

Alexis de Tocqueville's Citizenship: A Model of Collective Virtue

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1. Introduction

This paper describes a virtue I will call, "citizenship." The virtue itself is based on what Alexis Tocqueville describes in *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville himself, however, does not use the specific turn of phrase, "citizenship." Nor is there an extended discussion of any one particular virtue at all. Indeed, in one of the few pieces of scholarship specifically addressing Tocqueville on citizenship, Doris Goldstein notes that,

Much of recent Tocqueville scholarship has tended either to select one of the major works or one clearly defined time span for intensive examination,' rather than to trace the development of a particular idea or cluster of ideas throughout his writings. The latter approach may prove useful, however, in uncovering the role of some of those subordinate motifs which are encountered again and again, only to be swept away each time by the exigencies of Tocqueville's dominant theme: the problem of maintaining a good society in the midst of rapidly increasing democratization (39:1964).

Goldstein and I agree that one of the “subordinate motifs” that comes up repeatedly throughout *Democracy in America* is the virtue of citizenship. Unlike Goldstein, however, this paper will be looking at things from the perspective of contemporary virtue ethics.

Since there is indeed, no extended discussion on citizenship, this paper is based on various brief discussions throughout Tocqueville’s famous text. The theme of the aforementioned are certain *dispositional traits*. For example, traits that dispose Americans to aid their community and community members. Because modern virtue ethics also understands virtues as dispositional traits, Tocqueville’s discussion smoothly lends itself to be interpreted in terms of virtue theory.

While there is an important sense in which Tocqueville’s musings on American behavior fits well with contemporary virtue theory, there is an even more important sense in which it *departs* from this tradition. And indeed, my main focus in this essay will be explaining the way in which Tocqueville’s “citizenship” is a virtue that can be understood as importantly distinct from those described in both classic and contemporary virtue theory.

There are a number of nuances (important nuances, and ones that Tocqueville perhaps ironically describes oh so casually) to the virtue of citizenship that make it stand apart from other virtues like courage, temperance, and generosity. But the difference which seems the most critical, is the way in which citizenship does *not* make the *virtue holder* a better person (or at least not always or necessarily), but rather improves the character of *the republic*. Said differently, we can think of Tocqueville as describing a *collective virtue*.

While there have been some discussions of collective virtue in the virtue theoretic literature, these discussions are limited.¹ What is important about citizenship is not so much the virtue itself (although this is of interest), but the mereological features that might be applied to other collective character traits. In learning about the collective virtue of citizenship, we learn about collective virtues themselves. Not only do we learn what conditions define collective virtue, but we learn how a collective entity might encourage the development of all kinds of virtue by shaping the habits of its members. In this way, philosophical virtue ethics can use Tocqueville's citizenship as an opportunity to expand their very field of study. Some virtues traditionally ascribed to individuals can be examined in respect to collectives. Moreover, there might be some virtues that are *entirely absent* from *individual* members of a collective, but can nonetheless manifest in the *collective level at large*. For what it's worth, citizenship itself seems a trait that can be potentially manifest in both individuals and collectives. Whether or not citizenship is *a virtue* when manifest in individuals, however, is a contentious issue. This paper will not debate that point, but only claim that (1) when manifest at the collective level it is, indeed, a virtue, and (2) understanding the trait as a trait of collectives fends off many criticisms that might apply when the trait is understood as a feature of individuals. Both (1) and (2) leave open whether or not the individual trait of citizenship is a virtue, vice, or something in between. That being said, the structure of the collective citizenship puts on display the way in which not all *collective* virtues need be fit for *individual* virtue.

¹ Interestingly, there has actually been much more discussion on collective or group virtue in other disciplines than in philosophy. Discussions include Clowney 2014, Leach et al., 2007; Heugens et al., 2008, and Reicher et al., 2008. In philosophy, discussions of group virtue can be found in Kvanvig, 1992 and 2007.

Although this paper is most focused on the structure and methodological features of citizenship, the importance of the particular collective virtue itself is not overlooked. Interestingly, the methodological features that Tocqueville ascribes to citizenship can help demonstrate why this characteristic is indeed a collective *virtue* and not a vice. More specifically, citizenship can be considered in light of various criticisms of patriotism and nationalism. I will argue that when citizenship is considered as solely an individual virtue, these criticisms will go much further than when we consider it in the proper light, i.e., as a virtue of collectives.

2. What is Citizenship?

As mentioned above, there is neither one particular place in which Tocqueville's discusses citizenship, nor does he even use this turn of phrase. So, what then, does Tocqueville discuss and why is there reason to equate this with citizenship? The parts that weave together to form what I consider a dispositional virtue of citizenship are sections in which Tocqueville discusses the following:

- (1) The willingness of Americans to help one another
- (2) The willingness of Americans to make sacrifices for the communal good.
- (3) The willingness of Americans to participate in political life.
- (4) The willingness of Americans to work together for a common goal.

Throughout various discuss on a vast array of topics throughout *Democracy in America*, these traits come up again and again. To be clear, I will not focus so much on the above *ethical criteria* for two reasons (i.e. whether (1) – (4) are actually moral traits or not.)

First, I think it is uncontroversial that the willingness to help your community members

is virtuous rather than vicious. And more importantly, what stands out about Tocqueville's discussion of citizenship is not so much the virtue itself, but the structure of the virtue that can be applied to not only citizenship, but many other virtues which are fitting to a collective.

3. Collective Virtue: Dispositional and Dynamic

Before discussing the above characteristics further, let me briefly take a step back and start with an analysis of two critical methodological features of Tocqueville's account, i.e., that citizenship is (1) dispositional, and (2) that it is manifest in a dynamic process between individual behaviors, group action, individual motives, social norms, and collective institutions.

Let us begin with some greater detail concerning the features of dispositional virtues. The idea goes back as far as Aristotle, and is based on the notion that character traits are not so much grounded in how people *actually* behave, but rather in how they are *disposed* to behave.² A person might be courageous, for example, yet rarely ever engage in courageous acts because the proper circumstances do not arise. Part of what it means, after all, to have a virtue is to know the specific situations which call for its exercise.³ If these situations do not come to be, then there is no need to exercise the virtue. But one can still be virtuous. What matters is that *if* the circumstances did arise, one would act as required. In other words, what matters is that one is *disposed* to act in

² Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV: Chapter 5.

³ Aristotle calls this kind of judgment, i.e. knowing when to exercise a virtue, "practical wisdom." It is discussed in Nicomachean Ethics, Book VI.

a certain way. Courageous persons are disposed to face great fears, generous persons are disposed to share, and temperate persons are disposed to withstand hardships.

At various sections in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville describes the way in which Americans are disposed to help one another and participate in activities that promote the good of the union. In the following quote, it is clear that Tocqueville is not describing mere behavior but rather a dispositional trait:

I must say that I often saw Americans make great and genuine sacrifices for the public, and I remarked a hundred times that, *when needed, they almost never fail to lend faithful support to one another*. The free institutions that the inhabitants of the United States possess and the political rights of which they make so much use recall to each citizen constantly and in a thousand ways that he lives in society. At every moment they bring his mind back toward the idea that the duty as well as the interest of men is to render themselves useful to those like them (2000:488) (emphasis added).

There is a lot of importance in the above quote. But for now, let's focus on the dispositional aspects. First, Tocqueville remarks that, "when needed," Americans are always there to help one another. The "when needed" suggests that Americans might hold back their help in certain instances, but that they are always disposed to help when to do so is in response to a genuine need. Second, Tocqueville discusses the way in which American institutions serve as reminders of one's moral duty to serve society. This is dispositional insofar as reminders keep citizens consistently disposed to do what's right. We see that important parts of the collective itself, i.e., the institutions which make up the United States, play a critical role in creating a reliable disposition. Hence, we see both that Americans are disposed to help one another, and also that this disposition is not only collective in the way it is exercised (for the sake of the collective, by a sufficient number of the collective for Tocqueville to use the general term,

“Americans”), but also in the way that it is maintained (via institutions, i.e. organizations that are part and parcel of the collective itself).

When discussing virtues at a collective level, it matters not only that an individual acquires a disposition to help the collective, but that the habits by which he acquires it are *intertwined with the institutions of the collective*. Tocqueville claims that, America’s “free institutions,” “recall to each citizen constantly and in a thousand ways that he lives in society.” Hence, America’s institutions serve as reminders and these reminders help Americans develop good habits. This brings us back to Aristotle, who argued that acquiring virtue demands *habituating* oneself by performing certain actions again and again. In Aristotle’s words, “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts” (Nicomachean Ethics, Book II, Chapter I). Tocqueville gladly admits to this part of the process. But he also adds that collective institutions play a role in encouraging citizens to do these acts over and over, i.e., in encouraging citizens to habituate themselves.

Collectives, of course, are made up of individuals. Hence, it is impossible to talk about virtues of collectives without talking about certain features of individuals. Because of this, it can sometimes be hard to discern if a given characteristic is a feature of the group or simply group members. Furthering complicating matters, is that it is also possible for both groups and group members to possess the same virtue. A generous collective might also have generous collective members, even when the two do not reduce to each other. Other times a group might have a given virtue even if the members of the collective do not. In this regard, Tocqueville’s writings support two claims, (1)

there are certain instances in which the evidence strongly supports the presence of a group virtue, and (2) during the time Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*, there was strong evidence that citizenship was a collective virtue of this kind. (Whether America still possesses this virtue is a separate issue, but the larger point is that it would, in theory, be possible for America or nation states in general to possess it.)

Tocqueville seems comfortable with the following claim: collective virtue is dependent upon the individual behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of the collective's members. Nonetheless, what makes it a *collective* virtue is the following: *features of the collective are intertwined with, and thereby explain the consistent display of the virtue amongst the group as a whole*. In other words, that a significant number of group members (and perhaps group institutions) are disposed to a specific virtue cannot be explained merely by coincidence, or any common cause divorced from the group itself.

Suppose a large collective, consisting of hundreds of thousands, boasts that 90% of individual members are saving more money this year than last year. First, it seems likely there is a common cause involved and that matter is not mere happenstance. Second, it also seems likely that this common cause is not merely a molecule in the air, but rather a change in political legislation or social norms. In other words, the cause can be traced back to the group.

When large groups consistently exemplify certain virtuous traits, it seems unlikely that this is happening by chance. We could, in theory, imagine a nation where every member is *privately committed* (i.e. not because of social norms, etc.) to selflessly voting for the common good even against individual needs. However, this seems incredibly unlikely, and even more unlikely that this pattern would coincidentally hold

over time. If something like this *did*, however, happen by chance, then there would not be a collective virtue. There would only be a collection of individuals acting virtuously.

Within large and often diverse groups, what most likely explains consistent large-scale behaviors, attitudes, and actions is some feature that can be traced to the group itself. By the group itself, I mean a feature that does not belong to a group member personally but is somehow intertwined with the collective, e.g., social norms, government institutions, shared cultural values, etc.

Tocqueville explains how collective citizenship arises with the aid of structural features of The United States, e.g, interaction between local and national governments, social norms that encourage certain traits and behaviors, a cultural commitment to morality and religion, and so on. Tocqueville's claim is that insofar as individual citizens possess traits that benefit the collective, such traits are dependent upon these special features of the collective: social norms, cultural commitment, and governmental structures. The aforementioned are all features of collectives, not individuals. An individual him or herself, for instance, does not and cannot make up a culture.

This brief discussion on the way the collective and individuals enter a dynamic process that result in virtue, is the crux of what this paper is about: collective virtues while requiring individual efforts, are manifest in a collective body, moreover, the collective body is crucial to the development of the virtue. Said differently, individuals are merely the mechanism by which the collective acts. To have collective virtue, a group of individuals behaving virtuously is not enough; one needs collective institutions, norms, and values to encourage this group virtue, such encouragement might or might not motivate *individual* virtue, but regardless, when looked at collectively the trait is undeniably virtuous. And this brings us to our next discussion: the role that *individual*

self-interest plays in citizenship. Self-interest, when considered just at the individual level, is rarely considered virtuous. But we will see Tocqueville make the case that what some might understand as an individual vice is nonetheless a collective virtue.

4. Self-Interest and Citizenship

Tocqueville was well-aware that self-interest was not traditionally considered virtuous but rather the opposite (vicious). Indeed, he himself seemed to struggle with the notion that self-interested behavior could be considered ethical, despite the good results he believed befell the nation. Consider this quote:

Americans, on the contrary, are pleased to explain almost all the actions of their life with the aid of self-interest well understood; they complacently show how the enlightened love of themselves constantly brings them to aid each other and disposes them willingly to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state. I think that in this it often happens that they do not do themselves justice; for one sometimes sees citizens in the United States as elsewhere abandoning themselves to the disinterested and unreflective sparks that are natural to man; but the Americans scarcely avow that they yield to movements of this kind; they would rather do honor to their philosophy than to themselves (Tocqueville:502).

In the above, Tocqueville remarks that Americans are not giving themselves enough moral credit, insofar as they attribute all their altruistic motivations to nothing other than enlightened self-interest. This suggests that Tocqueville cannot, himself, fully accept that self-interest is morally admirable. What we will see, however, is that even if self-interest as manifest *in the individual* is not virtuous, it can still be virtuous as manifest via *a collective*.

Although Tocqueville was skeptical toward individual virtue manifest through self-interest, he nonetheless admired the way in which Americans used the natural human disposition toward selfishness to achieve selfless ends. In a matter of fact style, Tocqueville claims that an American, "...obeys society not because he is inferior to those who direct it or less capable than another man of governing himself; he obeys society because union with those like him appears useful to him and because he knows that this union cannot exist without a regulating power (61-62)." But can a society motivated not by what is good, but rather what is useful, still be successful? It seems it can be, and not merely successful but *ethically* successful. Tocqueville has this to say:

Among the Americans, the force that administers the state is less well regulated, less enlightened, less skillful, but a hundred times greater than in Europe. There is no country in the world where, after all is said and done, *men make as many efforts to create social well-being*. I do not know a people who has succeeded in establishing schools as numerous and as efficacious; churches more in touch with the religious needs of the inhabitants; common highways better maintained. One must therefore not seek in the United States uniformity and permanence of views...what one finds there is the image of force...full of power; [the image] of life accompanied by accidents, but also by movement and efforts (87-88)(emphasis added).

Notice that in the above Tocqueville describes the American system not only as successful, but successful insofar as efforts are fostered toward "social well-being." Self-interest as manifest in the collective of Americans results in social institutions that benefit the nation and the nation's citizens.

In many ways America seems a contradiction. There is a sense in which Americans are obsessed with material wealth and their own enjoyment. Tocqueville notes that, "In America the passion for material well-being is not always exclusive, but it

is general; if all do not experience it in the same manner, all do feel it. The care of satisfying the least needs of the body and of providing the smallest comforts of life preoccupies minds universally (p. 506).” In spite of this drive for material wealth, there is an even more important sense in which Americans seeking earthly pleasures is intertwined with acting cooperatively with one’s fellow community members. Not long after describing the obsessive materialism of Americans, Tocqueville qualifies his remarks with the following:

The particular taste that men of democratic centuries conceive for material enjoyments is not naturally opposed to order; on the contrary, it often needs order to be satisfied. Nor is it the enemy of regular mores; *for good mores are useful to public tranquillity and favor industry*. Often, indeed, it comes to be combined with a sort of religious morality; one wishes to be the best possible in this world without renouncing one’s chances in the other (509) (emphasis added).

In the above, far from saying that Americans love of comfort is harmful to the collective interest, Tocqueville makes the case that because Americans want lots of material pleasures, they also want and strive for what is in the collective’s best interest. The catch, of course, is that a society in which its members can live a life of material comfort is also a peaceful and productive society.

What seems the most interesting aspect of Tocqueville’s discussions on enlightened self-interest, is the way in which self-interest is both deeply individualistic and yet *also* collectively virtuous. It is deeply individualistic in the following ways. First, it stems from the American belief that each man is his own master, and as this is such he has no right to control any other man, but nor do other men have any rights over him. Or, said in Tocqueville’s own words,

As in centuries of equality no one is obliged to lend his force to those like him and no one has the right to expect great support from those like him, each is at once independent and weak...His independence fills him with confidence and pride among his equals, and his debility makes him feel, from time to time, the need of the outside help that he cannot expect from any of them... (644).

We see that the individualism and egalitarian nature of Americans lead them to believe that they owe nothing to other men, nor is anything owed to them. But how then, could a country made up of persons who owe nothing to one another not only work together cooperatively, but do so consistently? And cooperation is just the beginning, Americans also go out of their way to help fellow Americans in trouble, and to participate in the social community through politics. Tocqueville insists that not only is self-interest not opposed to this American sense of community, but rather *it is what fuels it and maintains it*. Americans are motivated to help one another because it is in their interest to do so:

He obeys society not because he is inferior to those who direct it or less capable than another man of governing himself; he obeys society because union with those like him appears useful to him and because he knows that this union cannot exist without a regulating power. In all that concerns the duties of citizens among themselves, he has therefore become a subject. In all that regards only himself he has remained master (61-62).

Tocqueville knew that Americans were not simply self-interested, but that their self-interest was enlightened. And it is this enlightenment that bridges the gap between what might seem like a vice of selfishness (acting in accordance with one's own preferred ends) and the collective virtue of citizenship. Good citizens are enlightened, and know that by helping their community they only help themselves. In Tocqueville's words, "Americans, on the contrary, are pleased to explain almost all the actions of their life

with the aid of self-interest well understood; they complacently show how the enlightened love of themselves constantly brings them to aid each other and disposes them willingly to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state (502).”Since there is no Aristocracy ruling the community, all that is left is for the people to rule themselves. Hence recognizing that a refusal to participate in communal life will only lead to chaos, Americans see it as both wise and good that they do their part.

Hence far we have discussed two seemingly contrary aspects of citizenship. First, there is the self-interested motivation of the citizens themselves. Looking at traditional moral philosophy, it is hard to see how anything motivated by self-interest could lead to virtue. For example, if you look at two of the most influential moral theories in Western philosophy, Kantianism and consequentialism, fundamental to each is the idea that an individual should not count themselves as greater than any other individual. Another major moral theory, contractualism, is based on the idea that your own interests must be balanced against what others might agree fits their interests. Virtue ethics might seem a bit more fitting to self-interest, although virtue ethicists themselves have denied accusations of egoism.⁴

The key to having self-interest work in a virtuous way, is that the disposition which self-interest creates in Americans: the disposition to *help* their community. It does not create the disposition to help only oneself. This comes with enlightenment. And when virtue is looked at not in terms of a particular person, but rather in terms of

⁴ See Annas 2009; Toner, 2006 and 2010.

the whole nation, we see that self-interested individuals create a nation that is always ready to work for the common good.

Self-interested persons on their own is not enough to create a virtuous society. After all, persons are self-interested everywhere, but it is specifically in America where the self-interest results in collective good. The right kind of institutions play the crucial role. In encouraging certain habits, institutions thereby encourage virtue in their citizens. Hence self-interested persons, with the right influence from institutions, somehow become “occupied with the general interest.” Tocqueville claims that,

The free institutions that the inhabitants of the United States possess and the political rights of which they make so much use recall to each citizen constantly and in a thousand ways that he lives in society. At every moment they bring his mind back toward the idea that the duty as well as the interest of men is to render themselves useful to those like them; and as he does not see any particular reason to hate them, since he is never either their slave or their master, his heart readily leans to the side of benevolence. One is occupied with the general interest at first by necessity and then by choice (488).

It is not merely by chance that Americans see it as within their interest to help one another. It is that the norms, laws, and institutions of America are the necessary components that make this possible.

5. Making Virtue Work: Institutions, Culture, and Principles

5.1 Egalitarianism

What exactly, are the features of America and American institutions that make self-interest conducive to virtue, i.e., the virtue of citizenship? Tocqueville tells us that Americans are constantly reminded that they need to work together, but how do these reminders work? Tocqueville focuses on three key features of American life. The first is

egalitarianism. This aspect comes back again and again as central to Tocqueville's vision of the American experience. And it plays a unique role in the virtue of citizenship. One reason that Americans are so driven by self-interest is that they feel they hold no obligation to anyone other than himself. Unlike in an aristocracy, Americans are not beholden to royalty. And since all Americans live life on an egalitarian playing field, nor are they beholden to each other. Or, as Tocqueville explains,

As in centuries of equality no one is obliged to lend his force to those like him and no one has the right to expect great support from those like him, each is at once independent and weak. These two states, which must neither be viewed separately nor confused, give the citizen of democracies very contrary instincts. His independence fills him with confidence and pride among his equals, and his debility makes him feel, from time to time, the need of the outside help that he cannot expect from any of them (644)

In the above we see that it is only natural that Americans concern themselves with, well, *themselves*. After all, since all Americans are equal, no American owes anything to a higher authority. But on the same grounds, nor does any American owe their fellow common American any act of reverence nor charity. In the end this follows: no individual American is, himself, owed anything from any other American. Americans know it is within their liberty to ignore, but also within the liberty of others that they *be ignored*. This then, at first glance, leaves only themselves, i.e. each American left to his or her own self-interest. Notwithstanding, quotes mentioned earlier make clear that Tocqueville was sure that he witnessed what might be considered a paradoxical result: Americans were indeed motivated to be benevolent and cooperative with one another,

for that, after all, is the only way to expect any benevolence and cooperation in return.⁵ And as the quote below shows, something similar motivates Americans to participate in political life:

Americans see in their freedom the best instrument and the greatest guarantee of their well-being. They love these two things for each other. They therefore do not think that meddling in the public is not their affair; they believe, on the contrary, that their principal affair is to secure by themselves a government that permits them to acquire the goods they desire and that does not prevent them from enjoying in peace those they have acquired (517).

Self-interest is the simple answer that explains Americans' communal spirit not only toward one another, but also toward politics and public engagement. And it is only because of egalitarianism, that this participation in public life makes sense at all. All citizens have the same power in political life, and hence each is motivated to participate because he knows that his political action can make a difference. In the aristocracies of the old world, citizens could not be assured that political action would have any influence.

Digging deeper into Tocqueville, at times offhanded commentary shows a more complex picture. It is not merely that Americans know that society must be governed by someone in order to remain peaceful (although this is part of the picture). The other point of interest is that Americans *identify* with the collective that is itself America. This

⁵ Although Tocqueville repeats many times that self-interest motivates Americans to act in communal ways, in a few places he admits there is a bit more to the story: It would be unjust to believe that the patriotism of the Americans and the zeal that each of them shows for the well-being of his fellow citizens have nothing real about them. Although private interest directs most human actions, in the United States as elsewhere, it does not rule all (488)."

brings us to the second feature of American norms and institutions which encourage citizenship.

5.2 Identification

There are two ways in which self-interest might be compatible with communal self-sacrifice. Both ways are important parts citizenship. The first is instrumental: by engaging in public life and creating better institutions for the nation, one thereby creates better institutions for oneself. Once those institutions are in place, citizens can make use of, and benefit from, the same. This (which has already been discussed above) is instrumental benefit for it is not merely in having great institutions that a citizen benefits, but it is in making use of them oneself. Yet there is another way to look at this same phenomenon. Imagine that an American, let's call him "Sam" joins one of Tocqueville's prized "associations" in order to build a highway.⁶ Suppose that this highway will benefit the country in numerous ways. However, the highway is of no personal value to Sam; he will never use it personally, nor will any loved ones. *Prima facie*, it would seem as though Sam is engaging in an act of pure selflessness. He, after all, is not benefiting from the highway. But Tocqueville would tell us that this is too quick.

Tocqueville can explain the above supposedly selfless act again in terms of self-interest. Sam is not lending his aid to the highway project out of selflessness, but rather

⁶ While we have yet to discuss as much in this paper, Tocqueville argues at length that one of the hallmark features of American life is the tendency of Americans to come together and build associations for cooperative endeavors. Consider, for instance, the following quote, "It often happens that the English execute very great things in isolation, whereas there is scarcely an undertaking so small that Americans do not unite for it. It is evident that the former consider association as a powerful means of action; but the latter seem to see in it the sole means they have of acting (490)."

self-interest. The highway, after all, *does* benefit America. And Sam is himself an American. Because Sam's identity is wrapped up in America, he personally benefits whenever America benefits.⁷ When self-interest is understood in this light, it becomes much easier to see how virtue can be compatible with a characteristic (seeking one's own good) that is traditionally viewed as a vice. When a collective manages to create an environment in which members see the collective's benefit as their own, then there emerges a direct, and as Tocqueville describe, inexorable link between self-interest and the collective good. And this, Tocqueville argues, is exactly the kind of environment that America itself projects:

In the United States the native country makes itself felt everywhere. It is an object of solicitude from the village to the entire Union. The inhabitant applies himself to each of the interests of his country as to his very own. He is glorified in the glory of the nation; in the success that it obtains he believes he recognizes his own work, and he is uplifted by it; he rejoices in the general prosperity from which he profits. He has for his native country a sentiment analogous to the one that he feels for his family, and it is still by a sort of selfishness that he takes an interest in the state (90).⁸

In the above, Tocqueville describes a sense of national identity, via self-interest. that can motivate what might otherwise seem like completely selfless action. And indeed, this sense of identity is still seen in the US today.⁹ While other countries also identify with

⁷ Tocqueville also makes clear that a sense of identity with one's country means not only taking joy in its successes, but also feeling indigent when one's country is criticized, "The American, taking part in all that is done in this country, believes himself interested in defending all that is criticized there; for not only is his country then attacked, he himself is (226-227)."

⁸ Because Tocqueville compares a citizens' relation to their country to a relationship with family, it is apt to not that earlier Tocqueville also explained love of one's family in terms of selfishness. He wrote that, "What is called family spirit is often founded on an illusion of individual selfishness. One seeks to perpetuate and in a way to immortalize oneself in one's remote posterity. Whenever the spirit of family ends, individual selfishness reenters into the reality of its penchants (49).

⁹ On the one hand, the number of Americans who claim to be "extremely proud of their country" is at a record low, 47%. However, when looked at in its entirety the vast majority of Americans are still proud to

their nation, there seems something distinct about the way Americans did and continue to relate to their country. Consider, for instance, a recent National Review article that discussed the difference between European and American patriotism: “In Europe, we treat our patriotism very differently. Flag-waving is regarded with suspicion” (Wislon:2017). Americans, of course, are not afraid to wave their flag. But what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of American pride (or patriotism or sense of identity) is that it is often completely divorced from what might benefit the particular proud individual. It is also divorced from the personal actions of the prideful. It is simply founded in the belief that what happens to one’s country also happens to one’s self.

We see that there are at least two ways in which a collective, in this case, “The United States,” manages to merge its own interests with the interests of its citizens. The first is through egalitarian institutions: because Americans see one another as equals, they also see the need to play their part in the creation of laws, norms, institutions, and associations that benefit the whole. Unlike in an aristocracy where institutions and laws often benefit the elite alone, in a true egalitarian society all citizens will have the opportunity to take advantage of social goods and services.

The second sense in which America contributes to the formation of virtue in its citizens is through norms and institutions which instill in Americans both pride and identity. Actually, the pride follows from the identity: because Americans internalize

be Americans. As mentioned, 47% are “extremely proud”, 25% “very proud, and 16% “moderately proud”(Jones:2018). That is 88% of Americans who express some pride in their country. This is large number, especially considering that overwhelming majority of Americans have never held office or served in the military.

accomplishments of the nation as their own accomplishments, they thereby feel pride in these accomplishments as well.

5.3 Republicanism

In addition to egalitarianism and identification, there is a third key methodological feature of citizenship. This is republicanism, i.e., the way in which the United States gains support through the nation via the townships.¹⁰ Republicanism is connected to egalitarianism, self-interest, and, and national identity. Let us begin by delineating what, exactly, is the relevant sense of republicanism at play. What seems to interest Tocqueville most, is the sense in which the townships were wisely provided with a fair amount of both autonomous authorities to direct their own affairs, as well as an established national authority, i.e. townships were granted the needed respect to be taken seriously in aiding the direction of national governance. Consider what he says below,

The township and the county are not constituted in the same manner everywhere; but one can say that the organization of the township and the county in the United States rests on this same idea everywhere: that each is the best judge of whatever relates only to himself, and is in the best position to provide for his particular needs. The township and the county are therefore charged with looking after their special interests. The state governs and does not administer (77).

As Tocqueville describes the relationship of townships to the national government, one can't help but think of the relationship of Americans to each other. Earlier we saw that

¹⁰ More work on Tocqueville and townships can be found in Gannett 2003; Allen 1998, and Winthrop 1976.

Americans took place in public life, in part because the egalitarian nature of America encouraged it. Because Americans saw themselves as above and below no one, it is up to them to act in their interests. Something similar arises in the spirit of Republicanism. Townships need not think of themselves as servants to the national government, but rather that they are to work with the national government as a means of promoting their own interests.

If Americans had no means of participating in townships, and had to instead participate in politics nationally, Tocqueville seems assured that they would lack the “public spirit” and patriotic feeling that so efficiently develops at the local level. Because Americans are self-interested, they clearly have a greater interest in what goes on directly around them, then in what goes on thousands of miles away. Tocqueville describes this republican spirit as follows:

It is in fact incontestable that in the United States the taste for and usage of republican government are born in the townships and within the provincial assemblies. In a small nation like Connecticut, for example, where the opening of a canal and the laying out of a road are great political affairs...Now, it is this same republican spirit, these mores and habits of a free people, which, after having been born and developed in the various states, are afterwards applied without difficulty to the sum of the country. The public spirit of the Union itself is in a way only a summation of provincial patriotism. Each citizen of the United States so to speak carries over the interest that his little republic inspires in him into love of the common native country. In defending the Union, he defends the growing prosperity of his district...all things that ordinarily touch men more than the general interests of the country and the glory of the nation (153).

In the above we see how, a resident of Connecticut, for example, will naturally care more for a canal that opens in his own town than one that opens on the other side of the nation. The self-interest he has in creating a better life for himself, (and suppose this

better life includes a canal) will fuel his participation in the town square. Egalitarianism plays a role here as well. Because Americans see themselves as one among equals, they are both willing to engage their own efforts in local political life, and they are also willing to participate with others who are doing the same. If Americans saw themselves as above their contemporaries, then they would be resistant to bending down and working with their inferiors. On the other hand, if Americans saw themselves as lesser than fellow community members, they might fear that it is not their place to help direct affairs. An egalitarian community is free of both such problematic possibilities.

5.4 Egalitarianism, Identity, Republicanism, and Citizenship.

The natural human presence of self-interest alongside a political philosophy of egalitarianism is the perfect combination for the creation of a community that enthusiastically participates in local politics. Yet this, itself, would not yet be enough to create the virtue of citizenship. What is missing is the proper connection between local and national politics, and the sense of community with all Americans, located anywhere. The virtue of citizenship is a national, not a local virtue. The citizens Tocqueville describes have their identities wrapped up *not* with their township but with their *country*. The missing piece of the puzzle is the institutional structure of republicanism, where the national government takes the needs and recommendations of the township seriously. When residents of a township see that their efforts are taken seriously at the national level, they can foster a sense of identity with the entire nation. This sense of identity, in turn, leads to Connecticut residents rejoicing not only in projects that benefit Connecticut, but in projects that benefit another state thousands of miles away. The

township's success becomes the success of the nation, and thereby any national success also belongs to the township.

Let us conclude this section by reviewing and drawing together the methodological features of the virtue of citizenship. This section discussed three features of American norms and institutions which motivate the development of this collective virtue. It is also important to remember that what explains the success of these features is that American institutions respect the natural dispositions of the citizens. Persons are self-interested. Rather than trying to turn people into something they are not (for example, selfless saints) the collective body that is America utilizes its self-interested populace to its own advantage. It does this through three separate but interrelated ways: egalitarian institutions, building a sense of identity, and via republican governance.

Egalitarian institutions are key to a populace that works together for the benefit of all. If persons saw themselves as below others, they might not think that it is their duty to participate in governance at all. But if they saw themselves as above others, they might be hesitant to work together with those below them in the social hierarchy. Not only is a sense of identity needed for Americans to care about what happens beyond the borders of their township, but a sense of *egalitarian identity*. It is one thing to feel empathy for Americans that one sees and works with day to day. It is another to care about those one has never, and will never, know. A strong sense of national identity solves this problem. One cares about all American insofar as all are a part of America, and America itself is part of one's personal identity. Lastly, the republican nature of US governance provides communal motivation on two accounts. First, because Americans know that governing institutions are not thousands of miles away, but right in their home town, they feel as though they have power to make changes, and hence there will

be rewards in return for their efforts. Second, the township's ability to influence national government again creates a sense of solidarity with the American government as such, as opposed to just the government of the township. In other words, republican government itself helps foster a sense of national identity.

6. Tocqueville, Vernon Smith, and Modern Economics

At this point I wish to draw a connection between Tocqueville's citizenship and modern economics. In particular, let us consider the way in which Tocqueville's description of the evolution of citizenship within the US bears key similarities to the concepts of ecological and constructivist rationality made famous by behavioral economist Vernon Smith.¹¹ The very brief summary is this: both ecological and constructivist rationality are the result of human action, and both play an important role in human and institutional evolutionary processes. The two play off each other in ways that eventually lead to the destruction of *inefficient* legal and cultural institutions, norms, values, rules, laws, and so on. The difference between them, however, is critical: constructivist rationality is the result of conscious human design, i.e., the attempt of human beings to create institutions, laws, and norms that further certain kinds of human ends. Ecological rationality is unplanned human action that often, without anyone so intending, creates laws, institutions, and norms on its own accord, often overturning those that were intended via constructivist rationality.

Both ecological and constructivist rationality play a role in the development of Tocqueville's citizenship. However, it does seem that ecological rationality has more to

¹¹ Smith's work on constructivist and ecological rationality is most notably described in his 2003 article and 2007 book.

say in the matter. Citizenship might ultimately be understood as the ecological consequences (the unplanned evolution) of The United States itself. Granted, within this evolutionary process, government officials and citizens alike made plans, all sorts of plans, but citizenship did not emerge because of them. Rather citizenship was a byproduct of human action responding to America's laws and institutions and norms (both planned and unplanned).

Although unplanned, citizenship is inevitably the result of human (US citizens') ideas, actions, and decisions. Tocqueville is quite clearly *not* claiming that there is any sort of conscious effort to create a nation whose populace possesses citizenship. Rather a combination of the conscious development of democratic institutions (Smith's constructivist evolution), alongside the ecological development of social norms within an American citizenry, creates (perhaps by an invisible hand) the collective virtue of citizenship. If we are to follow the general thought process associated with ecological rationality, the virtue of citizenship will remain a virtue of the collective insofar as it proves advantageous (i.e. an evolutionary success).

As mentioned many times before, one of the key features of Tocqueville's citizenship is the promotion of the common good (the good of the United States and its citizens). According to ecological rationality, this feature increases the odds that the virtue will have staying power. After all, almost by definition, the common good is advantageous. Of course, even if the staying power of citizenship proves forceful, this does not imply the virtue will continue forever. There are many potential circumstances that threaten to make citizenship obsolete. Even more, the collective itself might dissolve, and so with it the collective virtue. Perhaps an increasing acceptance of cosmopolitan values will foster social norms that place rising worth on international

commitments as opposed to national ones. World history shows that nations and cultures come and go. The virtue of citizenship may start to fall apart as the collective known as The United States starts to fall apart, i.e., when the nation enters a downward spiral that could eventually result in its destruction. The destruction of citizenship (a nationally advantageous virtue) can be understood as a sign that the nation itself might be in its waning days. If we then take a step back and look at ecological rationality from a world view, as opposed to a national view, everything continues to go as evolutionary theory would predict. The virtue of citizenship will have played its advantageous role during the flourishing years of the United States. But perhaps the continued success of The United States was proving disadvantageous internationally and/or regarding human kind in its entirety. Hence, the destruction of The United States as a means to the broader flourishing of human kind is just what ecological rationality would predict. This is not to say this is by any means a necessary outcome, perhaps both citizenship and The United States will continue to flourish. Or perhaps The United States will continue to flourish but citizenship, proving less advantageous in an international market, will evolve or disappear entirely. The end result, of course, is not something that can be planned, designed, or predicted.

7.Virtue Ethics

At this point in the paper there is a shift of focus. Instead of discussing Tocqueville, his understanding of citizenship, and its structure, we attempt to set the scene for applying Tocqueville's theory to contemporary virtue ethics. To do this, it is best to start with an overview of the latter.

Although *contemporary* virtue ethics is our focus, it makes sense to go back to Aristotle, who got all of these ideas started and whose influence cannot be overlooked in modern work. As noted in Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove’s article in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Although modern virtue ethics does not have to take a “neo-Aristotelian” or eudaimonist form (see section 2), almost any modern version still shows that its roots are in ancient Greek philosophy..”(2018). Unlike later theorists who thought that morality was fundamentally about consequences (Mill and Bentham), or fundamentally about duty (Kant), for Aristotle, the foundation of morality is found in an individual’s character.

Character, not surprisingly, is constituted by a collection of character traits. These traits can be understood (as discussed earlier) as behavioral dispositions. To use a simple example, generous persons are disposed to give of themselves to help those in need.¹² In Aristotle’s words, “We see that all men mean by justice that kind of state of character which makes people disposed to do what is just and makes them act justly and wish for what is just; and similarly by injustice that state which makes them act unjustly and wish for what is unjust (Nicomachean Ethics: Book V: Chapter I).” When Aristotle says “that state” he seems to be referencing an internal state of character that causes one to act in certain ways, in response to certain situations.

¹² Within contemporary virtue ethics literature, the very notion of Character has come under attack by those who claim human beings lack anything resembling stable character traits. Human behavior is influenced by situations, not character, or so this line of objection goes (see Doris 1998 and 2010, and Harman 1999 and 2009). Virtue theorists have defended the notion of character traits against these critics (e.g. see Athanassoulis 2000; Kristjánsson 2008, and Kamtekar 2004). It might be helpful to note here that even if virtue theory indeed had some type of problem in respect to consistent dispositional behavior, there is no reason to think that group virtue would have the same type of problems. Groups do not have their own minds, and therefore are not subject to the same psychological traits as individuals.

Dispositions, while necessary for virtue, tell only part of the story. Suppose someone wishes to be generous. Further suppose they are already disposed to give. This is not yet enough, for being generous means not merely disposed to give if generous, but one must be disposed to give to the right persons, at the right time, and in the right way. Let us turn to Aristotle's discussion on anger, where he tells us that,

For those who are not angry at the things they should be angry at are thought to be fools, and so are those who are not angry in the right way, at the right time, or with the right persons; for such a man is thought not to feel things nor to be pained by them, and, since he does not get angry, he is thought unlikely to defend himself; and to endure being insulted and put up with insult to one's friends is slavish (Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV: Chapter 5).

What Aristotle says about anger is applicable to the other virtues as well. One must not merely be inclined to certain types of behaviors but inclined in the right way, in the right circumstances and so on. Let us return to generosity. Giving drugs to an addict, for instance, is the wrong type of giving. Giving money to charity when one should be working is to engage in giving at the wrong time. And to give so much money that one cannot pay back personal debts is to give too much. The person of true generosity does not make these mistakes, for they know not only that they should give but that they should give at the right time, in the right way, and offer the right amount.

Another critical part of Aristotelian virtue ethics is the notion of the golden mean. Virtue, for Aristotle, was a means of aptly hitting the prized middle way. Most persons are disposed to go too far or too short. Every virtue, then, has two directions in which it

could be made a vice. It is in hitting the middle way, that one reaches virtue.¹³ Let us return to generosity. Many people fail by not giving enough, which (if displayed in a consistent disposition) is the vice of greed. Some others, however, are profligate: they give too much, perhaps so much that they cannot meet important financial obligations. It is only those who give of themselves, but not so much that they fail to fulfill other duties, who are truly generous; all Aristotelian virtuous are of this kind.¹⁴ Later on, we can discuss the way in which citizenship fits into this golden mean.

8. Collective Virtue Ethics

While much work has been done since Aristotle, it remains common to see virtue as a disposition to behave in certain ways, rather than behavior itself. Many agree that virtue lies in the middle of two extremes with vices on each end. And most also follow Aristotle, in discussing virtues typically in terms of virtues held by individuals, as opposed to collectives. At first this might seem normal. *Prima facie*, we think of individuals as having character traits, not collectives. But upon reflection, it does seem that at least in ordinary discourse, we speak in ways that suggest groups also can possess virtues and vices. For instance, it is common to talk about major corporations like Facebook and Google as greedy or malicious.¹⁵ I have heard both virtues like generosity and vices like dishonesty attributed to the Catholic church.¹⁶ And then, of course, we can look at countries. I've heard many people call the United States and the UK heartless for

¹³ In Aristotle's words, "How far, therefore, and how a man must stray before he becomes blameworthy, it is not easy to state in words; for the decision depends on the particular facts and on perception. But so much at least is plain, that the middle state is praiseworthy (Nicomachean Ethics: Book IV: Chapter 5)."

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, Chapter I.

¹⁵ See Imbellino, 2019; Sodha, 2019, and Smith 2008.

¹⁶ See Brown, 2013, and

their stand on immigration. Some of the more patriotic among us attribute traits like “creativity” and “forgiving” to their country. In sum, it seems like there is no shortage of instances in which we attribute character traits to groups.

Now some might wonder if the way in which talk about groups and their traits is just a matter of speaking. Perhaps groups don’t “really” have character traits at all. Of course, whether or not groups have character traits ultimately depends on how we define these traits. Let us go back to what was said before. A character trait is a disposition to behave in certain ways. There seems no reason why groups cannot be disposed in this fashion. Of course, it is possible to understand dispositional states as psychological states or even brain states. And if a character trait is made up of such, it will be difficult to explain how it can be manifest in a group.

What seems most important is not whether character traits of groups have all the *same* qualities as character traits of individuals, nor whether character traits of groups are “real” traits in some platonic sense. What matters is that there is *philosophical value* in understanding groups to possess a type of character trait. Group traits shall be called “virtues and “vices” not because they are identical to virtue and vice in individuals, but rather because, (1) they bear important similarities to individual character traits, and (2) our language already functions as if groups had character traits. If our language functions this way, it makes sense to analyze just what we mean by such talk and what function these traits serve.

9. A Tocquevillian Account of Group Virtue and Vice

This section does not claim to explain the one and only way to understand group virtue, it does not even claim that this understanding is the *best* understanding. The approach

taken here is more modest. *In Democracy in America*, Tocqueville delineates a *plausible* account of group virtue via his discussion on citizenship. His account is displayed through a particular methodological structure that has the potential to be modified and then utilized in advantageous ways by contemporary virtue theorists. Not only is the collective virtue of citizenship itself a worthwhile contribution to the virtue theoretic literature, but citizenship can serve as a model in respect to the structure of various types of group virtue and vice.

Perhaps the most advantageous aspect of Tocqueville's description of citizenship is the way in which a collective learns to understand the tendencies of group members, and in so understanding can create systems which aid the development of group virtue. We already discussed the specific manifestations of the collective virtue of citizenship: egalitarianism, identification, and republicanism all play off each other to greatly increase the odds that the collective in its entirety will develop a collective virtue. Now, however, I want to take a step back and discuss things in much more general terms.

What matters for collective virtue, speaking generally rather than specifically, is not the particular ways in which the collective motivates its members to develop virtue, but simply that there is this dynamic. One might *prima facie* think of virtue in terms of the virtues of the individual members. For instance, a collective is generous if all or at least a significant percentage of its members are also generous. But this type of account does not hold up to scrutiny. Imagine a large collective. Let us suppose it is the collective of amateur bowlers who live in Springfield, MA. Suppose that every member of this bowling club is generous. Not only does each member give at least 20% of their paycheck to charity, but they all also volunteer at least 10 hours every week. Does this mean that the Springfield bowling club is generous? It seems not. For there is no reason

to assume that any of the generous members are engaging in their giving in virtue of being a member of the bowling club. Their charity, rather, happens outside of club hours and club activities. We can even imagine that Springfield has a yearly fundraiser for the Special Olympics, and that it is custom for local sport clubs to participate. But let us imagine that the Springfield bowling team completely skips this fundraiser. In spite of the generosity of its individual members, the bowling club is not meeting the bare minimum in terms of standard club sport generosity.

If collective virtue is not simply the sum of the virtue of its individual members, then what is it? This is where Tocqueville and his discussion of citizenship comes in. We have seen that Tocqueville argues that in spite of the fact that Americans are highly self-interested, they nonetheless display a spirit of communal generosity in a variety of circumstances. What makes this type of communal spirit a group virtue rather than a collection of individual virtues is at least three features:

1. Citizenship is displayed for the sake of Americans.
2. Citizenship is displayed insofar as they are Americans.
3. The collective at large (i.e. The United States) played a crucial role in the virtue's development

Let us look at each of the above in turn. Citizenship is not merely the act of helping out one's fellow person. Rather, citizenship is displayed in helping Americans because they are Americans. Tocqueville compares this disposition, with a contrasting one in "Englishmen." He notes that, "In a foreign country, two Americans are friends right away for the sole reason that they are Americans. There is no prejudice that repels them, and the community of their native country attracts them. For two Englishmen, the same blood is not enough: the same rank must bring them together" (541). Caring about

group members simply because they are group members is one feature which makes a trait a group trait rather than some collection of individual traits: when a collection of individuals is consistently disposed to do something for the sake of the group, this dispositional tendency is best described as a group character trait.

What solidifies this aspect further is not merely doing something for the sake of the group (doing things for Americans), but doing it for the group specifically because one is oneself a group member (doing things for Americans because one is American). After all, it is possible that I do something for a group that I don't belong to. But when I do something for a group, because I am a group member, I then act not merely as an individual but as part of the group itself.

Aspect number 3 listed above is the most unique aspect of Tocqueville's account. Most persons think of groups from the bottom up, i.e. they think of the members and then they think of the ways in which these members acting together collectively manifests group action. But Tocqueville's discussion on citizenship allows us to see that things can work the other way around. A collection can itself behave in ways that are meant to have specific consequences for the group members. This might even happen before the group really has members. Consider, after all, that many legal and institutional features of the United States were drafted and discussed before the nation gained its independence. In this way the founders of the group envisioned the way in which the groups structure, institutions and norms would influence future group behavior.

Those who create a group might create institutions that are likely to lead to virtue, or they might on the other hand form the group in such a way that vice is the more likely outcome. Despite of the focus on the virtue of citizenship, America also has

its vices. Tocqueville discusses not only the virtue of citizenship, he also describes less flattering traits of America and Americans like materialism. He describes materialism in ways applicable not just to individual Americans, but as a spirit that is felt throughout the entire nation, noting that, “In America the passion for material well-being is not always exclusive, but it is general; if all do not experience it in the same manner, all do feel it. The care of satisfying the least needs of the body and of providing the smallest comforts of life preoccupies minds universally (506).” Not only do all Americans strive for material well-being, but they do so in a manner that suggests a warped perception of material value. Tocqueville notes that,

The inhabitant of the United States attaches himself to the goods of this world as if he were assured of not dying, and he rushes so precipitately to grasp those that pass within his reach that one would say he fears at each instant he will cease to live before he has enjoyed them. He grasps them all but without clutching them, and he soon allows them to escape from his hands so as to run after new enjoyments (512).

While there is not time to go into detail, one might argue that Americans not only possess the collective virtue of citizenship but also the collective vice of superficiality.

10. Citizenship Today

Having discussed the general structure of Tocqueville’s collective virtue, in this section we will look at the ways it can be specifically applied. While an important feature of Tocqueville’s account is the fact that it can be applied to any of a variety of collective virtues or even vices, there is no reason we should not start with citizenship. While this paper is most concerned with the structure of collective virtue, the specific virtue of

citizenship is worthy itself of becoming an important contribution to contemporary virtue ethics.

We have already discussed in detail the structural aspects of citizenship. But let us briefly return and consider how these features might change if manifest in contemporary times. Do Americans still have the virtue of citizenship as described by Tocqueville? Speaking generally, this virtue is a willingness to go out of one's way to help fellow Americans and to participate in politics and communal life for the sake of the public good. In other words, citizens are those who do at minimum their part, and often go above and beyond, serving their community. It is not immediately clear to me that Americans do have this virtue. Surveys show that Americans are as divided as ever before. Consider a recent article from the Pew Research Center:

Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades. These trends manifest themselves in myriad ways, both in politics and in everyday life. And a new survey of 10,000 adults nationwide finds that these divisions are greatest among those who are the most engaged and active in the political process (Suh:2014).

It appears that Americans are spilt into factions, and factions hardly seem to care about the fact that we are all Americans.¹⁷ Not only this, but American run into a potential problem when it comes to participation in public life; many Americans do not vote or participate in politics at all.

While the purpose of this paper is not to come to any definite conclusion about the virtue of citizenship and whether Americans have it in the here and now, it is

¹⁷ See also Associated Press, 2016.

germane to our broader discussion to note that at minimum, a case can be made that the collective virtue of citizenship is no longer an apt description of Americans as such.

Suppose we were to accept that Americans lack citizenship. Should we go so far as to say that they actually have the corresponding vice? First, we should know which vice is under discussion. While collective virtues have certain features, which are different from individual virtues, there is no reason to think that we need to do away with the spectrum view of virtue. Hence, we can understand citizenship, like other virtues as lying on a mean of extremes. Nations that possess the virtue of citizenship hit a desirable middle ground between two undesirable extremes. We already noted that a nation manifesting the virtue of citizenship is a nation whose members are eager to help one another, and eager to participate in public life for the sake of collective betterment. What remains, then is to reason our way into an account that can explain how one might go too far or too short in the relevant respects.

How might one go too far in helping out your community members? Likewise, is it possible to go too far in participating in public life? It seems there are a number of ways that this might come about, some of these ways were discussed by Tocqueville himself. One way of going too far, is in defending your country or country persons in any and all circumstances. Ethically speaking, there are some cases in which both your country and your country persons should not be respected. Imagine, for instance, that one's nation is involved in an obviously unjust war. In an attempt to support one's nation in public life, we can imagine some citizens working toward supporting these war efforts and advocating for the war to continue. This would seem to be a case going too far. Likewise, one might blindly be willing to help a fellow country person regardless of their criminal and violent tendencies. This is another way of going too far.

If one way of taking citizenship to an extreme is supporting your country in all circumstances, even inappropriate ones, then the other extreme can be found in refusing to help. While there are some who go out of their way to support their nation, just or not, there are others who do not identify with their nation at all. They do not care to help their fellow country persons, nor to participate in public life. One way of manifesting this type of attitude is via apathy. Apathetic citizens do not identify with their nation, and thereby do not rejoice in its successes nor are they angry in its failures. They instead, fill their life with other matters.

One worry some might have with any virtue like citizenship is that it will lead to, or is actually nothing but, nationalism.¹⁸ Yet within a virtue theoretic framework, one can answer these worries quite naturally. Nationalism is not a middle virtue, it is a vice of an extreme. The extreme of helping one's country persons, and one's nation, no matter what. The opposite vice is a complete failure to join in any communal efforts to better one's nation, or help one's fellow country persons. Neither of these extremes are virtues. And hence, nationalism is decidedly not the same as citizenship. Of course, it is possible that some nationalists will try and claim they are citizens. But this is true of most vices: persons who have vices can try to pass them off as virtues. Greedy persons can claim they are just trying to manage their money responsibly. Those who are cowards can claim they are playing it safe. And those that are indulgent will argue they just like to have fun. It should be no surprise that with the virtue of citizenship, there are also persons who will claim the virtue even though their actual trait is a vice.

¹⁸ For instance, the following critics of patriotism might have a problem with Tocqueville's citizenship, see Dombrowski 1992; Gomberg 1990; Keller 2005, and Nussbaum, 1994.

11. Objections: Against National Impartiality

In this section I respond to two objections concerning the value of Tocqueville's citizenship.¹⁹ While the objections are distinct, they arise from a similar concern about nation states, i.e., "what makes them so special?" Said differently, some might worry that (1) citizenship (as applied to nations) unfairly suggests that similar concerns for community at more localized level are unimportant; (2) Others might worry that the content of citizenship itself is morally problematic, insofar as it consists in an unjustified favoritism to a state and its citizens. I answer these objections here, contending that the concerns are ultimately unproblematic for Tocqueville's understanding of citizenship.

11.1 Localized Citizenship

In principle, there is no reason that smaller, more localized, groups could not possess a virtue mirroring citizenship. Perhaps we wouldn't call such virtue "citizenship" (given the connotation.) Notwithstanding, it is easy to imagine the same base virtue applied to other group types. If so, then one might wonder what point, purpose, or moral justification exists for Tocqueville's (or this article's) exclusive focus on the virtue in respect to nations. In other words, if there is a collective virtue that benefits a group and group members, why does it matter (or what is so important about) this virtue when found in nation states as opposed to any other group? Here is the start of a response: While virtue at the local level is possible, there is a reason that Tocqueville focused on

¹⁹ Rather than respond to this or that specific work, in this section I take the overarching theme from various authors from different disciplines concerned with problems related to partiality. Some write specifically about national partiality, and others about partiality in general. My response should suffice to both type of concerns, since in explaining why one can defend national partiality I cannot help but explain why partiality more generally can also be morally defended. Some authors who raise concern that help motivate my response include: Arenson, 2005; Audi, 2010; Callan, 2006; Dombrowski, 1992; Goodin, 1998; Gomberg, 1990; Keller, 2005; Landsburg, 2011, and Singer, 1972 and 2004.

national virtue; there is something uniquely important about citizenship at the national level.

Even within relatively small groups, just like within nations, group members often (if not always) have competing interests. In addition to competing interests, the group and its members might nonetheless share important goals. And in this sense, Tocqueville's virtue of citizenship is relevant to groups of all sizes and types, whether the group is a city league softball team or The United States. Group members with both competing interests and shared goals benefit from a disposition to look past the former and work toward the latter. That being said, nation states are *atypical* groups in the following senses: (1) they are generally very large groups with thousands or millions of members; (2) members have not merely competing interests, but an enormous number of *directly competing interests* that must be addressed using a *common monetary fund*, a monetary fund which can *coercively demand that members pay-up*; (3) in addition to competing interests, members have a vast array of priorities and preferences. Personal preferences and priorities likely effect how members wish to spend the common pool of money, and it is impossible to satisfy each member. This results in members personally funding collective activities of which they individually disapprove; (4) unlike most groups, if not entirely impossible, exiting the group is both impractical and costly; (5) In spite of competing interests, citizens also have important **common** interests, e. g. : (a) that fair trade deals with other nations are arranged, (b) that the government not be overtaken by tyrants; (c) that certain public goods like roads and national parks are well maintained; (d) that the nation is not attacked by other nations. And there are others that can be added to the list.

The combination of shared common interest, the high cost of group exist, and the state's coercive power over member finances creates an unusual group dynamic where persons who may have little personally in common nonetheless can get great reward for working together, and are threatened with disaster if they either refuse to do so or just do not do so well. This results in a difficult but critical challenge: in spite of competing interests, how can self-interested persons be motivated to work together for the common good, i.e., the common interest? This is where citizenship comes in. In groups that are not nation states, the same set of challenging yet motivating dynamics are unlikely to occur.

While one might look at the world-wide body of Catholics as a single group, for most Catholics (most are not particularly devout) the decisions of the church have little impact on everyday living. Likewise, while the church might encourage members to donate, Catholics who keep their money to themselves face little or no penalties. With nations, on the other hand, the government can and does confiscate income. Cultural, governmental, and social institutions and practices permanent deep into the life of average citizens on almost a daily basis. Laws, for example, influence where and how we can make a living, and the ways in which we might use our earnings. Cultural norms shape judgements on what behaviors ought to be meet with social acceptance, as well as what behaviors result in social rejection. Given the indisputable evidence that humans are social creatures who crave peer acceptance, the creation of social norms directly influences the happiness and well-being of the average person. The point is this: nation states are an exceptional type of collective, and because they are exceptional, collective virtue is both exceptionally important and uniquely manifest.

The above defense of a sharp focus on collective citizenship as virtuously manifest in nations by no means implies that a collective virtue akin to citizenship is superfluous, much less impossible, outside the confines of nation states. It is just to say that there is something especially interesting and important when collective citizenship arises within the confines of a country.

While all truths are circumstantial, speaking generally, it seems quite plausible that the larger the group and the more diverse its members, the harder cooperative member action becomes. Citizenship is a means to rise to this challenge, and especially important in a country like The United States where there is lots of land, lots of people, and lots of diversity.

11.2. Worries about National Favoritism

Perhaps you have gotten this far in the paper and are inclined to agree that Tocqueville's writing describes a trait we might call citizenship, and that the particular way he describes it lends itself to being best understood as a trait of a collective, rather than individuals. However, you might be hesitant to call this trait a *virtue*. Citizenship, after all, seems a trait that prizes concern for country and fellow country persons. But, why, you might wonder, ought we to value either our country or fellow citizens any more than we might value foreign nations or foreigners? Said differently: In what sense is a special commitment to country *morally* valuable (even admitting such commitment might be of obvious *personal* value to a nation and a nation's citizens.)

If you found the worries expressed in the above paragraph compelling, you are not alone. Numerous scholars coming from a variety of disciplinary expertise have expressed criticism for partiality of all kinds, but especially for national partiality or

related concepts like patriotism and national pride. Such criticisms come from a range of academic and ideological perspectives, and many criticisms offer differing twists on what, exactly, is problematic with showing special concern for one's own nation and fellow citizens in contrast to an egalitarian concern for all (or most) persons from all places. In response I focus on the main moral worry that is present in most (if not all) of these criticisms: there is neither moral nor logical justification for showing preference toward one's own country or country persons. Said differently: there is just as much reason to display special concern to foreign nationals and foreign countries as there is reason to display the same concern to one's home nation and fellow nationals.

The short defense of national partiality can go like this: first, it is part of human nature (evolutionary nature) to care about some persons more than others, i.e., humans have an evolutionary tendency to connect first to our kin and second to our "tribe." Nations and national commitment provide an outlet to the common and perhaps inevitable human tendency toward tribalism. As long as a commitment to country is manifest in morally acceptable ways, or more preferable yet, morally admirable ways, not only is there nothing morally wrong with concern for one's country and country persons, this general concern might be praiseworthy. It can be praiseworthy first, insofar as concern for country is displayed via acts of altruism, kindness, and sacrifice, and second, because virtues that fit well with human nature are preferable to those that work against it. More on this later, but the general idea is that when moral norms and virtues work *with* (rather than against) our evolutionary tendencies, such norms and virtues are likely to have a much higher adherence rate (when compared to norms and virtues that are in conflict with evolutionary nature.)

Of course, the key to the above argument is that national commitment is indeed manifest in morally admirable or at least morally acceptable fashions. But as I will contend below, the virtue of citizenship indeed clears this bar.

Some might be unsatisfied at this point, contending that even if tribalism falls in line with our evolutionary nature, it is a bad part of our nature and we should try to overcome this. A simple response is that moral systems **ought** to work within the confines of natural human dispositions, at least insofar as this is possible without grossly violating moral laws. Otherwise, we are likely to end up with a failed moral system, i.e., a moral system that has an especially low adherence rate, for overcoming natural dispositions is difficult.

The next claim in the defense of national partiality is this: it is indeed possible to imagine a type of national partiality that does not grossly violate moral laws. First, holding special allegiance to a circumscribed group, does not, in itself, imply actively harming those outsiders, nor that one ought to never offer help to outsiders. In other words, it is possible to have the virtue of citizenship while still treating non-citizens respectfully and sometimes going out of one's way for non-citizens. Citizenship just implies a prioritization of the nation and national needs. To prioritize X need not mean discounting all concerns outside of X, nor that X must always come first in every and each circumstance. Rather, national prioritizing means committing significant resources to national concerns. This need not dry up **all** resources, nor imply that there can be no other priorities. To analogize: I can prioritize my school work while still caring for and loving my spouse. Likewise, citizens and a country can prioritize national interests while still leaving room for interests that stretch beyond state borders.

In response to the above argument, some might insist that any type of national prioritizing is problematic. After all, they might contend, there is no ethically logical grounds that support favoring the needs of, say, a United States Citizen over the needs of an Argentinean citizen. However, in addition to going against natural human tendencies, there are moral benefits associated with national partiality. First, because citizens hold a special relationship to one another in virtue of being members of a common country, they have important and significant shared interests, shared perspectives, and often shared knowledge. The three commonalities just mentioned are critically intertwined with each other in the following ways: (1) in virtue of sharing many interests, citizens are more likely to be informed on *how* to forward many interests of their fellow country persons; this is opposed to the likely ignorance of citizens concerning ways to forward the interests of foreigners, and (2) citizens are more likely to be motivated to work for the interests of their fellow country persons, after all, the interests of fellow country persons often coincide with personal interests.

One need not be a consequentialist to see ethical value in strategic moral action. Strategic moral action is using carefully chosen methods which aim to increase the odds of especially favorable moral outcomes. The following appears plausible: when persons are reasonably well-informed about how to achieve a particular end, and moreover, are motivated to achieve it, this increases the odds of attaining said end. Citizens, hence, can work together for the common good of the citizenry in a manner that is especially efficacious. As said previously, while fellow citizens have many competing interests, they also share significant common interests. Moreover, in virtue of simply residing within the same national borders, being subject under the same government and sharing use of many of the same social and political institutions, citizens are comparably well-

informed (i.e. when compared to non-residents and non-citizens) of how to work within their system to achieve desired ends. This gives strong reason, both moral and pragmatic, for all citizens, of all nations, to give some sort of special priority to their own country.

Here is an example of an inefficient use of moral resources: an individual randomly (impartially) selects some good end, for some person, somewhere, and gets to work on achieving said end. Not only is this inefficient, this individual might unreasonably intrude into moral matters, that frankly, are none of his business. Imagine a United States citizen who randomly (impartially) commits himself to improving the governmental election process in Brazil. Such US citizen would not only be wadding into waters far out of his area of expertise, but he also would be unreasonably intruding into the Brazilian community. Even more, Brazilian citizens likely have a much better sense of what Brazil needs and how best these needs are achieved.

As a final line of defense supporting national partiality, here is a point from the perspective of moral value. While perhaps not *everyone* will agree, it is uncontroversial that close relationships and a sense of community are morally valuable. When persons have an equal allegiance to all individuals and all places, we lose something valuable regarding such relationships and communities. Imagine that “Casey” criticizes you for the special relationship you have with your circle of close friends, and argues that all persons ought to equally be your friend. Casey contends that there is nothing special about your friends in particular, and that hence there is no moral reason for these friends in particular to get so much of your time, company, good will, and concern. Rather, you ought to treat everyone like they are equally your friend.

The first problem with Casey's line of argument is that his suggestions are, in practice, impossible. The attempt to treat all like close friends would inevitably result in "friendships" missing all or most of the features which make friendship so special. If 5k of your close friends have an especially difficult Thursday, there is neither a bar large enough to accommodate all of them, nor can any individual sympathetically and sincerely listen to thousands of buddies at once. This loss of intimacy is a moral loss, even if it is true that there is really nothing morally special about the persons you consider close friends. Likewise, if all persons in the world were treated as if they were members of a common community and culture, we would lose all that is special about community and culture. Even if one is not particularly moved by loyalty to country, it is hard to argue that a sense of culture is worthless, and even harder to contend that communities lack value. And a nation is just one form of community.

12. Conclusion

In closing, Tocqueville's sparse yet consistent discussions of what I call "citizenship" can teach us a lot. By "us" I refer to both any scholar fascinated by Tocqueville, but more specifically contemporary virtue ethicists. As mentioned, virtue ethics has mostly focused on individual virtue, although there has been some literature on collective virtue.²⁰ Tocqueville's discussion on virtue and citizenship opens up new doors. We can see that not only is collective virtue possible, but also that it is something distinct from a collection of individual virtue. Moreover, we need not assume that collective virtue is

²⁰ It seems apt here to repeat an earlier footnote: Interestingly, there has actually been much more discussion on collective or group virtue in other disciplines than in philosophy. Discussions include Clowney 2014, Leach et al., 2007; Heugens et al., 2008, and Reicher et al., 2008. In philosophy, discussions of group virtue can be found in Kvanvig, 1992 and 2007.

one directional, i.e. that we can only move from the virtue of individuals to the virtue of collectives. Rather it is just as important to recognize the way in which the collective might encourage certain behaviors in its members, and in so doing pave the way for virtue at the collective level. One such virtue might be citizenship.

When we recognize that citizenship need not imply nationalism, the former seems a particularly useful virtue for a nation to hold. At least, it does, if we understood citizenship in the same way as Tocqueville. Striving to help those around you, and striving to make laws that make your own country must just and a better place to reside. These seem beneficial ends regardless of what particular ethical theory one might favor.

Citizenship is just the beginning of a true literature on collective virtue. Once we recognize that a collective is not dependent on the whims of its members to acquire virtue, there is no reason not to strive for all kinds of collective character improvement. Nations can strive to be generous, caring, and patient. And it is not only nations which might be collectively virtuous, any group is a candidate. A sports team, for instance, might strive to acquire the virtue of sportsmanship in the same a nation strives for citizenship. There are many other types of groups, and hence many ways collective virtue might be manifest. A constant in all such examples of collective virtue, is the dynamic process between individuals and collectives which explains why the virtue is properly ascribed to the latter rather than the former.

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