

Anthony Trollope: Novelist of the “Democratic Revolution”

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Abstract: Anthony Trollope uses the characters and drama of his “semi-political” Palliser novels to pursue the ends of Alexis de Tocqueville’s political science in a lighthearted yet serious way. Describing himself as an “advanced conservative Liberal,” Trollope claims that his “political theory” is expressed most fully in the Palliser novels. Preoccupied with the phenomenon Tocqueville designates the “democratic revolution,” the novels emphasize the historical “tendency towards equality,” consider its social and political implications, and intimate how traditionally aristocratic England might respond to it. While he endorses the justice of the democratic revolution, Trollope shows that it is accompanied by such disadvantages as a decline in human excellence and greatness. Realistic depictions of character arouse sympathy for his view that by adopting a posture of prudent liberalism toward the advance of equality, the English could both reform their aristocratic institutions and rely on those institutions to mitigate the excesses of democracy.

In the introduction to his nonfiction work *North America* (1862), Anthony Trollope gives a nod to the stature of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* had appeared several years earlier (1835, 1840). Lamenting the difficulty of writing an accessible yet serious book about the “social and political” condition of the United States,¹ Trollope states:

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¹Anthony Trollope, *North America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1862), 1. Despite the title, Trollope states on the first page that his book is about the United States. He devotes a few chapters to Canada and mentions Mexico only a handful of times.

It is very hard to write about any country a book that does not represent the country described in a more or less ridiculous point of view. It is hard at least to do so in such a book as I must write. A De Tocqueville may do it. It may be done by any philosophico-political or politico-statistical, or statistico-scientific writer; but it can hardly be done by a man who professes to use a light pen, and to manufacture his article for the use of general readers.²

Of those who had written with a heavy pen about the political affairs of a country, only Tocqueville is mentioned, and the designation “A De Tocqueville” suggests that Trollope esteemed him an author of the first rank. Nevertheless, this appreciative reference is the only mention of Tocqueville in Trollope’s major works,³ so it is difficult to know whether Trollope was greatly influenced by Tocqueville.⁴ Notwithstanding the question of influence, this article maintains that Trollope’s own political project is essentially a Tocquevillian one, and it highlights his most significant effort to advance this project, which occurs in his “semi-political” Palliser novels.⁵

Generally speaking, Trollope is thematically preoccupied with the phenomenon Tocqueville designates the “democratic revolution,” or the “gradual and progressive development” of “equality of conditions” throughout the “Christian universe.”⁶ Although Trollope does not use the term “democratic revolution,” he acknowledges a historical “tendency towards equality,” and

²Ibid., 2. Trollope suggests that writing a heavy book about the American regime might be easier than writing a “light” book, but he thinks that writing a *good* book (of any sort) about the United States requires a special kind of author. Describing the person truly fit “to dilate on the nature and operation of [American] political arrangements,” he states, “It is a work which some man will do who has earned a right by education, study, and success to rank himself among the political sages of his age” (ibid., 1–2). As this description comes mere sentences before his reference to “A De Tocqueville,” one wonders whether Trollope thought of Tocqueville in these terms.

³Thanks to Jamie Orlando for researching this question. I bear responsibility for any oversights.

⁴Trollope did own a copy of *Democracy in America*, though we cannot confirm whether and, if so, how closely he read it. Anthony Trollope, *Catalogue of His Books* (London: Virtue, 1874), 79. Photocopies of this catalogue were obtained from the Forster Collection, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, July 2, 2018.

⁵Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 317, henceforward abbreviated *AB*. I follow the scholarly consensus in considering *Can You Forgive Her?*, *Phineas Finn*, *The Eustace Diamonds*, *Phineas Redux*, *The Prime Minister*, and *The Duke’s Children* to be the six “Palliser” novels. Trollope states that *Phineas Finn* was the first of his “semi-political tales” (*AB*, 317). However, *Can You Forgive Her?* is often classified as a Palliser novel because it provides the first extended introduction of Plantagenet Palliser and the very first introduction of Glencora (M’Cluskie) Palliser.

⁶Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3, 6, 7. Henceforward abbreviated *DA*.

we shall employ the term as a general one to encapsulate this idea (*AB*, 294). In his posthumously published *An Autobiography* (1883), Trollope offers a five-page synopsis of his “political theory,” a position he describes as “advanced conservative Liberal[ism]” that is in a deep sense informed by the reality of the democratic revolution (291, 294).⁷ Advanced conservative Liberalism consists in accepting both that God has created men unequal in important respects *and* that He has seen fit to set in motion a process whereby “distances” among men are gradually being diminished (292–93). Cognizant of the dangers of rapid social transformation, the advanced conservative Liberal is nonetheless a proponent of gradual social reform that “tend [s] towards equality” (294). As such, he stands on the side of both Providence and justice, concepts that mingle without merging in both Trollope and Tocqueville.

Tocqueville and Trollope reach similar conclusions regarding the emerging democratic universe. Both believe that the shift toward equality is irreversible and as a consequence aim to educate readers about what “goods and ills” might be expected from it (*DA*, 13; see also 3–15 and *AB*, 291–94). Regarding these goods and ills, both maintain—Tocqueville with somewhat greater reluctance—that the age of equality is “more just” than the aristocratic age it has eclipsed, but both also perceive that the leveling tendencies of democracy will foster a culture in which mediocrity tends to stifle human excellence and greatness (*DA*, 675; see also *AB*, 291–94 and *DA*, 661–76).⁸ Lastly, both are aware that the democratic revolution affects different societies in different ways and that societies’ responses to it must vary accordingly. For example, when writing about democratic America, both Tocqueville and Trollope stress the importance of institutions and practices designed to check the excesses of equality (e.g., *DA*, 57–65, 82–93, 251–64, 275–88, and 489–95).⁹ However, when discussing the still-mixed English regime, they note the need for democratic reform but generally assume that a robust set of inherited institutions will help control the advance of equality for the foreseeable future.¹⁰ The predominantly English setting of the Palliser novels explains why institutions remain in the background while Trollope encourages his primary audience—the nation’s middle and upper classes¹¹—to adopt a prudently Liberal attitude toward changing social conditions.

⁷Trollope typically capitalizes “Liberalism,” “Conservatism,” and “Radicalism” as well as related words. When discussing Trollope, I follow his usage.

⁸For discussion of Trollope’s views on democratic culture and mediocrity, see the section “Democracy’s Shadows,” below.

⁹Trollope’s *North America* features chapters on “Education and Religion,” “Congress,” “The Constitution of the United States,” “The Government,” and “The Law Courts and Lawyers of the United States.”

¹⁰For an overview of Tocqueville’s views, see Ada Zeman, “Alexis de Tocqueville on England,” *Review of Politics* 13, no. 3 (June 1951): 329–43.

¹¹While he had hoped to appeal to as many readers as possible, Trollope understood that politically themed novels would appeal primarily to the politically interested

The *Autobiography* presents a distilled version of Trollope's political thought, but his great effort to advance his political ideas occurs in the Palliser novels. It is there that his "political and social convictions" are expressed most fully (*AB*, 180; see also 317).¹² The novel was Trollope's strongest genre,¹³ and using the characters and drama of the novel form, he makes political arguments in the same way that he makes other kinds of arguments, that is, in a good-humored, easygoing fashion that seduces and "charms" readers rather than "wearying" them as more demanding genres might (222). His lighthearted yet serious novels work toward the same ends as Tocqueville's political science but do so primarily by encouraging ordinary educated readers to sympathize with "portraits" of "real" men and women caught up in a unique historical moment (126). The fact that many readers fail to find the "politics" in the Palliser novels is a testimony to his artistry.¹⁴

Trollope was an important literary counterpart to Tocqueville and hence the "novelist of the 'democratic revolution.'" In defending this claim, I will first present Tocqueville's account of the shift toward equality and indicate how his anthropological assumptions inform his response to this development. I then show that Trollope generally agreed with Tocqueville's foundational views about history and human nature and that he articulated his political thought most fully in the Palliser novels. Turning next to Tocqueville's and Trollope's strategies for helping societies adjust to the arrival of equality, I argue that Tocqueville relies on the tools of political science while Trollope draws on the resources of the novel. Although Trollope's strategy primarily involves using realistic characters that evoke sympathy to shape readers' attitudes, he does not discount, but rather presupposes, the teaching of political science regarding the importance of institutions.

portion of the middle and upper classes, i.e., those "who would have lived with" his characters (*AB*, 318; 317–18).

¹²By contrast, Brent E. Kinser argues that one should look to Trollope's nonfiction for an account of his "actual political outlook." Additionally, Kinser appreciates the Tocquevillian themes in Trollope's nonfiction. Kinser, *The American Civil War in the Shaping of British Democracy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 59 and chap. 2.

¹³While he wrote in many genres, it is as a novelist that Trollope did his best work. No one thinks that his *North America* occupies the same plane as *Democracy in America*, but he is memorialized as a novelist in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner (<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/anthony-trollope/>).

¹⁴A "common view" of Trollope's political novels is that the political elements are incidental to the author's fundamental aim of realistically portraying mid-nineteenth-century English society. David M. Craig, "Advanced Conservative Liberalism: Party and Principle in Trollope's Parliamentary Novels," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38 (Sept. 2010): 355. For a list of authors who hold the "common view," see *ibid.*, 355 and 355n1. See also John McCormick, introduction to *The Prime Minister*, by Anthony Trollope (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vii.

Tocqueville: Theorist of the Democratic Revolution

At the beginning of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville makes a broad historical claim: since the eleventh century, a “great democratic revolution” has been gradually unfolding in the “Christian universe” (*DA*, 3, 6). In essence, the democratic revolution is a “social movement” characterized by the continuous advance of “equality of conditions” (*ibid.*). Evidence that the general tendency of historical development favors equality is overwhelming. It can be uncovered almost without effort by considering all the “great events” of the past seven centuries, the effect of which has been to reduce the gulf that once separated the noble and the commoner (5–6).¹⁵ Indeed, the democratic revolution is sufficiently “accomplished” that Christian societies must henceforth be organized on the assumption that men are one another’s equals (13).

The theoretical foundation of the democratic revolution—the idea of equality—has religious origins, and Tocqueville insists that the revolution itself bears all the marks of providential design. In a short work entitled “The Emancipation of Slaves,” he states that it is a “Christian idea that all men are born equal,”¹⁶ and *Democracy* suggests that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was necessary to draw men’s attention to the truth of human equality (*DA*, 413). Nevertheless, while special revelation might have been necessary to make the democratic revolution possible, no special revelation is necessary to grasp its providential character, which can be inferred by considering “the usual course of nature and the continuous tendency of events” (6–7). In light of the “universal,” “enduring,” and “irresistible” character of the “gradual development of equality of conditions,” it is reasonable to assume providential responsibility as well as providential approval (6, 674–75).

When the idea of equality refused to remain a purely spiritual concept and gave rise to the democratic revolution, the result was, if not a change in human nature, at least a dramatic change in what Tocqueville calls men’s “social state” (*DA*, 45). In the aristocratic past, the presumption of human inequality correlated with the organization of society into different social classes, but individuals living in the democratic age perceive one another as equals, or as being fundamentally like themselves.¹⁷ Though unequal in many specific respects, these individuals believe that they belong to a common humanity and thus reject the notion that one’s station in life

¹⁵Tocqueville’s enumeration of “great events” serving to weaken the nobility and strengthen the common people includes “the Crusades and the wars with the English,” “the institution of townships,” “the discovery of firearms,” the invention of the printing press, the development of mail service, the advent of Protestantism, and the discovery of America (*DA*, 5–6).

¹⁶Tocqueville, “The Emancipation of Slaves,” in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 207.

¹⁷Tocqueville uses the word *semblable* to capture the notion of someone “like oneself.” Mansfield and Winthrop, introduction to *DA*, xliii.

should be fixed by law or custom (8–9, 45–52, 412–13). The democratic social state requires that all experience the possibilities and insecurities of a life without permanent ranks and orders.

Although the democratic revolution is a historical and “providential fact,” it does not follow from this fact that everything about the democratic revolution is praiseworthy or even that the new age is superior to the old (*DA*, 6). Generally speaking, Tocqueville evaluates the ages on their own terms and concludes that each has its “particular advantages and inconveniences, its goods and evils that are proper to it” (675). Though it oppresses many, aristocracy elevates some men, “give[s] a certain loftiness to the human spirit,” “inspire[s]. . . a sort of contempt for material goods,” and leads societies to “attempt great undertakings” (234). Democracy, on the other hand, is less splendid and less “brilliant” than aristocracy. However, while it does not “give the most force or the most glory possible to the entire body of the nation,” it does “procure the most well-being for each of the individuals who compose it” (235).

Tocqueville’s reservations about democracy and selective praise of aristocracy are rooted in an anthropology that acknowledges the naturalness of both human inequality and human equality.¹⁸ The emergence of the democratic social state does not negate the fact of human inequality. In particular, God has ordained “intellectual inequality,” and “man cannot prevent it from existing always” (*DA*, 51). Aristocratic societies grasp the truth of human inequality, and building on this recognition allows them to bear witness to human excellence and greatness (e.g., 428–43). However, such societies often err in exaggerating the differences among men to the point of denying human likeness and similarity. Democracies rightly assume that all men have enough in common to be considered part of the same species (412–13), though this just emphasis on equality becomes an unjust overemphasis if natural inequalities and individual differences are accorded no place in society (e.g., 239–42, 243–45, 670). For this reason, Tocqueville opposes an unqualified embrace of the equality principle, and his project attempts to ensure that the predominance of the democratic idea does not completely stifle the expression of natural differences and genuine diversity.

Trollope: Novelist of the Democratic Revolution

Like Tocqueville, Trollope recognizes a historical “tendency towards equality” as well as the persistence of significant inequalities, phenomena that he, too, associates with the workings of Providence (*AB*, 294, 291–94). In the *Autobiography*’s discussion of his “political theory,” he claims that inequalities among men are of “divine origin” and hence ineradicable: “Make all men

¹⁸Sara Henary, “Tocqueville and the Challenge of Historicism,” *Review of Politics* 76, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 469–94.

equal to-day, and God has so created them that they shall be all unequal tomorrow" (291–92). This, however, is only part of the story, for God has also set in motion a process whereby inequalities among men are gradually being diminished. "That such diminution is taking place on all sides is apparent enough," and one cannot deny that "distances" such as the one separating the prince and the peasant "are day by day becoming less" (293).

Trollope's "advanced conservative Liberal[ism]" (*AB*, 294) is closely connected to his interpretation of the "facts" pertaining to both human nature and the democratic revolution. The advanced conservative Liberal is conservative in acknowledging the God-givenness of inequalities and in his concomitant aversion to the pursuit of egalitarian utopias (293). He recoils at the thought of mere equality, which he associates with "communism, . . . ruin, and insane democracy" (294). As a Liberal, however, he is critical of the conservative view that the "preservation of the welfare of the world depends on the maintenance" of existing inequalities, for he is cognizant of the historical "tendency towards equality" (292, 294). He accepts the providential origin and justice of this movement as well as the fact that he ought to play a part in reducing "distances." At the same time, because he fears advancing too rapidly toward a more democratic "millennium," he welcomes the "repressive action of a Conservative opponent" as a supplement to his own prudence (293–94).

The *Autobiography* expresses Trollope's core political ideas in a nutshell, but it directs the reader toward the Palliser novels for an elaboration on these themes.¹⁹ A disappointed Liberal candidate for Parliament (*AB*, 290–306), Trollope states that he used these "semi-political tales" as an alternative means of "declaring [himself]" (317). He places special emphasis on the characters of Plantagenet Palliser, a Liberal aristocratic politician, and his wife Lady Glencora as vehicles that he "frequently" used to express his "political and social convictions": "As I have not been able to speak from the benches of the House of Commons, or to thunder from platforms, or to be efficacious as a lecturer, they [the Pallisers] have served me as safety-valves by which to deliver my soul" (180).

Multiple aspects of the Palliser novels suggest that Trollope indeed used them to present his political theory artistically. At the most basic level, the novels echo the *Autobiography's* view of history by portraying the democratic revolution as a historical fact. They do so primarily by depicting a

¹⁹Other Trollope novels feature political themes that are not inconsistent with those articulated in the Palliser novels. For example, *The American Senator* addresses the different paces at which England and America are advancing toward greater equality. Trollope, *The American Senator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chaps. 77–78. Nevertheless, this essay focuses on the Palliser novels because Trollope stresses their particular importance in relation to his own views.

concatenation of historical developments, all tending toward equality,²⁰ and by indicating universal awareness—if not universal approval—of this tendency.²¹ To borrow a formulation of Tocqueville, “all see [the democratic revolution], but all do not judge it in the same manner” (*DA*, 3). Moreover, the novels generally agree with the *Autobiography* about how one ought to judge the democratic revolution. While Trollope’s characters represent a broad range of possible responses to the advance of equality, his leading political characters are “advanced” yet generally prudent Liberals.²² To be sure, one cannot equate Trollope’s views with the views of any particular character, but the novels contrive to commend to the reader a political theory strongly resembling advanced conservative Liberalism.

Although the Palliser novels seem to substantiate Trollope’s declaration that he wrote them with a political purpose in view, a number of scholars have disputed the novels’ political character. These scholars generally maintain that while the novels do contain political elements, these elements are incidental to the author’s more fundamental aim of realistically portraying character or mid-nineteenth-century English society.²³ After all, even a novel entitled *The Prime Minister* features numerous subplots that are unrelated or only marginally related to the political themes, so to suggest that the political occupies a special status in the novels is not, in these scholars’ view, borne out by the evidence.²⁴

Trollope appears to have believed that mixing political and nonpolitical themes in no way detracted from the Palliser novels’ political character. In the *Autobiography*, he acknowledges that the novels were political “for [his] own sake” and featured “love and intrigue, social incidents, with perhaps a dash of sport, for the sake of [his] readers” (*AB*, 317).²⁵ He exhibits no anxiety that the latter might interfere with his ability to express himself politically. Moreover, the fact that the novel form can involve the mixing of light and serious elements means that serious subjects can be attractively

²⁰See, e.g., Trollope, *Phineas Redux* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1:31–50, 69; Trollope, *Phineas Finn*, ed. Jacques Berthoud (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1:245, 251, 2:79; and Trollope, *Prime Minister*, 1:183, 194–95, 358. With the exception of *The Duke’s Children*, all editions of the Palliser novels cited here comprise two volumes under one cover; each volume features its own pagination.

²¹E.g., *Phineas Finn*, 1:163; *Prime Minister*, 1:311, 2:257–69.

²²E.g., the Pallisers, Phineas Finn, and Mr. Monk, a tamed Radical (*Phineas Finn*, 1:118; *Phineas Redux*, 1:80).

²³See note 14 above.

²⁴John McCormick complains that “*The Prime Minister* has been judged ‘political’ despite the circumstance that four-fifths of the narrative is given over to complex relationships among the characters” and “to manners.” McCormick, introduction to *Prime Minister*, xi–xii.

²⁵This does not mean that the novels were political “for [his] own sake” alone, which would imply a lack of interest in persuasion. In all likelihood, Trollope is simply communicating the special pleasure he took in writing these portions of the novels.

packaged, so it is possible that the presence of lighter themes actually enhances readers' engagement with weightier matters.

No novel is pure entertainment (*AB*, esp. 218–24). Discussing the novel as a means of conveying moral and ethical ideas, Trollope claims that in developing his characters and shaping their destinies, the novelist inevitably makes arguments, at least implicitly, regarding good and evil, virtue and vice. He teaches lessons “whether he wishes to teach or no,” and the fact that all novels instruct means that the novelist with a conscience “must preach his sermons” and “have his own system of ethics.” However, the good novelist preaches as he pursues his primary task, which is to delight, “please,” and “char[m]” his readers, providing occupation for their “idle hours” (222). This gives him a potential advantage over those other teachers of morality and ethics: the poet, the clergyman, and the moral philosopher (217–18, 222). Poetry is often difficult, and sermons and “disquisitions on moral philosophy” can be tiresome and dull (218–22). If, Trollope asks, the writer of novels can indicate sound morals by “mak[ing] virtue alluring and vice ugly,” “then will not the novelist have preached” a very effective sermon (222, 224)? By extension, embedding one’s political views in novels featuring well-developed characters and diverse storylines could make one’s political speech more effective than it might otherwise be.

In the end, Trollope is his own best interpreter, and politics are central, rather than incidental, to the Palliser novels, which continually advance his political theory while also diverting the reader with tales of fox hunting, romance, and all the other stuff of life. Furthermore, Trollope’s awareness that the novelist is a teacher suggests that by dramatizing the democratic revolution and recommending a particular response to it, the Palliser novels constitute, in effect, an attempt at semipopular²⁶ political education. For this reason, they are usefully analyzed alongside the great work of political science whose end they appear to share.

Educating Democracy: Tocqueville’s Political Science

Tocqueville’s analysis of the democratic revolution and equality of conditions is an effort to educate modern peoples about their historical era and encourage them to take responsibility for their social and political circumstances (*DA*, 12). Equality is here to stay, and individuals must accept this fact as a nonnegotiable aspect of living in the modern world. However, as the American and French cases unequivocally demonstrate, a “similar social state” is compatible with quite divergent social and political outcomes (12, 10–15). Because numerous factors affecting the outcome in any given nation are within the orbit of human control,²⁷ Tocqueville insists that individuals

²⁶See note 11 above.

²⁷See, e.g., *DA*, 292–302, 675–76.

consider in a clear-eyed manner what they have “to hope or fear” from the new world and endeavor to make the best of their situation (13).

In Tocqueville’s view, many of the challenges to living well under conditions of equality will arise if and when equality is taken to be the sole good. Perhaps the greatest danger is that the juggernaut of equality will threaten freedom itself as well as the human variety that flourishes where freedom reigns. As it involves “sacrifices” and “efforts,” freedom is always difficult to achieve and maintain (*DA*, 481), but Tocqueville stresses that the equality principle itself can endanger freedom. In principle, freedom affords equal opportunities for all, but natural inequalities ensure that the prizes will not be equally distributed. Many will become envious, revealing a “depraved taste for equality in the human heart that brings the weak to want to draw the strong to their level” (52).

Left to follow its most natural course, the advance of equality could result in an extreme universal leveling that would degrade human nature and present grave political dangers. Men who are alike and equal are also weak and isolated. If not encouraged to do otherwise, they will gravitate toward a limited domestic existence and occupy themselves with the “small and vulgar pleasures” within easy reach (*DA*, 482, 663). If benignly disposed, the state hovers paternalistically over these inward-looking, materialistic men and attempts to do everything it can to secure their comfort and happiness. This, however, further disempowers citizens, who gradually lose the ability to accomplish for themselves the most basic tasks and begin to resemble “a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd” (663). Such men will have great difficulty combining against any “aggressions of power” should the need to do so arise (52).

To avoid such “equality in servitude,” democratic peoples must strive for “equality in freedom,” or what we might call liberal democracy (*DA*, 52, 482).²⁸ A liberal democracy is a society that manages to combine recognition of equality with respect for freedom. In such a society, equality is a “manly and legitimate passion . . . that incites men to want all to be strong and esteemed” and “tends to elevate the small to the rank of the great” (52). This “manly” form of equality respects individual differences and thus holds individual rights and the institutional arrangements that protect them in esteem (669–70).

“Equality in freedom” is not a guaranteed outcome of the democratic revolution but is rather the hoped-for product of conscious effort on the part of the legislator, others who “direct society,” and ordinary citizens, which might be helped or hindered by chance and circumstances (*DA*, 7, 265–74). For this reason, societies require guidance if they are to avoid the pitfalls of democracy while deriving from it “all the goods it can offer” (9). More specifically, Tocqueville insists that they need a “new political science” to direct “a

²⁸For a helpful discussion of the idea of liberal democracy, see James W. Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), chap. 1.

world altogether new." The ends of this political science would be "to instruct democracy, if possible to reanimate its beliefs, to purify its mores, to regulate its movements, to substitute little by little the science of affairs for its inexperience, and knowledge of its true interests for its blind instincts; to adapt its government to time and place; to modify it according to circumstances and men" (7). Tocqueville is less concise and less explicit in identifying the means of pursuing these ends, which must be inferred by perusing all of *Democracy in America*. However, generally speaking, the new political science consists in the use of observation, experience, and conjecture to describe and analyze the emerging world and to identify strategies for helping societies to support both equality and liberty. In this connection, Tocqueville's political science identifies various institutions and practices that have the potential to educate citizens either directly or indirectly about the importance of diversity, the individual, and freedom in an age of sameness and majoritarian politics.

While Tocqueville analyzes how numerous institutions and practices might support "equality in freedom," two related examples—local government and voluntary associations of "plain citizens" (*DA*, 667)—will suffice to illustrate this connection.²⁹ Such intermediate institutions as these unite citizens in a common enterprise yet operate on a smaller scale than national governments. They are thus fairly accessible and allow ordinary individuals to do a number of things for themselves. Merely by existing and asserting their own prerogatives, intermediate institutions afford citizens some protection from majority tyranny and the homogenizing forces present in the larger society (e.g., 250, 668). However, these institutions also shape citizens' political judgment and character in ways that make them better stewards of the democratic social state and possibly better human beings.

Associating for purposes of all sorts helps citizens to develop politically relevant habits and skills (*DA*, 489–92), but involvement in local government in particular affords them a democratic political education that equips them for better managing their own affairs and for confronting the challenges of democracy. By occupying himself with small public matters within his grasp, the average person develops a sense of personal and political efficacy and acquires "a taste for order, understands the harmony of powers, and finally assembles clear and practical ideas on the nature of his duties as well as the extent of his rights" (65; 58–65). Having had his judgment developed by this absorption in political detail, the citizen is more likely to have a nuanced understanding of public issues and to be sensitive to the claims of particular individuals against the majority (e.g., 87, 415–16). Despite the administrative shortcomings of democratic government, which can be "wild" and prone to carelessness, widespread familiarity with the basic

²⁹Examples of other institutions and practices Tocqueville discusses are religion (*DA*, 275–88, 417–24, 504–6, 517–21), the legal profession (251–58), civil juries (258–64), and newspapers and freedom of the press (489–92, 668).

forms and procedures of government permits popular rule to work much better than its critics might anticipate (87–88; see also 65).

In addition to its political advantages, uniting with others in a common enterprise enriches the lives of democratic citizens, which tend to be focused on private matters, particularly on material gain (*DA*, 506–9, 511–14). However intermittently, both associations and municipal government draw individuals out of their personal affairs and into community with others (485–92). What Tocqueville says of associations specifically could also be said of local government: “Sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another” (491). It is not necessary that democratic citizens be or become “flat-souled.”³⁰

Educating Englishmen about Equality: Trollope’s Palliser Novels

In advocating advanced conservative Liberalism, the Palliser novels pursue the same general end as Tocqueville’s political science: to help individuals better adapt to the arrival of equality. They do so by stressing the reality of the democratic revolution, recommending a particular response to it, and indicating that the advance of equality is not an unmixed blessing. Nevertheless, the difference in genre means that Trollope will go about his work quite differently. Tocqueville is far from the most abstruse political scientist, but *Democracy in America* is still an analytical work intended as a general guidebook for the modern age.³¹ By contrast, like most traditional novels, the Palliser novels teem with particular people living in a particular time and place.³² Trollope’s political characters are members of the mid-nineteenth-century British middle and upper classes, and his primary audience is the politically interested portion of these same classes. Using the depiction of recognizable characters that elicit sympathy, he endeavors to show his readers how the general principles of advanced conservative Liberalism ought to apply in their own case.

Dramatizing the Democratic Revolution and Advanced Conservative Liberalism

Setting the stage for the novels’ political arguments, Trollope dramatizes the democratic revolution, painting a vivid portrait of a world that is

³⁰Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 134.

³¹*Democracy* does stress the importance of particular cases and local knowledge, but it inevitably does so in a general way (e.g., 12–15).

³²Cheryl Welch notices that *Democracy* features few particular people with proper names. Welch, *De Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 150.

unambiguously tending toward greater equality. Everywhere Trollope's characters look, in all realms of social and political life, ancient privileges are being abandoned and ancient institutions reformed. The Corn Laws had been repealed and free trade in grain instituted.³³ Household suffrage had passed.³⁴ The leader of the House of Commons, whether or not he was Prime Minister, was generally considered the leader of the country.³⁵ Disestablishment of the Church of England was a live political question.³⁶ The idea of a pocket borough was becoming distasteful.³⁷ Such developments produce in the minds of all of Trollope's characters, Liberal and Conservative alike, not only a sense of the direction in which history is moving but also a conviction that while the shift toward equality might be directed and even moderated by sound policy, it could not ultimately be reversed.

The apparently irreversible reality of the democratic revolution elicits a range of responses from Trollope's characters. Excluded from the highest positions of authority and hence free from the responsibilities of governing, Radicals want equality and all it entails without delay.³⁸ Conservatives are in principle opposed to the movement toward equality, but this does not prevent them from routinely cooperating with the spirit of the times and lending support to policies they deem "ruinous."³⁹ At times, their motivation is to retain a share in power in a democratic age,⁴⁰ but Trollope suggests that some higher-minded Conservatives will in good faith labor to ease the transition to a more democratic universe.⁴¹ Now committed in principle to Liberalism, Old Whigs often find the work they must do repugnant to their thoughts and feelings. The Duke of St. Bungay, mentor to Plantagenet Palliser and an Old Whig, sighs wistfully as he must "assis[t] in pulling down institutions which he in truth regarded as the safeguards of the nation;—but which he knew that, as a Liberal, he was bound to assist in destroying! It must have occurred to him, from time to time, that it would be well for him to depart and be at peace before everything was gone."⁴² Finally, Trollope's leading political characters, all Liberals, support a true yet moderate Liberalism that embraces the "tendency towards equality" because it accords with justice. However, they generally eschew both the imprudence of Radicalism and the episodic nostalgia of the Old Whigs for a social and political order that was fundamentally unjust.

³³*Phineas Finn*, 1:245.

³⁴*Phineas Redux*, 1:69.

³⁵*Prime Minister*, 1:183, 358.

³⁶*Phineas Redux*, 1:31–50.

³⁷*Phineas Finn*, 1:251, 2:79; *Prime Minister*, 1:194–95.

³⁸See, e.g., *Phineas Finn*, 1:163.

³⁹*Phineas Redux*, 1:70.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹See, e.g., *ibid.*, 1:46; *Prime Minister*, 1:311. See also *AB*, 293.

⁴²*Prime Minister*, 2:269.

In language that anticipates the *Autobiography's* discussion of Trollope's political theory, the novels defend the justice of assisting the providential "tendency towards equality." This happens most conspicuously when Plantagenet Palliser (now the Duke of Omnium and Prime Minister⁴³ of England) articulates his "political creed" in what has become a well-known chapter of *The Prime Minister* (*PM*, chap. 68). Even to the casual student of the Duke's character, the significance of this relatively long speech given by an ordinarily taciturn man is immediately obvious. His First Lord of the Admiralty, Phineas Finn, is the Duke's only audience and certainly understands that he is witnessing a most unusual display (2:266).⁴⁴ In his speech, the Duke describes two fundamental orientations toward the world: one Conservative and one Liberal. At bottom, these orientations rest on two different attitudes toward inequality and equality.⁴⁵ The Conservative approaches existing inequalities as so many facts about the world, facts that are, not insignificantly, of divine origin. The Conservative, says the Duke, "thinks that God has divided the world as he finds it divided" (2:264). He believes that "he may best do his duty by making the inferior man happy and contented in his position" and therefore seeks to maintain those "distances" and "differences" that have long separated dukes and their coachmen (2:264–65). By contrast, the Liberal compares his own existence with that of the "poor ploughman" and concludes that "it is not all as it ought to be." He seeks to "lesse[n] distances" between the duke and the coachman, bringing them "nearer and nearer" to a condition of equality (2:265).

Noting that "men's intellects are at present so various," the Duke argues that a "millennium" characterized by equality is so "distant" as to be practically "unattainable." Moreover, he acknowledges that reasonable Englishmen have come to fear equality itself as a consequence of other countries' ill-conceived attempts to establish it "by the scratch of a pen or by a chisel on a stone." Nevertheless, the Duke asserts that equality is "a good word signifying a grand idea" and insists that a condition of equality would be "heaven, if we could attain it" (*PM*, 2:265).

Without assuming that the Duke is meant to be Trollope's alter ego, it is worth indicating some differences between the Prime Minister's speech and

⁴³I follow Trollope's usage in always capitalizing "Prime Minister" and in capitalizing "Duke" when referring to a specific duke.

⁴⁴In the *Autobiography*, Trollope says that characters' speeches should be short "unless the writer can justify to himself a longer flood of speech by the speciality of the occasion" (240).

⁴⁵See Craig, "Advanced Conservative Liberalism," 358–59, though he claims that the difference between Conservatives and Liberals centers on their different attitudes toward inequality. I would add that the Whig and Radical positions should be understood in relation to the more fundamental distinction between Liberals and Conservatives.

Trollope's summary of his own views. The first difference is one of tone. Speaking for himself in the *Autobiography*, Trollope declares "equality" to be an "offensive" word, and his Liberals at times speak in almost identical terms (*AB*, 294).⁴⁶ However, at a key dramatic moment, Trollope's beloved Duke⁴⁷ acknowledges "objections" to the word yet ultimately concludes that it is a "good word" and a lofty aspiration (*PM*, 2:265). Furthermore, in his own voice, Trollope is more emphatically Tocquevillian than his Prime Minister in claiming that divinely appointed inequalities will continue to assert themselves (*AB*, 291–92; e.g., *DA*, 51, 513). The Prime Minister acknowledges that the realization of equality is a distant dream but emphasizes only "present" — not permanent — obstacles to this realization.

While the novels as a whole reflect Trollope's own views, it is possible that he chose to spotlight softer rhetoric about equality in order to correct for aristocratic bias in English society. Perhaps he assumed that most of his readers would have easily accepted the naturalness of some inequalities but thought that the idea of equality needed more and better friends in high places. In any event, the novels' support for Liberal ideas often borders on enthusiasm.

The Liberal Spirit: "Going In for the People"

When Tocqueville says that those living in democratic times should be "friends" of democracy, he typically means that one should support the new order yet be honest about its shortcomings (e.g., *DA*, 400, 666, 670). Perhaps for reasons just suggested, the Palliser novels are less restrained in their support of the equality principle. In Trollope's view, those who advocate political reform should support Liberal policies for the right reasons: because they are "Liberal[s] at heart" who "advocate equality."⁴⁸ This category includes "advanced" Liberals such as the Pallisers and Phineas Finn as well as tamed Radicals such as Mr. Monk.⁴⁹ While these "Liberals at heart" generally entertain no romantic illusions about "the people," they "[go] in for the people"⁵⁰ not begrudgingly, but because they hold them in some esteem and want them to be worthy of freedom and self-government.⁵¹ Trollope uses the "metaphor" of a "coach of reform" to illustrate how Liberals and Conservatives ought to be positioned vis-à-vis reform.⁵² While Liberals

⁴⁶E.g., Mr. Monk states, "Equality is an ugly word and shouldn't be used" (*Phineas Finn*, 1:128).

⁴⁷For Trollope's profession of "love" for Plantagenet Palliser, see *AB*, 360n1.

⁴⁸*Phineas Finn*, 1:126, 128.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 1:86, 128–29.

⁵⁰*Phineas Redux*, 1:126.

⁵¹E.g., Anthony Trollope, *The Duke's Children*, ed. Dinah Birch (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 356; *Phineas Finn*, 1:335–37.

⁵²Craig, "Advanced Conservative Liberalism," 359.

might often welcome the moderating effects of Conservatism, which saves them from being overrun by “Jacobins,” they should want to be in the driver’s seat while Conservatives serve as the coach’s “drag.”⁵³

Although the novels seem to favor Liberal leadership of reform efforts, they do not indicate a rationale for this apparent preference. However, they do explore the case for Conservative leadership of reform efforts, and the preferred position may be viewed in light of this. The case for Conservative leadership amounts to the claim that Conservatives would proceed more gently in dismantling ancient institutions and might thus occasion less social disturbance. On the general question of Conservative participation in reform efforts, a Conservative landowner, Frank Gresham, muses that if “the glorious institutions of the country are made to perish, one after the other, it is better that they receive the coup de grâce tenderly from loving hands.”⁵⁴ Some Liberals view the matter similarly. Regarding the question of disestablishment, an issue Liberals considered their own “legitimate property,”⁵⁵ a related Mr. Gresham,⁵⁶ Liberal MP, wonders why disestablishment should not be handled by an opportunistic yet willing Conservative Prime Minister “as well as another.” After all, the Conservative leader might better handle the task if he could manage to provoke less public “animosity” than Liberals might.⁵⁷

None of this is unreasonable, so it is important to consider why Trollope might disagree. Perhaps he thought that, *pace* the Conservatives, necessary regime change would be effected with less social and political disturbance if it were brought about primarily by those known to be its sincere friends. For political reasons, Conservatives might occasionally be willing to take the lead in working toward greater equality, but they generally do so cynically and begrudgingly, angering their own supporters and Liberals, whom they deny political victory. Equality advances, but without much rejoicing. On the other hand, if Liberals lead on principle while Conservatives help establish the pace of reform, a large number of people are left reasonably satisfied. Conservatives get the best deal they can in a bad situation, and Liberals celebrate the advancement of their cause. Conservatives would naturally prefer to be in power, but other arrangements would better support the transition to greater equality.

The “conservative” aspect of advanced conservative Liberalism primarily involves going slowly and applying Liberal principles prudently while remaining a “Liberal at heart.” For example, the Pallisers have solid Liberal credentials, but they are even more committed to political Liberalism at heart than in public. As we have seen, Phineas Finn is the sole audience for

⁵³*Duke’s Children*, 356; see also *Phineas Finn*, 1:333–34.

⁵⁴*Prime Minister*, 1:311.

⁵⁵*Phineas Redux*, 1:113.

⁵⁶*Prime Minister*, 1:181–82.

⁵⁷*Phineas Redux*, 1:46.

the Duke's articulation of his political creed, and the Duke requests afterward that he not go telling others that he has "been preaching equality."⁵⁸ Similarly, while Lady Glencora proclaims in Liberal company that the party ought to be "making men and women all equal," which is the "gist of [Liberals'] political theory," she acknowledges that she would "not admit so much" "if [she] were in the Cabinet [herself]." "There are reticences," she says, and "an official discretion."⁵⁹ Moderation of rhetoric or action is not hypocrisy provided one is like Mr. Palliser in being "really anxious to carry into practice all those doctrines of policy which I advocate in theory."⁶⁰

The Duke "Rebuked": On Being a True "Liberal at Heart"

In *The Duke's Children*, the final Palliser novel, Trollope suggests that the legitimate demands of equality will at times exceed what even the most advanced Liberals are prepared to concede. Having a Liberal political creed is not enough; the idea of equality will eventually come knocking on the door of our private, most intimate affairs. The Duke of Omnium, "who was as truly Liberal in his ideas as any man in England, and who had argued out these ideas to their consequences," initially perceives this knocking as an intrusion (*DC*, 142). The great stumbling block is the matter of his children's proposed marriages. The Liberal Duke considers impossible his heir's proposal to marry an American and his only daughter's proposal to marry the second son of an English country squire. The Duke perceives the merits of the proposed spouses. The daughter of a learned and accomplished man, the American is lovely, spontaneous, and intelligent, and the second son, though in want of money, is "manly," intelligent, ambitious, and generally of good character (304, 323, 391, 414, 420). Nonetheless, although the Duke is positively committed to bringing the classes of dukes and "proletaire[s]" "nearer," he dissociates this political Liberalism from an understanding of equality that would interfere with "his own private feelings, his own pride of race and name, his own ideas of what was due to his ancient rank" (142, 310–11). While the Duke might regard the peer "whose grandmother had been a washerwoman and whose father an innkeeper" as "every whit as good a peer as himself" and be perfectly content to "sit in counsel with Mr. Monk, whose father had risen from a mechanic to be a merchant," his "grand political theories" are "kept altogether apart" from his notions about the aristocratic integrity of his most intimate relations (311).

In the end, the Duke's affection for his children and commitment to Liberal principles are too much for his pride. While he is awkward, shy, and "undemonstrative," the Duke cares deeply about his children's happiness

⁵⁸*Prime Minister*, 2:267.

⁵⁹*Phineas Finn*, 1:126.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 2:28.

(DC, 3).⁶¹ Moreover, he experiences the cognitive dissonance a self-reflective Liberal in such a situation should. For example, his conscience is bothered when he initially enumerates the attributes he would most like to find in a suitor for his daughter, which include the man's being "of high rank, and an eldest son, and the possessor of, or the heir to a good estate" (153). When he ultimately relents, the Duke shows that he has learned something about the proper scope of his most cherished principles. Regarding the American, he acknowledges his "little prejudices" as well as the fact that he ought "perhaps" to be "rebuked" for "a pride of which [he is] conscious" (455, 467). Regarding the squire's younger son, he cannot help but ask "why Destiny had been so hard upon him," but he also "tak[es] himself to task and tell[s] himself that his destiny had done him no injury, and that the pride which had been wounded was a false pride" (471).

It would not have been true to nature for the Duke to undergo a complete transformation of character.⁶² Trollope's Duke is not Dickens's Scrooge, but a "real portrai[t]" (AB, 126).⁶³ In leaving the Duke "rebuked" and morally improved yet still struggling with disappointed hopes, Trollope leaves him in an altogether human state. In such a state, the Duke can serve as a realistic model for the taming of aristocratic pride. How odd it would be for a Liberal aristocrat never to be affected by residual aristocratic instincts. What is reasonable to expect of such Liberals, however, is that they follow the Duke's lead in *endeavoring* to overcome any "little prejudices" based on morally irrelevant distinctions. Trollope thus concludes the Palliser series with an implicit appeal to the nation's highest classes to engage in self-examination and to recalibrate their hearts and minds, if necessary, as they assist society in transitioning to the democratic era.

In addition to indicating a particular political teaching, this development of the Duke's character illustrates how Trollope methodically uses character to "teach" more generally (AB, 222). According to his theory of the novel,⁶⁴ realistic portrayals of "human nature"⁶⁵ elicit readers' sympathy. "So that [his] readers might recognise human beings like to themselves," Trollope states, he always sought "to make men and women walk upon [some lump of the earth'] just as they do walk here among us,—with not more of excellence, nor with exaggerated baseness" (145). Like every human being, Mr. Palliser

⁶¹*Prime Minister*, 1:105, 249–51; 2:258, 266.

⁶²See AB, 183–85, where Trollope discusses his attempt to depict the stability of character over time as well as the "changes which time always produces" (183).

⁶³For Trollope's criticism of Dickens, see AB, 247–49.

⁶⁴Pace Henry James, Trollope obviously did have "views" about "the subject of novel-writing," though his ideas were incompatible with having "a system, a doctrine, a form." James, "Anthony Trollope," in *Partial Portraits*, ed. Leon Edel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 100.

⁶⁵Trollope believed that "human nature" was the novelist's special subject (AB, 144–45, 229–40, 243–49).

is a flawed man, and he leads a cast of equally flawed yet well-intentioned Liberals in pursuit of the ideals of advanced conservative Liberalism. Some philosophers might cringe when Mr. Palliser acknowledges that his wife—a great theoretical proponent of equality—would dislike an application of Liberal principles that took away her ponies.⁶⁶ However, Trollope hopes to “char[m]” his audience with such sketches of “flesh and blood,” and delighted, sympathetic readers are more receptive to the novelist’s “lessons” (220, 222, 228). By inviting his readers to fall in love with his characters and sympathize with their struggles, Trollope gently nudges them to emulate the generally prudent Liberalism of his imperfect models.

Democracy’s Shadows

Despite this strong encouragement of Liberal impulses, Trollope is aware that the emerging democratic universe is not without shadows. In particular, he shares Tocqueville’s view that prioritizing the welfare of the majority means accepting that there will be both less misery and less greatness in the world. As Tocqueville puts it, in place of these “extremes,” “something middling emerges that is at once less high and less low, less brilliant and less obscure than what used to be seen in the world” (*DA*, 674). Much might be said in favor of democratic culture: it is likely to be industrious, efficient, and humane (233–35, 526–29, 535–39). The majority will enjoy opportunities for social and economic advancement and be better off materially than it had been under aristocracy (9, 511–14). Nevertheless, there will also be a marked tendency toward mediocrity that must somehow be checked.

The Orientation of Modern Politics: Benefiting the Many

Tocqueville observes that in democratic regimes, the presumption of human equality is associated with the idea “that the interests of the greatest number ought to be preferred to those of the few” (*DA*, 236–37). Although their regime is only trending democratic, Trollope’s Liberals acknowledge that attending to the welfare of the majority is the modern statesman’s primary task. For example, in the mind of Trollope’s Duke, “the object to which all political studies should tend” is “the greatest benefit of the greatest number.”⁶⁷ He understands this end not in utilitarian terms but simply as a matter of legislating for the many rather than for the few.⁶⁸

A regime focused on the “greatest benefit of the greatest number” behaves quite differently from a regime oriented toward an aristocratic end such as the glory of the nation (*DA*, 8–9). Although Trollope’s Liberals are not indifferent

⁶⁶Phineas Finn, 1:126; *Prime Minister*, 2:267.

⁶⁷*Duke’s Children*, 46.

⁶⁸Birch, editor’s note in *Duke’s Children*, 46n1.

to national glory, the novels suggest that modern politicians ought to concentrate on the mundane tasks that constitute “good government” and promote the general prosperity (*PM*, 1:252; see also 2:384–85). However, even a politician of ordinary ability—like Trollope’s Duke—will often have difficulty contenting himself with such political modesty, and presumably politicians of extraordinary ability would find doing so almost impossible (1:60, 250; 2:303). Nevertheless, when the Duke retrospectively laments his ministry’s failure to accomplish anything of significance, he is reminded by Mr. Monk of the “evil side of ambition,” which pursues “great measures” and “new arrangements” when they are unnecessary and “look[s] for grievances, not because the grievances are heavy, but trusting that the honour of abolishing them may be great” (2:385; see also 1:251). Under ordinary circumstances, modern politics should be rather pedestrian, and one should be satisfied with having played a small part in the political history of his country (2:384–85). The implication is that whether naturally modest or not, modern statesmen must generally resist the allure of greatness and more interesting politics.

The character of a regime is perhaps best reflected in what it honors, and in the modern regime, what benefits the many will be held in high esteem. This might be the industrious habits and “peaceful virtues” favorable to commerce and trade, which are the foundations of the wealth so dear to democratic peoples (*DA*, 595–96). Or it might be simple humanitarianism, as suggested in a discussion of formal honors in *The Prime Minister*. As Prime Minister, Trollope’s Duke insists that it is proper for him to make one Lord Earlybird a Knight of the Garter, at that time “the highest personal honour in the gift of the Crown” (*PM*, 2:223, 228). In the Duke’s view, Lord Earlybird merits the honor for having “devoted himself” “for nearly half a century. . . to the improvement of the labouring classes, especially in reference to their abodes and education” (2:228). His political mentor, the slightly less Liberal Duke of St. Bungay, claims that the proposed lord is “an honour to humanity” rather than “an honour to the peerage,” as the Prime Minister had asserted (2:229). A more traditional choice would involve consideration of political advantage and lineage, yet the Prime Minister points out that standards evolve. For instance, the notion that a knight had to be a “fighting man” had disappeared (2:229–31). In the end, to the dismay of his mentor and many others, the Prime Minister behaves “Quixotic[ally]” by selecting the humanitarian (2:231–32). While the decision might have been somewhat imprudent in being too abrupt a departure from tradition, it is also forward-looking in being consistent with more democratic notions of honor.

Modernity and Mediocrity

Trollope concedes more readily than Tocqueville that a balance sheet comparing the aristocratic past with an increasingly democratic present comes out in

favor of the modern era.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, he, too, acknowledges the virtues of aristocracy and demonstrates that leaving aristocracy behind, though better for the majority, involves leaving behind the social conditions that produced a small number of very high caliber human beings and citizens.⁷⁰ In modernity, one must anticipate the disappearance of this type along with a reduction in the ranks of the truly wretched. Although the sacrifice is worth making, Trollope does perceive this as in some sense a loss.

While the old order was unjust and caused much human suffering, it also produced—not reliably but also not infrequently—many noble-minded and patriotic citizens of the highest quality. These men and women “knew what they were about” and had a strength and unity of soul rarely rivaled by the sorts of citizens born in more dynamic social conditions. Although he might “preach equality” and be less enamored of country sports and “bowing down” than other members of his class, Plantagenet Palliser is still very much an aristocratic personage.⁷¹ “He had,” Trollope says, “an assurance of his own position,—a knowledge of the strength derived from his intellect, his industry, his rank, and his wealth,—which made him altogether fearless of others.”⁷² Mr. Palliser is a magnanimous man, albeit a somewhat modern one.

Even when they are less admirable than Mr. Palliser, members of the aristocracy can still impress the world with the depth and originality of their character. In *Phineas Finn*, a young aristocrat, Lord Chiltern, has no desire to take up the family seat in Parliament or to do anything, for that matter, but marry his beloved Violet Effingham and “ride to hounds.”⁷³ No one is more impressed by Chiltern than the middle-class Phineas, who upon seeing Chiltern for the first time was “stuck . . . almost with dread” by “something in the countenance of the man.”⁷⁴ As he comes to know Chiltern, he realizes that he is anxious to be esteemed by the “half-savage but high-spirited young nobleman,” who always acted for his own reasons and hence “was not like anybody else in the world.”⁷⁵ Phineas is the foil to such “indivisib[ility]” and proud self-assurance.⁷⁶

In the character of Phineas especially Trollope provides a glimpse of the kind of human being that more democratic social conditions will tend to produce. The son of an Irish country doctor, Phineas is well educated,

⁶⁹In Trollope, for example, one does not find the tone of lamentation that one discovers in Tocqueville, who grieves for what is lost while at the same time attempting to see equality from God’s point of view (*DA*, 674–75).

⁷⁰In portraying the nation’s “highest classes,” Trollope attempted to make “the strength and virtues predominant over the faults and vices” (*AB*, 181).

⁷¹*Prime Minister*, 2:211, 258.

⁷²*Phineas Redux*, 2:23.

⁷³*Phineas Finn*, chaps. 11, 19; 1:292–93.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 1:36.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 2:94, 196.

⁷⁶Berthoud, introduction to *Phineas Finn*, xxiv.

clever, and ambitious yet without a secure position in the world.⁷⁷ He quickly abandons his intended legal career in order to take up a seat in Parliament, though his lack of independent means makes political independence more difficult, place-hunting⁷⁸ essential, and access to the parliamentary lifestyle somewhat irregular.⁷⁹

Young Phineas's economic insecurity is correlated with social insecurity. For instance, he is often uncertain and thus anxious about where he stands in the estimation of his noble friends, whom he wishes to think well of him and is eager to be near.⁸⁰ By contrast, Trollope's aristocrats typically lack excessive self-consciousness, and their actions seem to flow from the very center of their being. However, Phineas moves through the world ever conscious of the gaze of others. He is sensitive to all of the subtle social cues that might provide some clue regarding others' estimation of him. This decentered mode of existence and its attendant vacillations are what lead the noble-minded Violet Effingham to observe that Phineas "lacks something in individuality."⁸¹

Nowhere is Phineas's weak sense of self more evident than in his romantic adventures involving Violet, Lady Laura Standish, and Madame Max Goesler, all of which take place across the sea from his pining Irish sweetheart, the existence of whom he initially keeps hidden from his London friends.⁸² In contrast to Lord Chiltern's lifelong, constant love for Violet, Phineas passes quickly from one attachment to the next, leading Lady Laura to exclaim that Chiltern's nature is "deeper" than Phineas's.⁸³ Phineas is self-aware and admits all of his weaknesses, weaknesses that make him an excellent case study in the "dislocati[ng]" effects of modernity on the human soul.⁸⁴

Whither the Institutions?

Like Tocqueville, Trollope acknowledges the drift of modern societies and has no desire to see the world become flat. However, while his analysis in *North America* affirms Tocqueville's view about the importance of institutions in maintaining free government,⁸⁵ the novels tend not to emphasize countering the challenges of democracy with the aid of institutions. Take, for example,

⁷⁷*Phineas Finn*, 1:1–22.

⁷⁸"The action or practice of persistently pursuing government office, esp. for reasons of self-interest." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v.

⁷⁹See, e.g., *Phineas Finn*, 1:131, 138, 285–96; 2:163–64, 179, 230, 269.

⁸⁰E.g., *ibid.*, 2:193; *Phineas Redux*, 1:14.

⁸¹*Phineas Finn*, 2:309.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 1:330; 2:107, 161.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 2:17.

⁸⁴Berthoud, introduction to *Phineas Finn*, xxiv.

⁸⁵See note 9 above.

the tendency of modern societies toward mediocrity. Tocqueville recommends selectively resisting the tendency by carving out space for the development and nurturing of excellences. As one possible antidote, he prescribes that Greek and Latin continue to be taught to students “whose nature or whose fortune destines them to cultivate letters or predisposes them to that taste” (DA, 452). While the majority of democratic citizens would receive an education that was “scientific, commercial, and industrial,” a few would be “steeped” in different waters (451–52). By contrast, in the Palliser novels, Trollope observes the tendency toward mediocrity but offers no clear prescription for it. At most, his general advice to advance slowly and steadily toward a more Liberal future would seem to apply.

To the reader of *Democracy in America*, this emphasis on fostering the gradual advance of Liberalism might seem casual, unguarded, and lacking in attention to the numerous safeguards Tocqueville thinks are necessary to protect human dignity and individual differences from the tidal wave of equality. In all likelihood, however, Trollope did not think that prudence alone could secure the advantages of the “tendency towards equality.” He no doubt simply assumed that England’s existing aristocratic structures, which are ubiquitous in the novels, were resilient enough to undergo necessary Liberal reforms while at the same time serving as useful “drags” on the “coach of reform.” Perceiving the dangers of Jacobinism, Trollope also perceived the legacy of centuries of aristocracy. Provided one could marginalize the Radicals with a series of gradual, well-executed reforms, English society and the English constitutional system were bulwarks of conservatism that already presented formidable barriers to the progress of the democratic idea. The novels’ preoccupation with encouraging Liberal attitudes rather than with constructing and maintaining institutions stems not from a failure to take institutions seriously but rather from Trollope’s agreement with the Tocquevillian notion that every society must respond to the democratic revolution in its own way.

Conclusion

Tocqueville had hoped that others would carry forward his project of “instruct[ing] democracy” (DA, 7). Although one can establish only that Trollope was generally acquainted with Tocqueville’s thought, his own political project is, in effect, a Tocquevillian one. In his own domain, he encourages his fellow citizens to do their best to advance Liberalism in a responsible manner. Ongoing efforts of this sort, originating in various spheres of life, are essential if democratic societies are to be the kinds of societies for which one might hope, rather than the kinds of societies that arouse fear and discourage souls.

In the end, Tocqueville and Trollope arrive at similar theoretical positions, albeit from different starting points. Contemplating the new world, the

French aristocrat brings himself to appreciate the greatness and beauty of democracy, which are rooted in its justice (*DA*, 675). At the same time, while he accepts that the aristocratic social condition will soon be a feature of the past, Tocqueville insists that democratic societies must recognize the truth of inequality to some extent if they are to be just, humane, and civilized. Trollope was a middle-class author living in an aristocratic nation in the midst of a long process of democratization.⁸⁶ For a “moment” during such transitions, Tocqueville claims, the literature of a civilized nation passes through a “very brilliant perio[d]” in which it displays the “literary genius” of both social states (449). Whether Trollope was in all respects a “brilliant” author is a question for another time, but one does find in him a style that is easy and accessible without being vulgar, correct without being fastidious. During such transitional periods, moreover, a particularly diverse array of human types presents itself, and in depicting this variety, the author indicates the virtues and vices of both ways of life. Considering that neither social condition has a monopoly on virtue or vice, Trollope is able to look toward the future with equanimity and even optimism. As the Palliser novels close, Trollope’s Duke is preparing to serve in a ministry headed by Mr. Monk, that son of a mechanic-turned-merchant with strong democratic credentials.⁸⁷ This piecemeal subordination of the aristocracy is, of course, the future of England. Having been fully acquainted with the Duke’s strengths and weaknesses as well as with Mr. Monk’s competence and acquired prudence, the reader is reasonably satisfied that this might simply be another way in which one might “get on.”

⁸⁶His father was an impecunious lawyer, and his mother became a well-known, if not always well-respected, author. Trollope himself was a longtime employee of the British Postal Service. See *AB*, esp. chaps. 1–3, 15.

⁸⁷*Duke’s Children*, chap. 78.