others. And, the way to do so was by aligning interests so that the work most preferred by each was *honest* work, as Tocqueville suggested. The market does precisely this, as Storr and Choi have suggested: it creates more altruistic people, it makes people less materialistic, it decreases corruption, it weeds out unfriendly views, and it punishes cheaters. To be sure, not every cheater or corrupt official in a market society will be punished, and some may be allowed to continue their misbehavior. The pure market, however, allows for feedback signals to be sent to producers and consumers alike, so that throughout the market, incentives are aligned that normally reinforce, rather than undermine, morality, thus allowing for self-interest to work as Tocqueville envisioned.

## C. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Markets have heightened the production and use of technology because of their innovative nature (Schumpeter 2008; Cox and Alm 1992; Leeson 2010). Technology has greatly aided communication and access to information; there are countless ways in which technology, telephones, email, websites, message boards, social media and other connection platforms all allow for greater ease of communication. Of course, greater ability to communicate and greater access to information both allow for easier association.

Tocqueville also discussed the greater ease of association brought about by communication and information. He described a “necessary relation between associations and newspapers; newspapers make associations, and associations make newspapers” (Tocqueville 2012: 908). His point was that newspapers spread the word about a common thought or idea, and that as people begin to unite and associate upon learning or reading of the idea, more associations come into being, bringing with them more newspapers. This self-feeding cycle allows for heightened association.

Further, he claimed this is essential in democracy for several of the reasons discussed earlier, most prominently that democracy promotes equality and individualism. With equality, uniting becomes harder because “a large number of men who have the desire or the need to associate cannot do so; since all are very small and lost in the crowd, they do not see each other and do not know where to find each other”

(ibid.: 907). Through newspapers, they can lower the costs of finding other likeminded people and thus lower the costs of association. Individualism, too, is feared in democracies for its natural progression into tyranny. To keep men from becoming self-focused and withdrawn, newspapers foster the ability of association and allow for individuals to read the current news and associate over such topics. “Newspapers therefore become more necessary,” claimed Tocqueville (ibid.: 906), “as men are more equal and individualism more to be feared.” Thus, newspapers do not just “guarantee liberty” through aiding the art of association, they also “maintain civilization” by decreasing the threats stemming from democracy and individualism (ibid.). Or, in another way, newspapers work not just by drawing people “closer together” but also by continuing to “hold them together” (ibid.: 907). Tocqueville, then, makes the strong case that newspapers are necessary for association, and so too is association necessary for newspapers. With the ability to freely associate and discuss ideas in the general, public sphere, association and newspapers produce themselves.

This Tocquevillean idea of association through heightened communication and information plays out in a modern context quite frequently. Storr and Choi (2019: 106) discuss how better connection allows for “stronger communities than people living in nonmarket communities.” They went on to specifically address technology’s role in this heightened communication brought about through markets, similar to Tocqueville’s discussion of newspapers:

[B]logs and online message boards devoted to particular topics or that express particular perspectives have arguably become a new public sphere, promoting the discussion of topics in a forum where all who have access to the Internet can potentially enter. The communication and transportation services available *because of markets* (e.g. telephones, email, automobiles, and airplanes) are likewise important tools for building communities and maintaining desirable relationships across sometimes great distances. Relationships that would have had to rely on infrequent contact in the past (i.e. through traditional mail and infrequent visits) now benefit from the possibility of everyday contact (ibid.: 110).

Tocqueville argued that newspapers enable communication, which allow for association to follow. Storr and Choi add that markets bring about heightened communication; while newspapers allow for maybe daily or weekly contact that lead to associations, the digital age allows for nearly constant communication, thus leading to a heightened ease of association. Hans Klein (1999) also details how online forums bypass many of the large the barriers to entry of communication and Tocquevillean association. He argues that participation costs fall drastically with the use of the Internet, as the cost of participation is significantly lower.

An example of Tocqueville, and Storr and Choi, and Klein's ideas might be the Arab Spring. Many of the protests and government upheavals in the Middle East during this time were aided by use of information-communication technologies (ICT) and social media websites, particularly that of Twitter and Facebook (see Eltentawy and Wiest 2011, Howard et. al. 2011, Khondker 2011, Stepanova 2011, Communello and Anzero 2012, and Tufekci and Wilson 2012). For example, in analyzing Egypt during

the Arab Spring in January 2011, Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson (2012) found that Twitter users were more likely to attend the first day of mass protests than non-users. Moreover, Ekaterina Stepanova (2011) suggests that Egyptian protests happened when they did, and not later, due to information on social media: "...the fact that the crisis [in Egypt] occurred sooner rather than later, in direct follow-up to protests in Tunisia, was largely due to the initial mobilizing effects of ICT and social media networks." Her conclusion is two-fold: "[o]verall, the input of the social media networks was critical in performing two overlapping functions: (a) *organizing the protests* and (b) *disseminating information about them*, including publicizing protesters' demands internationally" (ibid., emphasis added). Similar to Tocqueville's rendering of the importance of newspapers for association, the Arab Spring largely occurred through the help of ICTs and social media sites. News sources, other media outlets, and ICTs can help disseminate knowledge, which not only allows for individuals to find others with similar interests, but also helps them organize effectively. This process leads to a further dissemination of knowledge and information. It seems clear that markets bring about the heightened technology (like cellphones and computers) and media sites (like Twitter and Facebook) that allows for the harnessing and spreading of information in order to improve the art of association.

## V. CONCLUSION

Quite a bit has been written about Tocqueville's notion of association (V. Ostrom 1997; E. Ostrom 1998; Galston 2000; Warren 2001; Sabl 2002; Gannett 2003; Craiutu 2008; E. Ostrom and V. Ostrom 2014). Most notably, Vincent and Elinor Ostrom have extensively researched the "art and science of association," examining how it is that people tend to cooperate when economic theory predicts they would do otherwise. Elinor Ostrom (1998), for instance, focused on understanding how people band together to overcome collective action problems. Closely related, Vincent Ostrom (1998) explored democracy and its crucial components: he saw Tocquevillean association, and in general, individual relationships, as the bonds holding democracy in place. Mark Warren (2001) extended Vincent Ostrom's work by exploring not only what associations provide for democracies, but why we place the heavy lifting on associations, rather than some other entity or designated group. While the existing scholarship has said a lot about the importance of association, less attention has been paid to how Americans become skilled at the art of association, and almost no attention has been paid to how markets, especially within advanced commercial societies, cultivate a habit of associations. In fact, Tocqueville himself left us with something of a puzzle. The America that he observed was both a vibrant market economy and had a robust civil society, but markets and community are claimed to be at odds. Tocqueville's own discussion of the division of labor suggests that he is worried about how markets might undermine associational life.

Our chapter has set out to explain how the market is useful for advancing the Tocquevillean notion of association. We proposed that Tocqueville's thoughts on the division of labor may have been misguided, or at least prematurely considered, as he does not mention its potential associational benefits. Primarily, we argued that the division of labor helps inhibit the kind of individualism that emerges in a democracy, which happened to be one of Tocqueville's main concerns for democratic countries. Because it brings together many different people to provide plentiful goods much more efficiently, a highly advanced division of labor also decreases the opportunity cost of association. We do recognize, however, that these arguments may not address the moral concerns of alienation and degradation brought about by an advanced division of labor. But we offer the economic rationale that compensating differentials may help alleviate some of the burdens or stresses of a monotonous or degrading job.

We also argued, however, that markets naturally reward moral values. Markets, besides depending on virtues like courage, justice, temperance, prudence, hope, faith, and love (McCloskey 2006), make people more altruistic, less materialistic, less corrupt, more cosmopolitan, and more trusting (Storr and Choi 2019). We argued that through the moral guidelines reinforced through the market process, markets help promote self-interest rightly-understood – that is, markets can align incentives to allow for individuals to not only do the best for themselves, but for those around them.

Last, we maintained that markets aid association by facilitating ease of communication and access to information. Tocqueville described this phenomenon through newspapers, and he discussed the necessity of newspapers for association and vice versa. We applied his thoughts to the notion that markets bring with them greater technology, such as social media sites and other information technologies. Through use of the example of the Arab Spring, we detailed how social media sites and ICTs aided communication, access to information, and generally heightened association that eventually led to organic upheavals in many Arab countries (for better or for worse).

On the whole, we attempted to show that markets “combat” two of the greatest threats that Tocqueville saw to democracy because markets inhibit individualism and they align self-interest. Moreover, contrary to a major line of “neo-Tocquevillean” criticism that regards them with ambivalence, markets are important and indeed might be necessary for Tocquevillean associations to flourish. This is not to suggest that the “neo-Tocquevilleans” have misread Tocqueville but that Tocqueville failed to fully appreciate the associational potential of markets.



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