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May, 2016

DESIRING IMMORTALITY AND RESISTING THE REGIME IN POLITICAL  
LIBERALISM

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Political Science

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

Many political thinkers in the Western tradition, both ancient and modern, recognize the desire for immortality as either potentially helpful or harmful to political liberty. Indeed, there are deep disagreements among them over the most basic question: in what manner and to what extent should this desire be approached? Our understanding of their answers are only beginning to be fully understood. Limited scholarship exists on the desire for immortality in ancient Thucydides' and modern Hobbes' writings, but political liberals have been largely neglected. In the dissertation, therefore, the liberal approach to this desire has been studied in order to better our understanding of it. The thinkers I analyze each represent a major theoretical advance in the emergence and development of the liberal tradition: Plato, John Locke, Alexis De Tocqueville, and John Dewey.

I argue that in the liberal tradition, desiring immortality is related to the willingness to resist the authority and coercion of unjust regimes. Plato uses spiritual hope to promote the philosophic life in his encouraging of resistance to tyrannical authority. Locke links prudential hope for immortality to moral living founded on respect for individual rights, in order to oppose absolutism. Tocqueville uses a dogmatic assumption of immortality to tie together respect for property rights with religious conviction, hoping to oppose the excessive material enjoyments and irreligion which he thinks can threaten democracy. Dewey alone rejects this entire package of desiring immortality, respect for private property, and religion as increasingly antithetical to liberalism's development. He argues our true "religious" feelings are for experiencing ideals, which do transcend; our identity is a creation of social interaction in this world.

Lastly, I conduct a survey experiment which aims to empirically test the primary hypothesized relationships from the theoretical chapters. The results support the proposition, most explicit in Tocqueville, that statesmen acting as religious exemplars can strengthen belief in immortality. This effect predicts changes in participants' favoring of individual rights. To the extent that belief in individual rights is a crucial battleground for political change in the 21st century, this study suggests the fate of religion may be more consequential than generally thought.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I also thank my dissertation committee: I thank Professor Jeremy Bailey for exemplifying and encouraging me to hold with deeper regard the tastes, traditions, and forms of a serious scholar. On substance, I am certain the centrality of individual rights in American political thought, a key—if now invisible—step in this project's (and this scholar's) development, would not have been seen without his instruction. I thank Professor Scott Basinger for alerting me to potential problems and opportunities in the design and analysis of the survey experiment. And I thank Professor Laurence Cooper, expert on the infinite in political thought, for his thoughtful guidance and validating support.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lists of Tables and Figures.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Plato.....	16
Chapter 2: Locke.....	62
Chapter 3: Tocqueville.....	95
Chapter 4: Dewey.....	138
Chapter 5: A Survey Experiment.....	182
Conclusion.....	226
Bibliography.....	235

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary statistics.....	193
Table 2: Group sizes following attention checks.....	194
Table 3: COS difference of means among treatment groups.....	194
Table 4: Mean COS factor scores on primary extracted factor, by treatment group.....	200
Table 5: Multivariate Regression Analysis of COSFS on Dewey and Tocqueville Survey Items .....	207
Table 6a: Regression analysis of Dewey attitudes, data subset by treatment group.....	212
Table 6b: Regression analysis of Tocqueville attitudes, data subset by treatment group.....	219
Table 6c: Regression analysis of individualist priorities, data subset by treatment group.....	221
Table 6d: Regression analysis of preference for self-sacrifice, data subset by treatment group.....	223
<u>List of Figures</u>	
Figure 1: Factor loadings of COS items on two extracted factors.....	198
Figure 2: Factor loadings for priority list items.....	209
Figure 3: Factor loadings for sacrifice list items.....	210

## Introduction

In *Natural Right and History* (1953), Leo Strauss devotes significant time to discussing the intellectual significance of Max Weber, a man he calls “the greatest social scientist” (p. 36) of the 20th century. For Strauss, Weber believes that “Man’s dignity, his being exalted far above everything merely natural or above all brutes, consists in his setting up autonomously his ultimate values, in making these values his constant ends, and in rationally choosing the means to these ends” (p. 44). What makes this especially significant lies in what it rejects. The classical alternative to this view of man— as essentially “autonomous”— is that man’s ends are predetermined in “nature,” are teleological, and that the flourishing human life has a preexisting form and purpose (ch. 4). Man possesses inherent desires that he or she cannot overcome, and must be satisfied in order to be good and to be happy. Either one of these views, if adopted, would inevitably lead to different lines of scientific inquiry in the study of human society. But social science has exclusively followed Weber.

The autonomous model has been followed by contemporary social scientists to the present day, and continues to influence even how laymen conceive of human life. Our desires are understood as being quite diverse. We possess various unique preferences vis-à-vis each other regarding how we choose to satisfy them. What exactly any of us may happen to desire at any given moment is dependent upon the unique nature and circumstances of we “autonomous,” rights-bearing individuals. We reveal our unique

desires in our behavior, as our desires only become observable to the social scientist when we *visibly* pursue and/or choose one thing over another.

Certainly not all, or even most, social science research stops here. For example, it has frequently been shown by political scientists that economic conditions can predict the public's electoral behavior, suggesting that it is specifically *material* wellbeing (over advancing an intellectual or moral perspective, for example) that is the primary motivating desire for most people. Prominent Princeton political scientist Larry Bartels writes in his widely influential *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the Gilded Age* (former president Bill Clinton has endorsed this book) that "Economic issues continue to be of paramount importance in contemporary American politics, as they have been for most of the past 150 years" (p. 95). Bartels argues against the myth that non-material issues, such as cultural issues, motivate the electoral behavior of Americans. The oft-heralded pearl of wisdom for presidential politics, "It's the economy, stupid" (Kelly 1992) further demonstrates the ubiquity of this view.

From such scholars and elites, the image emerges of *homo economicus*, a commercial species possessed by a fundamental desire for material goods. To the extent that man can autonomously choose his own ends and means, he does so within a tight range of categories. The means and ends will be material, and presumably the more material the better. We might ask: Has this created a neo-teleological purpose for man? Since man has predictable political and economic behavior, is this his revealed nature and purpose? Well, if so, this purpose is clearly more individualistic and less aspirational toward the great human virtues than is the classical model. The autonomy model has not delivered, some

might say, on the dignity of man “being exalted far above everything merely natural or above all brutes” (Strauss 1953, p. 44).

A social science presupposing the classical or ancient view of man would necessarily lead in a less economic direction. An inventory would need to be taken, aided and directed by the humanities, as to how the nature of human beings is distinctive from other animals. In this inventory, the desire for immortality would certainly be among the most significant of these distinctions. The fears surrounding the awareness of death and the associated desire for immortality are those that are, especially for the ancients, most fundamental to man. These passions can motivate dangerous behavior that runs contrary to the common good, such as a military coup. It thus can and has been a major political problem demanding attention by political thinkers. If we look to many such thinkers addressing immortality, a major objective is not only accommodating this desire, but channeling it in a direction that could actually serve the public good. Indeed, this desire may be as beneficial when managed properly as it can be politically harmful when not.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The aim of this dissertation is thus quite distinct from a study of civil religion, as in Ronald Beiner’s *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (2011). Beiner examines how political philosophers approach the existence of various particular religious institutions within society that offer an alternative source of authority to civil government. He places the idea of civil-religion as an alternative to liberalism, in that the former chooses to empower religion for civic purposes while the latter refuses to do so (p. 2). Rather than this relationship between political society and churches in the history of political philosophy, this study examines the relationship between the desire for immortality and (as will be

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor states that, “the search for this kind of fuller being which is immortality, as John Dunne has shown so vividly, has itself taken a number of forms: the aspiration to fame is to immortality in one form . . . Eternal life is another” (1989, p. 43). We see these different forms in the ancients’ writings.<sup>2</sup> In Thucydides’ *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, symbolic forms of immortality are recognized as possible solutions for citizen-soldiers to better cope with the possibility of death in combat. Those in military service are shown being encouraged to think of themselves as living on through their nation, or to strive for eternal fame by conducting glorious deeds (Ahrensdorf 2000). For Plato, the desire for immortality must instead be satisfied for soldier, citizen, and ruler alike through belief in eternal life. This is possible by elevating the fear of death toward the pursuit of philosophical knowledge of the immortal soul. This

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shown) the philosophical prerequisites for society inherent to the political thought of some political thinkers. Hopefully in an age where the self-identified category of “spiritual-not religious” and atheism is increasingly common, the distinction being made here is sufficiently clear.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, proponents of one form of immortality can be hostile to proponents of other forms of immortality. Take for example seventeenth century Christian Platonist G.W. Leibniz, who states that, “Indeed, to put off [the enjoyment of] actual and tangible goods simply for the immortality of one’s name and for posthumous fame—for the voices of those whom one can no longer hear—what would this be if not magnificent folly?” (from *Leibniz: Political Writings* 1988, p. 67).

knowledge of one's possible immortality, accompanied by belief in eternal truths related to justice, is intended to cultivate a self-sacrificing, virtuous polity.<sup>3</sup>

As Taylor notes in the preceding paragraph, Dunne is singularly direct and lucid in describing the value of the desire for immortality to the ancient world. The following passage is from his *The City of the Gods* (1965):

It might be that the man who faces death squarely is saner than the one who attempts to ignore death. It might also be that the man who faces it with hope is able to face it with more sanity than the one who faces it without hope. It could well be that the stability of Egyptian culture, its persistence for better than two millennia, its ability to recover twice from the kind of downfall that destroyed other civilizations, is not unrelated to the fact that the Egyptian could face death squarely and face it with good hope and had no need to repress the thought of death in order to be happy. (p. 17)

This desire is thus clearly important in the ancient world—both in political philosophy and in political and cultural history. Scholarly study of this desire and its potentially generalizable importance, however, does not extend far beyond these passages. More importantly, the justification for and hence the validity of the contemporary abandonment of the desire for immortality remains unclear. Even the political theory undergirding liberal democracy, it would seem, has become something of a self-justifying exercise in autonomous choice. We reject the desire for immortality because we choose to do so, and

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. What I see as another form of immortality in the writings of Rousseau, as explained by Cooper (2004).

the reasons for this choice are dissolved into our autonomous human nature. From this position, what is the logically consistent explanation for why the ancients took the desire for immortality seriously? They made a different choice.

This dissertation will reject this “different choice” view, and argue that the desire for immortality, while admittedly obscured, remains significant to the liberal tradition of which we are a part. It will be argued that this desire is essential to a stable political order for Plato, John Locke, and Alexis De Tocqueville, and serves as a stumbling block to the progressivism of John Dewey. The reader will be shown the under-appreciated political value bestowed by these major political philosophers on this desire. It will be examined both theoretically and empirically what is gained and lost in their competing models for its political utilization.

Though many scholars have viewed the spiritual dualism of Plato’s dialogues as a primarily exoteric teaching for non-philosophers (e.g. Zuckert 2009), in Chapter 1 I will explain why this view is crucially mistaken. Plato is foundational to the history of political philosophy, and is a believer that metaphysics must ground morality, and philosophy must serve as the foundation of faith. In his writings, Plato presents a seminal model for using the natural desire for immortality to promote the cultivation of human virtue, serving as a theoretical yardstick for all subsequent alternatives, innovations, and outright rejections. For Plato, the immortal soul is indeed knowable (and should be studied). It is this philosophic understanding that motivates the cultivation of virtue through knowledge of the true, the

good, and the beautiful, which sustains freedom within society through just resistance to falsehood and political oppression.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent chapters will move from Plato directly to the “modern liberal” tradition that emerges with John Locke, whose writings are analyzed in Chapter 2. However, it is important to recognize the transition period, recognized by scholars (e.g. Ahrens Dorf 2000; McClure 2011), occurring between the ancients’ focus on the desire of immortality and its apparent abandonment in later liberalism. I will not be specifically addressing this period in later chapters, but would like to provide a brief, cursory overview here by way of introduction.

The transition between Plato and Locke is most visible to contemporary scholars in the writings of early modern political thinkers Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. These thinkers’ portray elements of both the ancient and the contemporary perspective of the desires of man. On one hand, they each follow the ancients in grounding their political systems on existential concerns, but rather than elevate the associated desires, they

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<sup>4</sup> My obvious need to address Straussian/Zuckertian interpretations momentarily left aside, I take this as a fairly standard line among Platonists throughout history. Continuing with Leibniz as my Platonist exemplar of choice, one scholar states in summary that Leibniz “always wants to show that without (naturally immortal) substances or persons there can be no moral concepts, no ‘subjects’ of universal justice, no ‘citizens’ of the divine monarchy or City of God. That is one reason (among many) that Leibniz is hostile to Hobbes” (Riley 1996, p. 51).

maximize the political advantage of the fears. Machiavelli is famous for claiming, for example, that it is better to be feared than to be loved (*The Prince*, ch. 17).

The Hobbesian Leviathan for its part functions in tandem with the “fear of violent death,” which is presumed stronger than all other natural human desires (*Leviathan*, ch. XIII; McClure 2011).<sup>5</sup> This fear resides fortuitously within the human breast as the necessary passion for politics, by which governments can coerce a state of peace. The longing for immortality, however, needs to be squelched. Leaving it vexed and frustrated allows the fear of death to establish its restraining force in taming the public’s passions (McClure 2011). Elevating these passions as the ancients did, toward knowledge of the immortal soul, or channeling them toward politically salutary forms of glory seeking, both

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<sup>5</sup> The very use of the word violent to qualify what kind of death is most particularly frightening, and hence motivating, to human beings, is a curious one. It is, after all, the philosophers in the ancient view that are not fearful of death, and would be the ones who would need to be facing a particularly violent death in order to be fearfully motivated to avoid it. It is the many non-philosophers that we should expect to be fearful of death, regardless of whether it is violent or not. And thus it is more normal, and hence more politically relevant, for the primary drive to be thought of in this way, the fear of death simply, or the desire to survive death simply, outside of some nightmarish thought-experiment having to do with the war of all against all. What Hobbes does in including the word violent is deny the distinction between the philosophers and the non-philosophers, and to a certain extent the distinction between man and beasts, which have no existential anxieties (that can be observed) apart from an existence that ends violently.

are rejected as dangerous and illusory political solutions (Ahrens Dorf 2000). Furthermore, in contemporary fashion, the material desires of man also come to be crucial in motivating much of early modern political thought, though frequently remaining secondary to the existential desires since the initial establishment of political order is the predominant concern.<sup>6</sup>

Though Ahrens Dorf (2000) and McClure (2011) have discussed the desire for immortality with regard to the ancients and the early modern Hobbes, scholars have declined to take up this desire directly in Lockean liberalism. The scholarly oversight is understandable: the liberal tradition as a whole since Locke indeed seems to have little to do with immortality or existential concerns. Specifically, there are three reasons I have considered Locke the most daunting figure taken up in this study.

First of all, reason receives more emphasis in Locke's theory than desire. It is the reasonable decision to preemptively avoid war, not to desperately escape it as in Hobbes, that Locke sees leading man from his natural state into civil society (*Second Treatise*, sec. 21). This emphasis makes man appear more motivated by his "reason" than his fears, desires, or an excessive focus on existential danger. Secondly, there is the complicating matter of Locke's fervent protection of private conscience in religious or existential matters, culminating in his doctrine of toleration. This problem strikes most to home: we still are

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Strauss in *Natural Right*: Hobbes "became the creator of political hedonism, a doctrine which has revolutionized human life everywhere on a scale never yet approached by any other teaching" (p. 169). "Just as Machiavelli reduced virtue to the political virtue of patriotism, Hobbes reduced virtue to the social virtue of peaceableness" (p. 187).

vigilant Lockeans in this sense, and thus here is where the desire for immortality most stubbornly resists its relevance to contemporary liberal democracy. Locke's political theory appears here most unconcerned with preserving the fear of death, as other early moderns do, in his denying government control of the beliefs that shape it. He thus seems significantly less concerned with the concern of securing order on man's dangerous natural passions.

Thirdly, Locke seems to neglect the ancient's concern of promoting virtue, with or without the desire for immortality, beyond illustrating our natural interests and/or duties to secure our liberty.<sup>7</sup> At most, Locke is credited by scholars with addressing virtue through a highly detailed and demanding education program (Tarcov 1999). Yet this education was

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<sup>7</sup> Locke states that parents are "by the Law of Nature, under an obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate the Children, they had begotten, not as their own Workmanship, but the Workmanship of their own Maker, the Almighty, to whom they were to be accountable for them" (1988, p. 305). Of course, there could be no parental "obligation" if there was no choice to obey or disobey their charge as parents. The presence of this choice has profound implications for liberal government's orientation to children's education. He also states that, "The Freedom then of Man and Liberty of acting according to his own Will, is grounded on his having Reason, which is able to instruct him in that Law he is to govern himself by . . . To turn him loose to an unrestrain'd Liberty, before he has Reason to guide him, is not the allowing him the privilege of his Nature, to be free; but to thrust him out amongst Brutes" (1988, p. 309). But again, this unjust thrusting children out amongst brutes is a choice made by the parents, not the state. Entering adulthood is, according to Locke, "the most hazardous step in all the whole course of life" (1996, p. 67).

handled at the level of private individuals, generally conceived as a special relationship between a tutor and the son of a gentleman.<sup>8</sup> The intended political importance for this solution remains unclear.

Nevertheless, there is still room to speculate that perhaps Locke does recognize the existential dimension to the human condition, and accounts for it in his writings in a manner heretofore unappreciated. After all, one of Locke's most frequently used phrases in his *Second Treatise* is the infamous "appeal to Heaven." And as Martha Nussbaum has reasonably noted, "all societies need to think about the stability of their political culture over time and the security of cherished values in times of stress" (2013, p. 2). Did Locke—the great Father of modern liberalism—really neglect to do so, perhaps by misunderstanding or rejecting the great political minds that came before his own? Given that Locke's influence on liberalism is so immense—a tradition he in particular, according to Michael Zuckert, helped to "launch" (Zuckert 2002)—this question demands careful answering. Whether the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. the following passage from Locke's *Essays on the Law of Nature*: "For most people are little concerned about their duty; they are guided not so much by reason as either by the example of others, or by traditional customs and the fashion of the country, or finally by the authority of those whom they consider good and wise. They want no other rule of life and conduct, being satisfied with that second-hand rule which other people's conduct, opinions, and advice, without any serious thinking or application, easily supply to the unwary. It does not therefore follow that the law of nature cannot be known by the light of nature because there are only few who, neither corrupted by vice nor carelessly indifferent, make a proper use of that light" (2006, p. 95).

desire for immortality might help explain questions that persistently puzzle readers of Locke, such as why the private sphere can be left to its own devices in the maintenance of a free society, will be examined.

Later Lockeans, however, do more clearly attempt to answer questions regarding threats to political order and the need for public virtue. And indeed, the natural desire for immortality can be found serving a pivotal role—pivotal in its enthusiastic utilization by one major liberal thinker and in its complete rejection by another.<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter 3 I argue that for Tocqueville this desire is essential to his entire project in *Democracy in America*, connecting religion (which he is well-known for endorsing) together with the ethical-political doctrine of individual rights. These complementary items, by mutually reinforcing each other, offset much of the psychological danger presented to democracies by the countervailing negative effects of irreligion and excessive material enjoyment. A new problem that arises here, however, is actually generated by Locke's philosophical writings, specifically those regarding his strong agnosticism concerning the soul.<sup>10</sup> This leads me into explaining how Tocqueville, in seeking to overcome Locke's

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<sup>9</sup> Tocqueville provides the prime example, and has been recently recognized even more so than in past scholarship. See e.g., Herold (2015).

<sup>10</sup> Jolley (1984) provides a very instructive analysis of G.W. Leibniz's critique of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He makes clear the significance, especially to those Christian Platonists of the seventeenth century, of Locke's undermining of the metaphysical justification for the immortal soul. Not coincidentally I think, Leibniz was

epistemological limitations, encourages governments to inspire by example the public's dogmatic adherence to spiritual beliefs. He cautiously states that:

I believe the only efficacious means governments can use to put the dogma of the immortality of the soul in honor is to act every day as if they themselves believed it; and I think it is only in conforming scrupulously to religious morality in great affairs that they can flatter themselves they are teaching citizens to know it, love it, and respect it in small ones. (2000, p. 521)

Tocqueville is thinking like a good Lockean in this passage. In Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, he argues that the civil authorities may use reason and argumentation to propagate religious beliefs as long as they do not impose penalties to coerce such belief (2010, p. 219). Inspiring by example, as Tocqueville here suggests, seems to conform to this principle. Furthermore, in agreement with the mechanism employed in this call for elected leaders to spiritually lead by example, Locke states in the *Thoughts* that there is "nothing sinking so gently and so deep into men's minds as example" (1996, p. 59). By combining Locke's political principle with this educational principle, one can reproduce the proposal articulated in the above passage. The Lockean framework, with Tocqueville operates out of, does not readily allow for many other obvious ways for the political system to sustain the desire for immortality.

On the progressive side of Lockean liberalism, Dewey carries Locke and Tocqueville's epistemological barrier to belief in the soul to its ultimate conclusion. He

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"much more interested in welfare and in the general improvement of men than any liberal" (Riley 1988, p. 25).

does this by rejecting concern with the soul altogether and, reminiscent of Thucydides, redirects our attention to the existential purpose of identifying the fate and fortune of self with that of society.

I examine Dewey's response to the desire for immortality in Chapter 4. Dewey's approach to spiritual religions, and through it the desire for immortality, is in fact quite hostile. What we find in Dewey is that the desire for immortality must be wholly replaced with the desire for democratic ideals, which is for him the manner of stimulating virtuous activity within a liberal democracy. He sees this as possible by stipulating that religious desire is equal to the desire to live in Heaven, and the desire to live in Heaven is equal to a desire to live in an ideal place. Rather than conceive of ourselves as individual and independent souls in need of salvation, Dewey suggests we collectively identify with our social character and seek out meaning within the social purposes involved in perfecting our democratic culture. I discuss some problems with Dewey's interpretation of religious desire, and its significance as a deeply confrontational break from the liberal tradition he is dialoguing with.

Each of the two "later liberal" approaches just discussed are aimed at cultivating political virtue while presupposing that the soul is not a matter which the state can support through its laws, or teach philosophically in its universities. Such education would be viewed as backwards insofar as the principle of immortality is presumed to be not verifiable through reason, and intrudes on the liberal principle that states should not coerce the citizenry into adhering to particular religious precepts (with some notable exceptions for the idea of God which can be sometimes be seen in the United States). What is left primarily as politically actionable from these two competing liberal theories is to change the rhetoric of

political elites to conform with either Tocqueville's spiritual exemplar model or to Dewey's religion-rejecting democratic idealist model.

This sets up the last major section of this dissertation, and in Chapter 5 I aim to empirically examine the different kinds of personal and political attitudinal effects of the competing models for the desire for immortality. The research design for this empirical analysis takes the form of a survey experiment, the details of which I will leave off until later. My methodological goal is to strengthen the perceived feasibility of combining qualitative political theory with quantitative hypothesis testing. My theoretical goal is to establish whether the effects expected from appealing to the desire for immortality (or the desire for ideals) in the manner specified will actually produce observable changes in contemporary persons' attitudes in liberal democracies. Most broadly, this is intended to represent a small step toward validating the alternative approach to social science which challenges both the original Weberian-autonomy model or the economics-determined model of human beings that developed out of it and is generally assumed in the social sciences.

## Chapter 1: Plato

Plato's writings provide the "original" liberal alternative regarding the desire for immortality, which I will evaluate against the modern liberalism of Locke, Alexis De Tocqueville and John Dewey. I am here borrowing the qualifier "original" from Leo Strauss. In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, Strauss offers the following explanation of what a "liberal" is when one speaks properly of the liberal tradition:

Originally, a liberal was a man who behaved in a manner becoming a free man as distinguished from a slave . . . He prefers the goods of the soul to the goods of the body. Liberality is then only one aspect of, not to say one name for, human excellence or being honorable or decent. The liberal man on the highest level esteems most highly the mind and its excellence and is aware of the fact that man at his best is autonomous or not subject to any authority, while in every other respect he is subject to authority which, in order to deserve respect, or to be truly authority, must be a reflection through a dimming medium of what is simply the highest. The liberal man cannot be a subject to a tyrant or to a master, and for almost all practical purposes he will be a republican. Classical political philosophy was liberal in the original sense. (1968, pp. 28-9)

What perhaps has changed the most to our understanding of the word liberal is we now assume human beings to be liberal by nature. When Socrates serves as interlocutor to people who support and defend tyrannical regimes, we consider this as almost impossible today because no one would seriously support or defend a tyrannical regime.

Yet many people do support tyrannical regimes despite our inability to understand why. Part of this struggle flows from the imperfections of modernity's assumptions regarding human beings. Strauss is uniquely perceptive in recognizing the political crisis these imperfections are creating, and believes that even our most modern liberal societies must learn from Plato's political thought, and indeed must continuously, dialectically, confront the entire ancient world. This orientation, and its justification, is represented in studies such as Strauss (1964, ch. II), Bloom (1968), Pangle (1980), West (1984), Benardete (1989), Cooper (2008), and Catherine H. Zuckert's study of the Platonic corpus entitled *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (2009). Taken together these works structure the dominant approach taken by political theorists to Plato in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The wider literature on Plato is extensive, spanning millennia. This work has not primarily been conducted by political theorists, but philosophers, and thus has quite different investigative purposes and methodological approaches than should be found here. The political theorist's concern is unique, as I understand it, for its over-riding concern of linking philosophical discoveries regarding the human condition to political things, such as: (1) fundamental principles relating to justice, such as the naturalness of freedom and the universality of equality; (2) key political concepts, such as rights, virtue and sovereignty; and, (3) social, political, and governmental institutions, such as popular elections and public education. A notable exception to this disciplinary divide, though differences remain, lies with those philosophers who pursue a research agenda focused on political things, such as Nussbaum (2013).

The analysis of this chapter is essentially Straussian. It recognizes that, for Plato, there is a natural conflict between the needs of the individual and those of the community that is rooted in the unique nature of human beings. Where I suspect the main thrust of Straussian scholarship tends to go wrong, however, is in its interpretation of Plato's solution to this problem. Specifically, I argue that it is a mistake to suspect that his arguments about personal immortality, spiritual goods, and spiritual desires, are mainly intended as noble lies,<sup>12</sup> or simply tools of inter-personal persuasion and/or pedagogy (Stern 1993). This dissertation adopts a clean break from this interpretational stance by taking Plato's spiritual theme as it relate to ethics and politics as earnestly expressed. The desire for immortality is a necessary component of Plato's theoretical goal of cultivating the noble virtues or human excellence, without which would leave only the vulgar virtues of regime sycophancy.

That the desire for immortality is thought necessary to the just political regime is evident in Plato's efforts toward establishing two crucial propositions. First, the desire for immortality is a natural human desire, implicit in the universal desire for happiness that all human beings exhibit. Second, the desire for immortality leads us into this quest for knowledge of transcendent and/or divinely sanctioned justice. To establish the first of these propositions, Plato shows in the *Symposium* how Socrates came through dialectical

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to doubt that noble lies do exist in Plato's works. My point is that there is a clear distinction between the philosopher's poetry, such as the Myth of Er, which has no basis in fact, and his philosophical arguments for beliefs in things such as the immortal soul. Some believe that even these arguments are noble lies, and those who do are certainly not limited to Straussians.

discourse to the fortuitous revelation of the desire for immortality (206a-207a). To establish the second of these propositions, in the *Republic* Plato shows us the benefits—both personal and political, worldly and other-worldly— from philosophic knowledge sought out because of it. The *Gorgias* shows us how the primary competitor and undermining influence in the regime to pursuing this philosophic, spiritual immortality is the regime itself (i.e. regimes not honoring philosophy). Plato shows how desiring immortality and resisting the regime can go together in this bedrock instantiation of what Strauss calls classical political liberalism, and how pursuing happiness in the next life can be compatible with—indeed crucial to—worldly happiness. Worldly happiness is understood here not only in terms of the isolated individual (we are talking about ancient thought here), but as a collective public good derived from establishing a social and political environment in accordance with justice and virtue. I will therefore proceed by balancing my interpretation of select areas of these three of Plato’s dialogues, *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Gorgias*, together with acknowledgement, appreciation, and some criticism of work that has come before.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The reader may wonder that perhaps a chapter on Plato on immortality should be expected to focus more on the *Phaedo*. My explanation for this apparent omission—it certainly could have been included—is that this chapter is meant to focus on Plato’s psychological mechanisms by which citizens might become virtuous. It is not, in contrast, an attempt to actually make the reader virtuous or convince him or her of anything spiritual, which in my view is what the *Phaedo*’s proofs regarding the immortality of the soul are meant to do. In Chapter 5, I will be using similar philosophical proofs of the immortal soul as an

## The Desire for Immortality in Plato

In Book I of *Republic*, Plato begins by putting on display fundamental political problems, appropriately so for a dialogue called *Republic*. (Strauss notes that, “While everything said in the Platonic dialogues is said by Plato’s characters, Plato himself takes full responsibility for the titles of the dialogues” (1964, p. 55).) One of the main political problems exhibited is the efficacy of physical force over attempts at reasonable persuasion (might “makes right”), and the other is the closely related question of the proper or best understanding of justice. Strauss views the *Republic*’s solution to these as involving a submission of eros. In describing it, Strauss states that eros “ranges in its healthy forms from the longing for immortality via offspring through the longing for immortality via immortal fame to the longing for immortality via participation by knowledge in the things which are unchangeable in every respect” (HPP, p. 48). In this definition there is a clear reluctance to include a literal desire for spiritual immortality. I will provide evidence below showing why this is a particularly pernicious error of fundamental consequence.

Furthermore, for Strauss “As far as possible, the love of one’s own must be abolished except as it is love of the city as this particular city, as one’s own city. As far as possible, patriotism takes the place of eros, and patriotism has a closer kinship to spiritedness, eagerness to fight, ‘wasppishness,’ anger, and indignation than to eros” (HPP, p. 48). This is also a mistake. The philosophical love of one’s own immortality actually is what attaches

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experimental treatment to test how effective these proofs might be at elevating hopes and desires consistent with classical liberalism, and at strengthening spiritual beliefs.

one to the just city, making the citizen something of a revolutionary in a bad regime and a patriot in a just regime only.

The key political problem for Plato runs something as follows: Under most regimes, the philosophers, the few who most doggedly investigate through this special human faculty called reason the question “what is justice?” have little to no public influence.<sup>14</sup> Indeed. There are, to present day, neither many historical examples of philosopher rulers (Marcus Aurelius being a notable exception), nor philosopher legislators (the American Founders are a rare exception). The reason for the philosopher’s weakness is that the public (usually swayed by would-be tyrants) respects its own political power, expressed in its ability to derive goods from its government, more than the philosophical power of the few.<sup>15</sup> *De facto* justice is thus often understood as the advantage of the stronger or doing good to friends and harm to enemies, boiling down to the alliance between the government and the majority (e.g. the opening to Book I, especially 332d & 343b). The public struggles to see any benefit (or feasibility—it could be either one or a combination of both) from being ruled or instructed by philosophers (cf. the image of the ship, 488a-489d). The public more naturally negotiates with the ruling authority, a worldly power that for the most part happens to exist by historical accident, in a continual effort to have its (untutored and untamed) desires satisfied

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<sup>14</sup> See e.g. “all those who start out on philosophy . . . most become quite queer, not to say completely vicious; while the ones who seem perfectly decent . . . become useless to cities” (487c-d).

<sup>15</sup> E.g.: “‘Well,’ he said, ‘do you see how many of us there are?’” (327c). This is Polemarchus’ explanation to Socrates for why he has to obey him.

(cf. the image of the beast, 493a-493d). Since the rulers can only provide short term measures of security and other social goods, this is what publics typically negotiate with their government to obtain. Politics, therefore, naturally becomes more about these things instead of aspiring towards the just life individually or the just regime collectively, as envisioned by those who know — the philosophers. Politics is done wrong, justice suffers, and in a sense, no one is happy.

The desire for immortality, on the other hand, allows the philosopher to make the public more resistant to the natural inclination to obsequiously negotiate with the ruling authorities to which it finds itself subject (cf. 503c-d, 517b-c). Citizens, by coming to grips with their deep desires for permanent happiness via personal immortality, and becoming interested in philosophic investigations for how to achieve it, show an increased willingness and ability, by desiring spiritual rewards, to stand up for justice and endure unjust punishments from the regime when necessary (e.g. 522e). In a word, citizens become virtuous.

#### *Virtue as Regime Resistance*

By arguing that the desire for immortality is essential to Plato's theory for the promotion of virtue, the various understandings of what "virtue" is present a potential and familiar stumbling block. Whereas the desire for immortality is straightforward enough to understand – the desire never to die — virtue frequently lacks such a straightforward and functional definition to which we can all mostly accept for purposes of discussion. Many of those who try to define virtue end up only running from it and hiding behind some similarly vague term such as nobility, wisdom, self-sufficiency, or perhaps the term most familiar to lovers of Aristotle's work: magnanimity.

Specifying virtue as civic virtue is something of an improvement toward conceptual clarity, but then this term also has a deep underlying ambiguity. This ambiguity can radically alter what we mean by civic virtue, all depending on how it is resolved. Specifically, does civic virtue necessarily entail serving the regime, or does it more properly involve doing justice to one's self and one's fellow citizens? Ideally, serving all of these parties – regime, self, fellow citizens – can and perhaps should intersect, but at least sometimes they certainly do not. This is especially the case under a corrupt and unjust regime, and difficulties can also arise, for example, when a just regime is being transitioned into. This is because under a newly established just and legitimate government, many of one's neighbors and fellow citizens may very well still want to serve, flatter, and protect the previous, unjust regime (e.g. the Baathists in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq). Where does duty and/or virtue exist in these most difficult and complex of cases? Indeed, these cases must be where the proper understanding of civic virtue is most important of all. On the line are the safety and prosperity of the regime, and all the members that comprise it, inside government and out of it.

A workable solution to the question of civic virtue I think can be found by having recourse to the traditional understandings of the term in classical political liberalism. The commitment to the freedom and equality of individuals, and the aim of transforming society to respect this freedom and equality, is both the creed and the cause of the citizen in political liberalism writ large. It is an understanding of civic virtue that seems to self-consciously avoid the contradictions that might arise between being a virtuous neighbor, individual, regime loyalist, father, mother, soldier, etc. It is not only for the appeal of conceptual consistency and familiarity that I make this point, however. The most important

consideration is that as soon as we turn to the tradition of political liberalism in its entirety, we find at the beginning of that tradition the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues.<sup>16</sup> Once we recall what Socrates represented to Athens (and especially Plato), we discover his views of citizenship and civic virtue,<sup>17</sup> which are the original understandings of these terms in political liberalism (Strauss 1968, pp. 28-9).

Now that key terms have been defined, a brief recapitulation: What I will be seeking to establish in the textual analysis that follows is the inherent link (and the importance thereof) in Plato's work between civic virtue (which relates to political order and justice) with a psychological element of human nature much less studied in this literature—the desire for immortality. Strauss scholars all recognize the need for a stable regime, but do not recognize that Plato thought the desire for immortality to be crucial to that stability. I will argue that the belief in a human desire for immortality is crucial to Plato's politics, specifically with respect to his vision of the just regime and how civic virtue — among the rulers and the ruled, leading to social harmony — can be brought about.

This interpretation should be important for scholarship on John Locke and the entire liberal tradition as well. I will be arguing in later chapters, for instance, that later liberals adopt similar approaches to Plato in trying to cultivate civic virtue, only then within a more

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<sup>16</sup> Strauss (1953) states that, “The particular natural right doctrine which was originated by Socrates and developed by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Christian thinkers (especially Thomas Aquinas) may be called the classic natural right doctrine. It must be distinguished from the modern natural right doctrine that emerged in the seventeenth century” (p. 120).

<sup>17</sup> See Strauss (1983, pp. 38-66)

Lockean scheme.<sup>18</sup> And we will see that virtuously resisting the unjust regime is a consistent theme, as is the penetrating search within the human spirit by political theorists to find the spiritual support for this resistance. Many more details of this relationship between immortality and civic virtue will be discussed below.

### *Discovering the Desire for Immortality*

I begin by grounding my case for this link by focusing very narrowly on Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, and then turn to Socrates' early conversations with Cephalus in the *Republic*. This approach is generally consistent with the many scholars who have studied the special relationship between these two dialogues on the topic of desire, such as Nussbaum and Hursthouse (1984), Kahn (1987), Nichols (1998), and Cooper (2001 & 2008). I then turn to the *Republic*'s exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus, and the *Gorgias*'s exchange with Callicles, to show the problem posed by the pressure of the regime on the individual to conform, to serve, to flatter, and to obey. This series of connections, to my knowledge, is not clearly made in any of the previous political theory literature.

We should begin with an acknowledgement that the desire for immortality in Plato has not received a lot of attention for a reason. It is not nearly the most explicitly emphasized theme in his works. There may be good reasons for this, and they may be quite

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<sup>18</sup> The dialogue between the ancients and the moderns on the human desires has recently been gaining more valuable attention. See, for example, Cooper (2004). He argues there that, "all serious moral and political thought, whether it would like to or not, is made by its own terms to concern itself with the factual question of desire" (pp. 105).

intentional. Plato could write esoterically for fear of persecution (similar to that suffered by his teacher Socrates) or for pedagogical reasons. What should not be denied is that Plato was a theological reformer and strong critic of Homer and the Olympian gods. Nor should it be denied that Plato thought the elites should mask philosophical truth about human existence in legends and myths. The scholarly debate I am intending to stir up is what truth are these myths covering up? It is often assumed that, due in no small part to the influence of Strauss, underneath these myths is a philosophic acceptance of materialistic atheism.<sup>19</sup> An alternative that is generally not considered is that these myths are poetic extensions of philosophical insights, making them suitable improvements to Homer's poetry, not only in terms of their character shaping capacity, but because they have more of the transcendent in them. My aim is also to strongly resist, on the opposite side of the interpretational spectrum, extrapolating too loosely from Plato's conception of eros. The risk here is turning eros into something of a mystical notion that inexorably draws human beings towards the truth. I think this is a mistake, and that the desire for personal immortality, a hedonistic concern, allows us to recognize Plato's, perhaps intentionally esoteric, demystification of this concept. This desire will be shown to follow the plain logic of enlightened self-interest.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This perspective allows for comments like "in the *Republic*, Plato reduces the sacred to the useful" (Strauss 1968, p. 27).

<sup>20</sup> Other scholars have argued quite the opposite, that Platonic eros has little to nothing to do with self-interest. See e.g. Osborne (1996), Rhodes (2003).

To get to this middle ground interpretation that I have been describing, let us examine how in the *Symposium* the desire for immortality is portrayed. It certainly is not a self-evident force bursting out of every corner of human nature. Had this been Plato's view, then little explanation of this idea would be needed, and much more scholarship would likely exist concerning it. What we find instead is that this desire is inherent to some elements of human nature that are far more visible and easier to acknowledge, and in many ways actually serve to conceal the desire for immortality. Here I am referring to the natural human desire for pleasure and happiness. So let us now analyze this surprising inference Plato presents from happiness and pleasure-desiring to immortality-desiring, preceded first by a few contextual details.

First, the account of the desire for immortality is made much more explicit in the *Symposium* compared to any other dialogue—indeed, most dialogues have their own theme in this sense. The account of this desire is relayed by Socrates, who in turn reports to have been introduced to and persuaded by this account from a mysterious prophetess with the name Diotima. This fact further drives home the point that this desire is not one that is at all easy to identify, for even Socrates has purportedly come to know of it only from a fortuitous encounter with an enlightened prophetess. Lastly, Socrates, who is famous for being wise by virtue of his awareness of his own ignorance, counter-intuitively asserts in the *Symposium* to have one particular expertise after all – an expertise in erotics (177d).

Although Socrates normally asserts to know nothing, he here is surprisingly comfortable asserting to have what sounds like a knowledge or a craft, and one that he presumably would have had to have been trained in by an expert of sorts. If Socrates is still consistent, then this expertise must somehow be significantly different from capital “K”

Knowledge. Perhaps knowledge of our desires is not quite transcendent knowledge, and so is not quite knowledge at all, in the manner Socrates understands the term. This seems more probable when we observe how it is that we all learn of our desires, which is through the mere sensing of their incessant pangs in lived experience. An expertise in these desires, or what he calls erotics, then could in some ways seem to be consistent with various kinds of crafts. A potter, for instance, can have practical expertise in pottery without having knowledge of the metaphysical status of his materials, equipment, or technique.

Furthermore, we know what an expert potter can do in the practical art of pottery versus a novice: he can sit down with his materials and create the best pottery – the pottery that is most useful and/or pleasant looking, that most deserves to be called pottery in the first place. We also understand that it is by practice and training with the equipment, and the knowledge of making pottery, that one acquires such expertise.

Even if this is sounding mechanical, a refined aesthetic sense would still seem needed to be developed. It is less clear, though, what an expert in erotics is capable of producing, or why when everyone has these desires that some can come to claim to be more expert than others, other than perhaps by virtue of the experience that age brings with it. On the other hand, some people are certainly better seducers than others, and Socrates is certainly seductive. We see this message delivered in bright colors in the exchanges Socrates has with Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, for instance (*Symp.* 217b-e). Rather than focus too much on Socrates's character as seducer, however, it is more to the present point to ask what kind of knowledge Socrates possesses in order to be an expert in seduction, particularly the seduction of would-be philosophers. We must also remember here that Socrates claims not to be a teacher (*Apology* 33a).

Much of this mystery is provided a provisional explanation when Diotima (recounted by Socrates) articulates the well-known metaphysical theory of the ladder of love, which claims that there is a hierarchy of the beautiful things which, when our minds are enlightened to this fact, our desires can be elevated more and more to the most intensely and truly beautiful. The ladder ends in the sight of the Beautiful itself, or what can be understood as the experience of a beatific vision (often referred to quite derisively in early modern philosophy<sup>21</sup>). Socrates's power as an expert in erotics seems to derive from his ability to either embody or mediate between the beauty desiring individual and higher forms of beauty.

While this compelling and complicated theory is very important to my investigation as a whole, I want to proceed by primarily focusing on some of the particular components of this account. This focus then sets up the transition into a discussion of the importance of immortality to human nature in Plato's political philosophy, following Socrates's claim that "one could not easily get a better co-worker with human nature than Eros" (*Symp.* 212b). These ideas, I just want to re-emphasize in passing, will be also be applied in subsequent

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, Hobbes states that, "What kind of felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour Him, a man shall no sooner know than enjoy, being joys that now are as incomprehensible as the word of school-men beatifical vision is unintelligible" (*Lev.* 34-5).

chapters to some of the later periods of the political liberal tradition, from Locke to Tocqueville to Dewey.<sup>22</sup>

The first premise of the desire for immortality comes from Diotima's claim that, "the happy are happy by the acquisition of good things; and there is no further need to ask, 'For what consequence does he who wants to be happy want to be so?'" But the answer is thought to be a complete one" (Symposium, 205a). The centrality of pursuing happiness to human nature is not a foreign one to modern readers, nor clearly was it one to the ancients. It is indeed quite difficult to dispute that happiness can stand alone as an end in itself, and really need not be pursued for any other supposedly higher or more important end. We are finite beings ignorant of the larger terrain, after all, so to dismiss happiness as our human end seems to

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<sup>22</sup> Patapan and Sikkenga (2008) provides an interesting contribution to our understanding of the debate between Plato and Hobbes on eros, which in the manner they present it, is in several ways related to the desire for immortality that I am discussing. However, I disagree with the central claim of the authors' interpretation of Platonic eros as a transcendence of self (I find the erotic Socrates very selfish indeed, along similar lines with Cooper (2012)) and an embracing of self-sacrifice, the reasons for this disagreement becoming self-evident below. See also Stauffer (2007) on the importance of the "quarrel" between Hobbes and Plato in the early thought of Leo Strauss, although I have reservations with this interpretation as well, fearing that it may overly emphasize, or to a certain extent misconstrue, the role of obligation in Plato's political philosophy.

dismiss our most obvious compass toward a good life. It is a simpler task, and more common, to argue over what true happiness is, and from where it can be derived, be it wealth, God's grace, public esteem, etc.<sup>23</sup> The importance of happiness to human beings thus seems to be one of the most durable valuations that human beings collectively share.

The political dimension to this arises because happiness is so fundamental to human nature, which implies that the political ordering of human society must take account of it in one way or another. I think few would deny, for example, that the *Declaration of Independence* is a highly political document, which of course is famous for sanctifying the existential right to the individual pursuit of happiness. The underlying psychological relationship between happiness and literally acquiring "good things," however, is a more contentious and widely debatable issue. Just think of how often we question whether money can buy happiness, or is the root of all evil. Or consider the popular expression, "it's not the destination, but the journey" that brings happiness. It is therefore particularly notable that

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<sup>23</sup> Some authors distinguish the happy life from things like the meaningful or purposeful life, and thus can dispute whether happiness is really the human end. I find this distinction mostly semantic—if you lead a life that is meaningful to yourself then you have some measure of happiness by this very fact, insofar as you would become less happy if that meaningfulness were to be lost. See e.g. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805/> (last accessed January 19, 2016).

here the language of actual acquisition and possession is made a central feature to this ancient account of happiness so foundational to the Western canon.

There are a couple of reasons why this is puzzling. First of all, we tend to think of Socrates as exceedingly happy but defiantly and even self-righteously poor — although he did, like many poor philosophers, have some rich friends. It seems denied here by Socrates that happiness involves the contemporary romanticization of the pursuit, longing, or desiring of happiness and good things. Rather, Socrates defines it is the actual *getting* of good things that produces happiness.<sup>24</sup> This raises significant confusion when we recall that Socrates dedicated his entire life to the pursuit of wisdom without ever admitting to acquiring any. Yet in this passage it is not the journey and pursuit, but rather the destination and possession of the good things that produces the individual's happiness. This seems to suggest that Socrates's expertise in erotics leads him to lie about where his happiness is coming from. For Socrates's happiness to exist seems to have required him to deny that he has good things. Perhaps even more to the point — his denying of possessing the good things is precisely what helps him to acquire good things. His denial of knowledge helps him to acquire philosophical friends, just as his denial of wealth somehow seems to help him to acquire rich friends. It is no wonder Socrates takes such quick issue with Cephalus' description of justice in the *Republic*, which includes the necessity of being honest, truthful, and without debts (331c).

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Locke's *Thoughts* on the joy that anticipation of heaven brings with it, as a dimension of how belief in the afterlife can motivate good behavior and be part of the proper education of a young gentleman.

Diotima, Socrates informs us, later summarizes this discussion they had together by stating that, “eros is of the good’s being one’s own always” (*Symp.* 206a). Eros is here<sup>25</sup> understood as a sort of desiring of happiness, and in its essence aims at permanent acquisition. Human beings do not tire of happiness, and thus do not ever wish to lose or part ways with the good things that are causing it. When we are happy, we wish for that happiness to continue indefinitely, and we necessarily become less happy by its parting from us. Furthermore, we evidently do not tend to want the good things for their own sake, or because they are objectively and independently good, but because they make us happy. So, we desire them simply for that reason alone.

Climactically, Diotima then states that, “From what has been agreed to, it is necessary to desire immortality with good, provided eros is of the good’s always being one’s own. So it is necessary from this argument that eros be of immortality too” (*Symp.* 206e-207a). The desire for immortality is here introduced very casually as a straight logical inference from the character of the human desires, following from the original premise of happiness as the perpetual possession of good things. To desire the possession of good things constantly, always, forever, is to implicitly desire one’s very being to at least be coexistent with those good things. The *desire* for happiness is seen as logically bound to the *need* for personal existence at least co-existent with the good things available for

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<sup>25</sup> Context of course always beings so crucial in any interpretation of a Platonic dialogue. It is important here to note that there can be no glossary of terms for the *Platonis Opera*, in that words are consistently understood as oftentimes clumsy symbols of differing concepts depending on the context.

acquisition, both of which apparently stretch ever outward. We might speculate that animals, who also seem to desire endlessly, nevertheless lack the intellectual structures to imagine the infinite, and hence would be prevented from such endless desiring and apparent alienation from what this desiring can bring. It is the human imagination that is crucial here,<sup>26</sup> and what so many political philosophers such as Plato and Hobbes consider as setting human beings on variously desiring and pursuing such disparate objects. Without imagination on the one hand and variation in knowledge of erotics on the other, the behavior of human beings might perhaps be as uniform and limited as that of other animal species. The diversity, or what can also be called disagreement, that emerges among human beings in turn generates a multitude of political problems, as politics depends on some unity at a fundamental level.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Waldron (2002), where the argument is made that Locke bases equality on the human capacity to think of abstract ideas, which enables man to imagine a god to which he owes duties.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*: "We thought we saw all these herds [of cattle and horses] more willing to obey their keepers than are human beings their rulers . . . Nor have we ever perceived a herd uniting against its keeper . . . on the other hand, human beings unite against none more than against those whom they perceive attempting to rule them" (2001, pp. 21-2). See also James Madison, *Federalist #10* on the logic behind the "expanded republic."

Zuckert (2009) interprets the desire for immortality discovered in the conversation between Diotima and Socrates much differently than I do here. Whereas my own take is the desire for immortality is satisfied in Plato by pursuit of literal immortality, she sees within the text more of a symbolic form of immortality. She states that, "Because human beings are mortal, however, the only way we can even approximately fulfill our deepest desire is by reproducing the best parts or aspects of ourselves in members of the next generation" (p. 195). This strikes me as an error in interpretation. If it is true, and "immortality" is that which is achieved simply by producing like-minded students, then there does not seem to be much nobility in it, nor need for philosophy. One needs only to be extremely vain and willing to act like a believer to be persuasive. Zuckert also states that "Knowledge of the best form of human life had to be demonstrated in deed or in fact (*ergon*). That is the reason Plato presents Socrates not merely as the enunciator of a certain argument about the ideas but emphatically as representing a certain, philosophical way of life" (p. 200). This places a great deal of emphasis on persuasion that seems to undercut the idea that Socrates represented the philosophical way of life not because this was the manner to be the most convincing and to thereby engender an immortal teaching, but because Socrates saw philosophy as the pathway to his literal immortality regardless of whether he persuaded anyone of anything. The line is dangerously (from an interpretational standpoint) narrowed between philosopher and tyrant, should we accept this distinction as a genuine one for Plato.

Bloom (2001) offers a more accurate yet I think overly tragic interpretation. He notes that living on symbolically for Socrates would not be sufficient because "poems,

inventions, laws, cities, teachings, and the fame they bring with them . . . are almost certain to be extinguished with time” (p. 146). He then concedes that “It is true that the objects of the philosopher’s contemplation are immortal, but Diotima wishes to make us forget that the philosopher is not. She says that the philosopher is immortal if any human being is. That is a very big if” (p. 152). My rejoinder to this is that to my understanding a major part of Plato’s philosophic project is in fact using philosophy to put the size of this “if” into its rightfully manageable proportion.

From this brief analysis we can begin to draw a few important conclusions. One, Plato recognizes that the apparent desire for happiness that human beings exhibit is real, constant, and fundamental. Two, that this happiness hinges on the possession of the good things, and this good is both perceived and hence pursued subjectively, respective to the independent judgment of individuals. Three, that for Plato there is some crucial disconnect between what we fundamentally desire as good (happiness and immortality) and what we actually pursue absent a philosophical understanding of our desires (the near and the certain). This derives from the difficulty of comprehending the logic of happiness, namely its dependence on acquisition and the necessity of immortality to accommodate its reach.

The cause of this natural human difficulty seems to derive from human beings’ experience of being born, metaphorically speaking, in a dark cave (see *Republic*, bk. VII). Socrates, as philosopher, had already dedicated his life to the pursuit of wisdom, but still required external inspiration from a priestess to advance in this pursuit. Cave dwellers need assistance from someone who has already seen the light. This fact brings out the distinction

between dialectically investigating contradicting hypotheses versus the initial imagining, or one might say creating or constructing, of a hypothesis to question in the first place, which obviously requires either self-contained, reflective inspiration or external suggestion. This is consistent with Socrates' frequently crediting his daemon for guidance (*Apology* 39c-d, 40a; see *Symposium* 202d for love's characterization as a daemon), and for his expressions of surprise when coming upon apparent truths in the course of dialectical investigation (e.g. the *Republic*, especially the discovery of justice, 432d-e).

This phenomenon of natural human ignorance and dependence on the wise also relates to the Platonic paradox of how one without knowledge can ever come to possess it, i.e. how one in ignorance could ever *confirm* to himself a possible discovery of knowledge (see e.g. *Meno*). To confirm that one has come across truth implies appeal to an authority, but the ignorant cannot be an authority regarding truth. (So goes the paradox.) In practice, however, we see this problem surmounted by Plato through the activity of dialectic, where the refuting argument is understood as closer to truth than the one refuted (if not itself definitively true<sup>28</sup>). In this way the philosopher engages in dialectical ascent by conversing with other philosophers, and why Socrates looks forward to meeting great men in the afterlife, supposedly to continue this activity forever (*Apology* 40e-41c). Socrates usually expects more than meeting a god or angels without the opportunity to converse and to learn (see *Republic* bk. X). This philosophic method holds here between Socrates and Diotima as well, as it was Diotima who "went on to refute" (201e) Socrates' pre-existing beliefs of eros,

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<sup>28</sup> see *Republic* (511b), the method of proceeding "from hypothesis to hypothesis."

leading him to assert a “state of conviction” in Diotima’s beliefs about eros (212b).<sup>29</sup>

Socrates himself consequently ascends closer to the Beautiful by Diotima’s helping him to discover the truth of eros, namely that it contains the desire for immortality.

It is thus a truly arresting problem Socrates is pointing out when he states that, “he who does not believe that he is in need does not desire that which he does not believe he needs” (*Symp.* 204a). The reason this is a problem is that although for Plato the desire for immortality is implicit in the desire for happiness, it requires recognition. Outside of this recognition, the desire for happiness is often satisfied through the pursuit of immediate pleasures that disregard the transformative long term dimension. Shortly, for instance, I will be discussing Cephalus as being the key to beginning the discussion of the *Republic*, where Socrates had initially been pressured by a large group with the plan to have dinner and watch a torch race with horses. Socrates’s strategy is to ask Cephalus what it is like getting old, and Cephalus points out that the fear of what awaits him after death is preeminently important to him because of his old age, and the question of justice and how to befriend the

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<sup>29</sup> Early modern and enlightenment philosophers grappled with this problem as well, appealing to, variously, a confirming faculty understood as natural light, independent self-evidence of the proposition itself, or an impression of vividness and clarity (Descartes, Locke, Hume, respectively). Arguably today we commonly appeal more to whether a thing “sounds right” and “private conscience,” or whether there is objective validity in the method leading to the conclusion, or statistical measures of “confidence,” to replace these standards of truth justification.

gods takes center stage. What follows could not have come without such a skillful introduction, the credit of course belonging to Socrates and his expertise in erotics. Socrates used Cephalus to make the forceful group see that they desired not the torch race or dinner, but knowledge of how to live a good life. Fears and anxieties were first needed in order to motivate a desire for immortality, leading to a desire for philosophic answers, just as hunger and boredom are needed to motivate a desire for dinner and torch races.

### *The Compatibility Thesis*

We as human beings are thus confronted with important problems pertaining to the selection of what types of goods to pursue and the means to the acquisition thereof. Mainly, there are the problems of goods' sustainability, durability, as well as their potential loss, and the potential permanence or encompassing nature of that loss. The seventeenth-century Platonist G. W. Leibniz offers a helpful image for this situation. He states that, "We can miss the right road by trying to follow the shortest one, just as the stone by falling straight down may too soon encounter obstacles which prevent it getting at all close to the centre of the earth" (NE, sec. 194).<sup>30</sup> When happiness is pursued on a direct moment-to-moment basis, this could very well be harmful to one's longer term cumulative happiness prospects. Longer term planning of course requires things such as the maintenance of one's health, access to resources, and one's material and intellectual ability to respond to the unforeseen.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Locke on the "Law of Reason" as being that "which hedges us in only from Bogs and Precipices" (ST, sec. 57). Note the contrasting images of the absolute pull of the center of the Earth on the stone versus the traveler traversing surface terrain.

These trade-offs are true for both happiness in this world and in the next. The unphilosophic life, or failure to comprehend the whole, subverts our ability to maintain our happiness, which requires a secure substructure or foundation in our continued existence. Just as we must plan for this life so as to satisfy our desires, any happiness obtained in the afterlife would also require careful planning. There is thus little evident tension between happiness in this life and permanent spiritual happiness – they both involve the pursuit of pleasure (though perhaps different in kind) and the overcoming of obstacles through self-restraint inherent to its effectual pursuit. The ignorant will not be equipped to engage in successful pursuits, and will be *de facto* dependents on the caprices of fortune. So, once *the inherent need* for knowledge and durability becomes apparent, unless the entire pursuit of happiness is simply given up as an ultimately tragic endeavor, bodily pleasures must become secondary sources of happiness. Indeed, bodily pleasures would almost seem to have to yield entirely to the pursuit of intellectual or spiritual goods, assuming the pleasures they bring are a hedonistically equivalent alternative.

Wisdom is in this way the most important virtue for Plato, and the one which seems in some passages to be the unifying principle for all virtue and happiness (see e.g. *Phaedo* 69b). In an important sense, virtue can be thought of as this ability or power to acquire the best things, for the very plain reason of having the knowledge to be able to distinguish them from the base things. Thus for Plato, the individual of complete virtue, the philosopher, is indeed the happiest. He or she endures the longest and acquires the best things better than anyone along the way, and is thus the most suited to rule him- or herself.

The compatibility thesis might, on the other hand, be completely false. The tragic nature of bodily pleasure can only motivate a switch to philosophy if its pleasures are at

least equal with bodily pleasures in their duration and intensity. Philosophy *might* be able to secure my hope in being an immortal soul, but is an eternity as a spirit desirable? What if the intellectual or spiritual pleasures promised by the philosopher are woefully less satisfying than bodily pleasures? Why bother with seeking existence for its own sake? Now, the individual must face a difficult choice between settling for a lamentable sacrifice in bodily happiness in hopes of some sort of spiritual compensation in the afterlife. The brief but thrilling life suddenly, for at least some, becomes more choiceworthy. Thrill seeking and drug use becomes more choiceworthy. Dying young, or even suicide, becomes more choiceworthy. If the compatibility thesis is false, and the desire for immortality can truly be given up, then philosophy can hardly compete with the pursuit of bodily pleasures.

Fortunately for philosophy's prospects, the only way to know if philosophy offers worldly happiness is to trust the reports of philosophers who have experienced both bodily pleasures and intellectual pleasures. Only they can say which is greater than which (*Republic* bks. VI-VII). For Plato, of course, philosophers faced with the choice always prefer philosophy and remain philosophers.

In sum, without the temporal dimension, and the need to be mindful of "and then what," it would appear to be unnecessary to become philosophic. Knowledge and contemplation of the good might be good for those who want to be philosophers, but I prefer the shorter life dedicated to intense and immediate pleasure. The options are all evaluated based on how much pleasure they appear to offer to the individual. This basic problem of subjectivity regarding what is pleasant is a big reason why the desire for immortality is tied to the cultivation of virtue for Plato and many other political philosophers. In a sense it is the ultimate trump card, as no one could vigorously argue that the bodily pleasures lead to

eternal life — how could they? But philosophy, on the other hand, does just that. It increases our knowledge of the whole, so if there is an immortality to be hopeful of, the philosopher will acquire that hope. Philosophy is uniquely empowering because it enhances knowledge and virtue in a way that mere memories of great past pleasures could never do. For there to be a need for empowerment, though, the expectations and desires of human beings first have to be enlarged beyond the near, easy, and immediate. Keep your desires and expectations low, if you can, and the philosopher is powerless to inspire you.

### Immortality and Justice

Now having developed an understanding of the desire for immortality and the related concepts, and pointed to some extent toward their moral and utilitarian importance, we can now turn to Plato's more direct treatment of political philosophy. Specifically, I want to establish the link here between the desire for immortality and the philosophical pursuit of knowledge of the best way to live. The best way to live is a political question because in Plato's view the political regime inevitably hinders some modes of living while promoting others. The individual seeking to live the best way of life is necessarily a political individual, whether by working through established political institutions and processes (up to and including becoming the ruler) or by seeking to reform these from the outside, or both.

Some might want to object before I begin this transition from the *Symposium* to the *Republic* that “the *Republic* downplays, abstracts from, and rides roughshod over eros” (Nichols 1998, p. 19). This view can be taken to imply that Plato did not think that love and justice fit together, and so relegated the two topics to different dialogues. A more careful reading, however, shows that, “the very eros being by and large crushed [in the *Republic*]

for the sake of the perfect city does nonetheless have its higher aspects. Socrates does make clear, after all, that not only the tyrant but also the philosopher is defined by eros. He makes perfectly clear, too, that even the austere education of the guardians culminates in eros of the beautiful” (Nichols 1998, p. 19). The fact that eros, love, and desire are criticized in the *Republic* does not necessarily imply that they are unimportant to the city, but rather this attention and criticism could very well be something of a refining philosophical fire necessary for the purification of an essential component of the best political order.

Here is the scene at the start of the *Republic*: Socrates finds himself caught by Polemarchus during his trip, taken with Plato’s brother Glaucon, from town down to the Piraeus. When Socrates expresses his desire to reason his way out, Polemarchus kindly asks Socrates to instead recognize that he is flatly outnumbered. Why resort concede to the dictates of reason when force can have its way? We are shown here — reminded really, as this, like many elements of this dialogue’s opening book, are quintessential human experiences — that reason requires consent to function in and among agents involved in a contestation of wills, that is, in political situations. But such worldly power struggles are not the only pressing political concern, because when we look behind what is driving these power struggles we find the need to confront the human passions and desires fueling the contestation.

We see the intersection between conflict and desire more clearly as Socrates is then led inside the home of Cephalus (Polemarchus’s father), where Cephalus is seated as a sort of captive himself, only in this case the symbolism points toward man’s existential prison cell. Socrates (being the great lover of wisdom) can, even here as an unwilling captive, still continue to pursue his will to happiness by philosophically investigating crucial matters of

life and duty. Thinking himself just, the elderly Cephalus reports to Socrates that he is, due to his justness, less terrified of what fate might be awaiting him in death. Rather than fearing the suffering of pains of a violent death, which in Hobbes' view is the crucial human fear, he is more motivated by the possibility of having to "pay the penalty [in Hades]" (330d). He neither claims nor seeks any comfort from the obvious likelihood of his life completely ending with his body. Socrates the philosopher with a reputation for possessing strange thoughts with regard to the gods (see Aristophanes' *The Clouds* (1998)) might have some knowledge he could share with Cephalus, yet Cephalus does not ask for it. None of Socrates' wisdom is important to Cephalus himself. Rather, Cephalus wants Socrates' wisdom to be imparted to his son without Cephalus himself being in the room. Perhaps ignorance is desirable to awareness of impending doom, or the possibility of such. Or perhaps ignorance is preferable to the possibility of being trapped in uncertainty and confusion, between the loss of one's old beliefs and the beliefs one suddenly suspects to be true.

Cephalus' character is in many ways both a tragic and a great one because he explicitly states that he wants the younger generation, and we can surmise especially his son Polemarchus, to learn more about truth and justice than he himself knows. Because he is old and afraid, he chooses to leave when Socrates raises difficulties and possible underlying contradictions about his understanding of justice. Cephalus wants to hope that he will be treated kindly by the gods more than he wants to know what the gods might actually want from him. There is no desirable benefit, from his perspective, in finding out early that he's in a bad way. Cephalus' ignorance is revealed to be one of his most jealously guarded possessions. In a reversal of Socrates, who seeks knowledge while professing ignorance,

Cephalus instead seeks ignorance while professing knowledge. Polemarchus in this scene is for his part presented as a good son, now quickly coming to his father's rescue and continuing the debate with Socrates himself.<sup>31 32</sup> No face is lost by the family, and the conversation does not skip a beat, but real pain and human drama has been undeniably exposed.

Note what Cephalus has accomplished, however. He has bridged Socrates and the youth, or rather he has served as a cooperative accomplice to Socrates' objective of getting the group of bossy youngsters to listen to him. No longer are they going to watch a torch race on horses, nor does anyone still appear interested in eating. Rather, the metaphorical banquet of Socrates explicitly noted by Socrates and his interlocutors is the philosophical discussion he is having, a discussion that Cephalus has helped to prepare for him. Also, it

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<sup>31</sup> Another potentially important factor is the Polemarchus represents a soldier. It is notable that the soldier is the one to take over the argument from the old man in the room (besides Socrates). Old age makes people worried about death and their ultimate fate. Among younger people, life experience, such as being a soldier, can also bring one to be more serious about their mortality. Indeed, the close relationship between military service and fear of death is a main topic of later discussions in the *Republic*, especially Book III. This shows that the desire for immortality / fear of death is the underlying sentiment driving the interest/curiosity in what Socrates wants to talk about, i.e. justice.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Menelaus' stating in *The Iliad* that, "The hearts of young men are often unstable, but whenever an old man is present, he thinks of the future as well as the past, and so both parties benefit greatly" (124-127).

cannot be over-emphasized that Socrates has made—has compelled—this to happen.

Socrates has made the best of his situation, having been arrested by Polemarchus and his compatriots, and saw in Cephalus the road to the conversation he wanted to engage in after watching the festival of Bendis. The expert in erotics has shown the power of his craft.

It must be concluded that this is exactly what Socrates wanted all along. When one prays as Socrates had prior to the encounter with Polemarchus, one needs to know who or what to pray to. In the presence of religious diversity as found at the Piraeus that day, the philosophical curiosity should naturally become aroused, at least if one is courageous enough to acknowledge and embrace it. Which god or gods are the true ones? Whereas Socrates asks Cephalus how the road to old age is in terms of smooth or rough, for Socrates the road he must really be concerned with is not just the uncertain road of life, but the road to the truth, and it is through Cephalus, representing the wisdom of experience and old age, that this road happens to pass.

Seth Benardete sees a compromise in this scene between Polemarchus and Socrates “reached between the threat of force . . . and the alternative of persuasion” (p. 11). I see the situation slightly differently, where the apparent compromise is only one that Glaucon and Adeimantus have achieved together by masking Socrates’s underlying and consistent refusal to compromise. Socrates wants to ascend and ascend he does, only instead of ascending back to town, the ascension becomes philosophic in pursuit of the truth. Socrates knows how to get people to listen, and this knowledge is derivative of his knowledge of the desires. Just as Adeimantus suspects that no one can turn down a horse race with torches, Socrates suspects that no one can turn down knowledge concerning temporal and eternal happiness should such knowledge suddenly appear needed and available.

We should also pay particular attention to what Cephalus represents: old age, class, and experience. Conventional knowledge comes from these sources, as opposed to the knowledge of the philosopher which is approached with more skepticism for its faults of being imaginative and abstract (see Thrasymachus on forbidding Socrates to generalize, 336c-d). Cephalus shares his empirical information of what old age is like, which Socrates seems to value as opposed to the old man's confused views of justice, which are quickly objected to and discarded. The empirical information provided, however, is never challenged. Let us review this empirical data.

One observation is that most old people lament the loss of their once youthful enjoyment of satisfying their bodily desires, especially for sex, and of apparently being completely indulged in them. As Benardete notes, "the capacity for pleasures of the body—though not its desires—has diminished" (p. 12). Cephalus reports having himself found a superior approach to old age and to living in general. His mode of living is a mode consistent with that expressed by Sophocles, that the bodily passions are enslaving, and that true freedom comes by actually being free of them. Cephalus sees the relative advantage over youthful pursuits of having a well-ordered soul and of being moderate. But this well-ordering of Cephalus's soul has not, unfortunately, brought him complete peace, and all is not well in his old age. The crucial thing that he must continue to pursue if he is to have peace and happiness is hope. Not hope generally, as in an optimistic attitude brought to one's outlook on a day-to-day basis, but specifically in his fate in the afterlife being devoid of punishment.

We should remember that he is not pursuing the infinite joys of the anachronistic Christian Heaven, but rather avoiding the punishments of Hades that is meted out by the

Olympian Gods for acts arousing disfavor, acts especially of injustice and disobedience. This hope can seemingly only be supplied by personal conviction in his own record of righteous and obedient living, and thus his understanding of justice is crucial. This is why Cephalus' character is the perfect illustration of why the question of justice is relevant to human life. All unjust lives are inadequate, including both the life of youthful pleasures and the life of classy moderation. Without knowledge of justice, sufficient to supply the requisite hope for peace and comfort in old age, the anticipation of death continuously vexes and erodes his worldly contentment.

The fact that the well-ordered soul is not sufficient to keep the fears of Hades at bay tells us something important about Plato's view of human psychology, specifically as it relates to the fear of death. Cephalus cannot stop worrying, and it is fear that dominates him more than the fear of missing out on Heaven's joys. But Cephalus does not run to Socrates hoping to learn the philosopher's truth that there is no afterlife, but rather he runs to religious ritual. This shows the buried desire for immortality hidden beneath Cephalus' report to Socrates on the experience of old age. Cephalus himself seems unaware of his desire for immortality, but nevertheless only it could explain his behavior and the manner in which he interprets it.

Here we are shown that anxiety of the next life can make justice in this life become a deeply important question. If Socrates were a modern tolerant liberal, then he would have to respect Cephalus' self-conception as a just and pious person, and appreciate the alleviation of fear, however superficial this alleviation may be, it brought to him. But, of course, Socrates is not a liberal in this sense and, neither tolerates nor recognizes Cephalus' opinions as what might now be called 'authentic.' Instead, Socrates immediately begins to

raise logical problems with Cephalus's beliefs.<sup>33</sup> By finding a reasonably objectionable exception to Cephalus' principle of justice, Socrates is quickly able to raise serious doubts over the understanding of justice put forth, and Cephalus graciously but abruptly quits the conversation to go "look after the sacrifices" (331d). We should note that Cephalus runs away entirely of his own volition, so it is not quite right to say that he is, "quickly dismissed

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<sup>33</sup> In this sense I am partly at odds with Bloom's (1968) interpretation of this interchange between Socrates and Cephalus. He argues that Socrates "forgets the divine" and that for Cephalus "prudence" is primary and "if there are no gods, there is no reason to be just or to worry" (pp. 314-5). I argue that Socrates assumes the consideration of the divine into the conversation in order to maintain the question's importance. That fact that justice is enormously important is, crucially, one of the ways Socrates refutes Polemarchus (see 333e). Also, Cephalus' report is that he is gripped by fear, for reasons he does not fully understand, and is reaching out to religion for help. Indifferent calculations of prudence comes across as an advantage of youth—Cephalus, however, needs hope to escape the fact that "he is, at any rate, full of suspicion and terror" (330e). Cephalus makes no mention of hope deriving from the possibility of oblivion. Strauss (1964, pp. 65-70) has a take similar to Bloom's, and likely influenced it.

in order to establish the new city” as Bloom has characterized it (2001, p. 64). Cephalus is left enslaved by his own fears and ignorance to wringing what hope he can from the dogmatic performance of socially sanctioned ritualistic acts of piety. His love of speeches has now grown (328d), but it is too late, coming only after his passions have subsided in old age. He cannot in this advanced state find the Socratic wisdom to interrogate his own existential condition without prejudice, or the courage to rest in his existing beliefs without self-doubt.<sup>34</sup> He wants to be as happy as possible up until the end of his this-worldly existence rather than engulfed in philosophic doubt (he already seems to have enough non-philosophic doubt) and haunted by his record of past behavior, and this appears to require self-delusion. One might even ask if what Cephalus is suffering from could be described as a disturbing form of madness. He is doing whatever he can to most efficaciously stay in self-deluded possession of the good things (in this case, comforting thoughts) for the longest

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<sup>34</sup> There is an interesting parallel in the setting of the *Symposium*, where the call for speeches arises only after a night of drinking, where everyone is left hung-over and momentarily averse to trying to satisfy those kinds of desires. Aging seems to have a similar effect, according to Plato in *Republic*. The weakness of the body can seem to have a beneficial effect on the human being. This view of how the human being becomes more open to the higher pleasures when the desires for sexual gratification dissipate is, I think, contradictory to the Freudian notion of eros as the sublimation / transformation of the sex drive. One would expect the loss of the sex drive to be the loss of the engine of erotic energy in certain interpretations of the Freudian view, which is clearly not the case at all for Plato.

amount of time possible, and has only come in old age to appreciate the fact that this desire for good things extends beyond his bodily death to whatever unknown fate awaits him.

We therefore must concede that a metaphysical dimension has been fused into the conversation over justice – that is the fear of the possible afterlife, the fearing of a notion that is quintessentially metaphysical, while being catalyzed by very natural human desires to avoid pain and to be happy.<sup>35</sup> It is on this point that I have both strong points of agreement and disagreement with Benardete’s interpretation. He states that Cephalus’ “citation of Pindar introduces piety and joins it with justice (331a4); and though Socrates may drop it when he summarizes Cephalus’ understanding of justice, the sacred may be not as easily dismissed as Cephalus dismisses his new found pleasure in speeches” (p. 15). Pindar, however, is only a very small part of why the sacred has been joined to justice in this discussion. Much more important is the fact that Cephalus is afraid of dying, and that this fear is both a cause and an effect of his listening so much to the poets in the first place. Recall that it was Cephalus’ citation of Sophocles on the benefits of an orderly character than distinguished him from the other old people that are miserable for, in their view, the lack of ability to fornicate and for their broken family ties.<sup>36</sup> The poets helped Cephalus

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<sup>35</sup> I should acknowledge what Cephalus mentions in terms of the this-worldly benefits of a just life: less sexual frustration and better relationships with our relatives (329a-b). I view these benefits—however valuable—as beside the point, and are meant to be diminished by comparison to the concerns with the afterlife that Cephalus ultimately focuses on.

<sup>36</sup> Studies have shown that during hospice care people frequently concentrate on their familial relationships above other matters. See Ai (2010).

revere the orderliness of character. Why does he listen to Sophocles in the first place, and care about orderliness of character more than his fellows in his age cohort? The answer provided by Plato is that Cephalus inherited sufficient wealth such that he did not have to create his wealth for himself, and thus never formed an excessive love of money as a creation of his own. Saved from this love, Cephalus was able to ultimately transition into a love of speeches when his age pushed him in that direction. But because Cephalus listens to poets to deal with his desires, he remembers from his childhood what the poets have said about Hades, and is thus in adulthood moved by Pindar's exhortation of justice and piety. Justice is rooted in the quest for peace and happiness, and the quest for these things implies a quest for immortality. Socrates really should not be thought to be dropping the sacred at all in this discussion, but rather to be seeking it out by his initial provocative question to the old man "crowned with wreathes" (328c): is old age "a hard time of life, or what have you to report of it?" (328e).

Benardete then strangely transitions into using the language of rights in the further development of his interpretation, and with it I think engages in a fairly clear cut case of over-reading. He states that, "Socrates' principle, if formulated universally, would run: Knowledge alone determines right. Not only do prodigals thereby lose the right to use their own property, but anyone who does not know how to use anything he has—including his life—either has it taken away from him or handed over to another to manage" (p. 15). I think this is a fundamental distortion of the text being interpreted. Clearly, Benardete is attempting to show how Socrates is already prefiguring the idealistic city in speech to come in later sections of the *Republic*. But the issue, both here and in the city in speech, is not about the determination of *right* but of *justice*. The tension throughout is what determines

justice — is it those who are physically strongest? Is it the poets and what they tell us about the gods? Socrates' answer is that perhaps it is neither of these things, and the appeal he makes is to something that might be called common sense or conventional views of the good (or nature, among all three of which he seeks to find as much overlap and agreement as possible). And indeed, Socrates is offering a strong critique of those who normally wield power, such as those who inherit great wealth or those who direct the most obedient followers. Socrates is dealing with these things in the scene, and is suggesting that they all have mistaken opinions about right and wrong. Socrates does not claim that he has a right to rule them, but simply asks them if “there is still one other possibility . . . our persuading you that you must let us go?” (327a).

There is no philosophic right to rule here that might be analogous to the infamous divine right to rule of pre-modern Europe refuted by that great liberal natural rights philosopher John Locke. One might say that Socrates governs strictly by consent, and the justice he promotes is conditional knowledge not arbitrary will. When Benardete suggests that “if justice could be absorbed completely into piety, Socrates' counterexample would lose its force” (p. 15) he is misunderstanding that Socrates is trying to reform what piety is and make its practice compatible with philosophic justice, which he does both in Book III and at the end of the dialogue in Book X, most famously with the presentation of the Myth of Er.

For Plato, the question of justice, the central political virtue, is raised by the natural human desire for immortality, even here where mere old age has naturally awakened it. The younger interlocutors, less concerned with the prospect of death, and more in a position to change the course of their future worldly lives, are more comfortable continuing the

dialogue with Socrates. But, they would not have been interested unless Cephalus had shown them the relevance to their self-interest: Cephalus, though representing the best case scenario for many destined for old age, is not an enviable character. Socrates is the exemplar.

### Resisting the Regime

In Book I of the *Republic*, we see that Cephalus is not the only interlocutor that Socrates wants to make uncomfortable: the real philosophical opponent (or target) of Socrates is Thrasymachus, the defender of tyranny. It is in this exchange that the existentially-motivated question of justice and the problem of force in politics are brought together. This is clear with Thrasymachus, but we should also recall that it is prefigured in the exchange between Socrates and Cephalus, where Socrates raises the question of returning weapons to a man not in his right mind. For Thrasymachus, the just are the “urbane innocents,” they are oppressed by those who are willing to do whatever it takes to force their way into positions of power and subject everyone they can to serving their advantage. The two safe options are you can flatter the rulers, or become ruler yourself and be flattered, at least if you care to save your skin. The case against liberal civic virtue raised here is that under general, common sense notions of what a just life implies, it only leads to suffering in this world for the uncertain hopes of greater benefits in the after-life. Thus one must choose whether to live well in this life or to rely on the hope of having one’s worldly virtue rewarded in the next life.

The Platonic-Socratic response to this is to argue that the just life is always mightier, happier, and more profitable for both this life and the after-life, and to reveal that the tension

between the two existential approaches is a false notion. This leads directly back to the lack of philosophic understanding of the desire for happiness from *Symposium*, and later in the *Republic* is more explicitly shown to be involved with kinship with and possession of eternal things and immortality. In Book VII, for example, Socrates remarks that “those who have been allowed to spend their time in education continuously to the end . . . [are] believing they have emigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive” (519c). To experience heaven on earth, in other words, is to live the philosophic life. And, as it turns out, living the philosophic life is the way to acquire knowledge and hope of a blessed afterlife, and it is the way to warrant admission into this afterlife by the gods. Socrates states in Book X that “if a man, when he come to the life here [death], always philosophizes in a healthy way . . . it’s likely . . . that he will journey from this world to the other and back again not by the underground, rough road but by the smooth one, through the heavens” (619e). And we see earlier that Socrates wants to help Thrasymachus in this available journey to heaven, vowing that, “We’ll not give up our efforts before we either persuade him [Thrasymachus] and the others [to practice philosophy], or give them some help in preparation for that other life when, born again, they meet with such arguments” (498c).

Just like the desire for immortality leads to virtue, virtue leads to social harmony. This is because the virtuous are naturally cooperative people. A competitive spirit, potentially disruptive to social harmony, is held by the unjust, exemplified by the likes of the Thrasymachus character from Book I, because power is understood by him as zero-sum. One is judged powerful by getting the better of another, by hook or by crook. To be successful at the expense of another is to have in a sense more of the truth than another in the eyes of the many. It is a concrete proof of sorts, confirmed by the world that allows it.

A cooperative spirit, in contrast, is held by the just because power is understood in an absolute sense, that one actually becomes powerful by acquiring the best things in existence, such as the philosophic life in a just society. There is no incentive among true liberal citizens to try to get the better of each other or to become quarrelsome with each other. There is no perceived benefit or power in it. Virtuous, classically liberal citizens only value possession of the absolute good, which requires learning and knowledge to distinguish from the lesser, more transient, and ultimately only apparent, goods.<sup>37</sup> Such people want more than anything to have their souls full of just things when arriving at Hades: “whoever arrives in Hades ignorant of the mysteries and uninitiated will lie in Muck, but that he who arrives There purified and initiated will dwell with gods” (*Phaedo* 69c).

And because the just have a stronger union in this sense than the unjust, the groups (including political societies) that are marked by justice will be stronger, happier, and more profitable than groups marked by injustice, which only dissolve into impotence via infighting over ultimately worthless pleasures. This is a great source of progressive optimism

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<sup>37</sup> For a more vivid illustration in thinking of this idea, we might recall the biblical image of the manna falling from heaven and equally satisfying the masses’ appetites (Exodus 16:4-5, Psalms 78:23-25, John 6:25-34). Cf. Socrates’ insistence that after the conversation of Book I in *Republic* that “I have not had a fine banquet . . . For in my opinion, I am just like the gluttons who grab at whatever is set before them to get a taste of it, before they have in proper measure enjoyed what went before” (354a-b). This dinner of course is metaphorical, whereas the people who captured Socrates had desired to actually have a physical dinner.

and validation of progressive views of humanity's experience in History. This is what makes justice the crucial political virtue, and the desire for immortality the crucial political human desire, or if you will, the Platonic solution to Madisonian faction. The just "mind their own business" in the sense that their profoundly personal business is to satisfy their deep desires for eternal happiness, which involves pursuit of the immortal things (truth) through learning, which is both individualistic *and* cooperative. The compatibility of individual interest and cooperation emerges when the desire for immortality is incorporated into the hedonistic equation of the self-interested person. The process of acquiring knowledge requires dialectical investigation, a natural component of conversation among honest pursuers of truth.

The *Gorgias* adds more explanation of the political importance of the desire for immortality by further underlining its relationship with classical liberalism. Socrates states that, "But as to leading desires in a different direction and not yielding, persuading and forcing them toward the condition in which the citizens were to be better . . . this is the one work of a good citizen" (517b-c). Socrates here invokes a higher authority to motivate the proper approach to unjust regimes: independent thought and resistance. For the citizens to be better, some higher model must be discovered by the philosopher and imposed on them. Their desires must be reshaped. But because the citizens are not better, "forcing them" to change carries serious risks to the good citizen-philosopher. The citizen-philosopher will be persecuted. Nevertheless, the citizen-philosopher must resist the persecution, being possessed of the wherewithal to do so.

Alongside the concern with becoming a slave to one's own desires in the pursuit of happiness, in the *Gorgias* there is the problem of fear of suffering at the hands of the unjust

regime tied. This fear is presented by Callicles, the foil to Socrates that plays an interlocutor strikingly analogous to Thrasymachus in the *Republic*. We should compare the political fears of Callicles to those of Cephalus, who feared suffering at the hands of the gods — in either case, fear of evil seems to precede hope for the good (let alone the best), suggesting that fear is for Plato the more basic or fundamental motivator and capturer of the untutored imagination. There is room here to say with Machiavelli that fear is therefore better than love, but perhaps only insofar as it stimulates the emotion capable of ennobling the character. In any case, the political problem of how to find happiness amid existential uncertainties and dangers arises again.

We see in the *Gorgias* as well the rationality behind why human beings are so shaped by their political regime into adopting the values of the regime itself, however misguided they may be. Callicles sees no reason to suffer at the hands of his rulers, and great reason to avoid suffering injustice by flattering them. To this fear, Socrates argues that the “kind of helping oneself” that is the “strongest” is to “neither to have said nor have done anything unjust as regards either human beings or gods” (522c-d). Here the fear of powerful human beings is contrasted with the fear of the gods, and we should see the similarity between the fearing of committing injustices, which Socrates promotes here, to the no harm principle that emerges from Socrates’ discussion with Polemarchus. There, Socrates objected to Polemarchus’ commitment to harming enemies by questioning how one can ever accurately distinguish one’s true friends from their true enemies. Since the distinction is hard to make, inflicting harm on wrongly perceived enemies is likely and will cause one to be unjust.

Self-interest is redefined by Socrates with the typically post-Plato religious move to extend considerations of self-interest to the afterlife. The reason being is that, “no one fears dying itself, who is not all in all most irrational and unmanly, but he fears doing injustice; for to arrive in Hades with one’s soul full of many unjust deeds is the ultimate of all evils” (522e). Socrates consistently concedes that the fear of death by itself does nothing to shape or leverage human behavior in a positive direction. Callicles, similar to Cephalus in some ways, has the fear of death, but lacks the philosophically ennobled desire for immortality. He copes with this fear by appeasing the strong, rather than resisting injustice. Socrates shows how the fear of death can be brought to motivate regime resistance by stimulating greater fears (divine punishment) and greater desires (eternal bliss). And as in the *Republic*, the philosophical arguments are followed by a poetic image of the afterlife, which Socrates calls “a fine rational account” (523a). Those “who went through life justly and piously . . . would go away to the islands of the blessed to dwell in total happiness . . . while he who lived unjustly and godlessly would go to the prison of retribution and judgment, which they call Tartarus” (523b).

This philosophical elevation of the desire for immortality is what allows Socrates to do the opposite of Callicles and martyr himself as the self-described “true political art [-ist]” (521d), making his speeches to his fellow Athenians “with a view to the best, not to the most pleasant” (521d). The allusion to Socrates’s trial in the *Apology* is explicit here, and brings out quite clearly another important way in which Plato is so different from modern liberal theories of toleration. The Athenian regime was not unjust because it was intolerant of Socrates’s beliefs, but because Socrates was being reasonable and the regime was being stubbornly prejudicial in its exercise of harm. The fact that Socrates censors the poets in the

*Republic* is not a case of hypocrisy, but the logical conclusion to the assumption that knowledge of truth is possible. Socrates, most likely, would not have wanted to be tolerated at the expense of sacrificing the principle that right and wrong are knowable through reason.<sup>38</sup> Speeches about the best things, when the best things are deemed permanently subjective, become that much harder to have any persuasive effect on anyone. This only further alienates the philosophical wise from the many, and perhaps threatens the very ability of philosophers to utilize the desire for immortality in the promotion of liberal freedom.

### Conclusion

Plato's philosophic project with regard to politics anticipates the concern with governmental oppression over individuals brought to the fore in Lockean liberalism and the modern liberal tradition that follows. This can be seen most starkly in Plato's portrayal of Socratic citizenship, where justice and the rest of noble virtue resides on the side of the individual desiring immortality over the political authority exercised by the city.

This Platonic view serves as a seminal model of what I call the compatibility thesis in political liberalism. This thesis broadly stated is that the pursuit of happiness in this world (often falsely offered by the regime) is compatible with—indeed intractable from—eternal, spiritual happiness (genuinely offered by the true philosopher), and that the two must be pursued in tandem. The former requires pursuit of material resources (which can be pursued through just or unjust means, which is a key problem), while the latter involves

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<sup>38</sup> For further discussion of this point, see West (1984, pp. 9-10).

pursuit of knowledge of the eternal, i.e. knowledge obtained from philosophy or religion. The compatibility of these two pursuits crystallizes only when the desire for personal immortality, and hence permanent happiness, is recognized by individuals as satisfiable.

It remains to be seen the manner and extent to which modern liberals reconstruct the compatibility thesis and take advantage of the desire for immortality to better sustain the rights and virtues of human beings within political society, and in effect honor Socrates' example of corrupting the youth in the eyes of the unjust regime.

## Chapter 2: Locke<sup>39</sup>

Martha Nussbaum recently observed that for classical liberal John Locke, “the cultivation of good attitudes is left to individuals and to churches” (2013, p. 4). This statement gestures towards a well-known difficulty: liberal societies require that citizens be *shaped* into dignified and civil human beings, but such shaping is preferably left *beyond* the responsibilities of government, and inside the sacred sphere of individual liberty.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The following is the chapter abstract included for a recent research conference, which remains appropriate. Since I have not written abstracts for each chapter, I only share it in footnote: *Locke’s account of natural rights in the Second Treatise, perceptible through reason alone, is accompanied by religious dogma. I argue that this use of religious dogma is an open acknowledgement of the psychological barriers to a popular assent of his secular doctrines. Locke’s discussion of the human person and the limitations of rational freedom in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding shows that a moderated religion is necessary for the public. Locke recognizes that religion uniquely stimulates man’s personal desire for immortality, which when framed as a reward for moral behavior as it is in Christianity, creates a need for moral knowledge. Thus, after stimulating his audience’s concern with morality with popular Christian invocations, Locke then needs to explicitly argue that his secular political theory is not only right reason itself, but is compatible with a “reasonable” Christian piety.*

<sup>40</sup> I am taking the search for legitimate political mechanisms for indoctrinating fundamental moral beliefs as separate from debates over the proper practice of religious toleration, but overlap is inevitable. Many of the religious toleration issues point in a direction far afield

Liberalism's reluctance to shape the moral character of peoples is, however, potentially harmful, which liberal-minded thinkers and leaders must address. Addressing the people's moral character involves (at a minimum) cultivating public respect for rights. This ensures the liberal project of protecting the freedoms of the individual from the community's needs as it perceives them: a theme brought out in the previous chapter. To this task, one finds at least three distinct approaches: (1) Lawmakers working to codify certain principles and rights into law (consider the educative purposes behind the Bill of Rights<sup>41</sup>); (2) Educators, intellectuals, and statesmen educating the citizenry of the economic and political soundness of rights and other liberal values (think of Hobbes<sup>42</sup> or Tocqueville's self-interest well understood<sup>43</sup>); (3) Political theorists attempting to rethink the whole problem from the beginning, critiquing Lockean liberalism as ethically or practically insufficient and/or outdated. Frequently, if not unavoidably, such efforts begin with reevaluating the murky, mysterious line between the public and the private.

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from where I want to go, which concerns how Locke himself expects a society to be tamed, i.e. assenting to his natural rights doctrine.

<sup>41</sup> But see Bailey (2012), who argues that the author of the Bill of Rights, James Madison, actually was a reluctant participant in this sort of response.

<sup>42</sup> See Mansfield (1995, p. 52)

<sup>43</sup> See Danoff (2005) for a discussion of this approach that contrasts Tocqueville with Lincoln, bringing out some important, though nuanced, differences between the two. Danoff here also places Madison with those who want to rely heavily on enlightened material self-interest to preserve public attachment to rights (p. 691).

Each of these approaches is useful in its own way, and as a group they can at times tend to reinforce one another. However, the question of this study is whether Locke himself has a different (and perhaps even better) approach in mind. What I will argue here is that Locke's intention was actually to assimilate the basic beliefs of what we now call liberalism into the Protestant Christianity of his time, and through it to posterity.<sup>44</sup> He chooses this approach not as a Christian zealot,<sup>45</sup> however, but first and foremost as a psychologically insightful political philosopher. For Locke, the biasing effects of ignorance and self-love lead human beings away from morality and virtue, but Christianity, for its tying of morality to the promise of eternal life, could be appropriated to lead them back. Moreover, Locke appears to regard the post-Christ world as a permanently changed one, where the linkage between personal salvation and morality would always remain.

The strongest evidence for this argument is found in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which reveals his high estimation of the motivational power of the

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<sup>44</sup> A great example of this is exhibited by Elisha Williams's "The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants [1744]" (Sandoz 1998, pp. 51-118).

<sup>45</sup> Locke's independent-minded, one might say free-thinking, approach to Christianity is widely acknowledged.

human desire for immortality.<sup>46</sup> This motivation is powerful enough to cause either extraordinarily constructive or destructive behavior. Constructive, when it is rationalized—destructive, when it is politicized by ambitious priests. Locke affirms that the afterlife’s existence is unknowable, and subsequently recommends that this uncertainty should rationally make us risk-averse towards ethical issues. Pragmatic hopes for immortality can make us uneasy in our moments of unreflective ignorance. This uneasiness can restrain us from passion-driven pursuits, which then allows reason to judge whether such pursuits may be unethical.

*The Reasonableness of Christianity* shows that Christianity’s great historical innovation on behalf of rationality was connecting morality with immortality. In this work and in his political writings, Locke argues that this morality is perceptible apart from religious revelation. One could describe his position as implying that the sermons of Christ are true insofar as they are the dictates of reason, not vice versa. Though he argues that morality is available through reason alone, rational morality has often been rejected in practice. The preferences of many peoples across history have been for the false superstitions peddled by enterprising priests and politicians. Locke’s public task is to unmask these distortions, and turn Protestant Christians back to independent reason. His

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<sup>46</sup> Locke’s reliance on this desire is quite frequently acknowledged in the literature. Alex Tuckness, for example, summarizing John Dunn, states that, “it is the intensity of human desire for eternal life that makes civil interference [into religious matters] so dangerous” (2002, p. 289-90).

*Second Treatise* offers a blueprint for what this independent reason suggests for the basis and aspirations of legitimate political society. Before turning to these texts, however, I begin the next section with a review of the current literature with respect to the ongoing secular versus religious Locke debate.

### Of Hobbism and Orthodox Arminianism in Locke

There currently exists a partially stalled scholarly debate over whether Locke is a secular *de novo* philosopher or more of a philosophical articulator of reformed Protestant (Arminian<sup>47</sup>) theology. The primary wedge issue entrenching this divide is that Locke invokes “Natural Law” early and often in his political works, leading scholars to argue over whether Locke meant by this term God’s law, or to actually mean Hobbesian death-fearing self-interest (see e.g. Tuckness 2002, p. 293; Forde 2001, p. 398 for some confrontation with this debate).

Locke worked deeply in the areas of natural theology and psychology. This work makes it easier to approach Locke as a thorough-going philosopher—equally open to faith and to skepticism. Such philosophers<sup>48</sup> often implicitly acknowledge that there is no need to

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<sup>47</sup> I am indebted to a conference panel discussant for strengthening my recognition of Locke’s association with Arminianism.

<sup>48</sup> See Kateb (2009) on “the secular disposition” we find among many political philosophers in the Western canon. He states that, “Examples of the secular disposition include among

make final determinations regarding God or the soul. It is enough to determine what is necessary for human life and political society, and to say belief in God has irreplaceable value is quite a different thing from saying belief in God has value because he certainly exists. With or without God, death forever keeps its thunder, and philosophy must press on. It is unlikely that deep in the hollows of his heart Locke ever ultimately decided whether his idea of “Natural Law” required God to actually exist in order for it to have political or moral value. Fortunately, as is the more accepted case with Plato, studying this philosopher’s work does not require such definitive answers, which are fleeting and unknowable.

The starting point of this study is to step back from the theology and focus more on the psychological premises of Locke’s political thought. This begins with observing that Locke certainly does blend secular with religious reasoning in all of his major political works. My primary hypothesis towards explaining this is that it is part of a far-reaching rhetorical strategy, and as such was surely shaped by his investigations into the human understanding. The analytical approach adopted here likewise distinguishes Locke’s moral reasoning (the dictates of right reason) from his psychology (the motivation to consult right reason), seeking to sidestep much of the entrenched debates over Locke’s faith by applying the latter to the former.

Some scholars have already begun approaching Locke in this manner. Steven Forde is a notable forerunner in this approach, recognizing a distinction among Locke’s works similar to the one I am adopting. He categorizes on one side Locke’s “more practical

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many others Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and J.S. Mill. But the center of my story is Locke” (p. 1005).

works” (2000, p. 400) such as *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, the *Second Treatise of Government*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. These works are considered as being categorically distinct from “the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which contains Locke’s most thorough treatment of moral theory” (ibid., p. 398). There is some important value in this breakdown of Locke’s corpus, especially insofar as it pushes for a more comprehensive frame for interpreting Locke’s works. It certainly looks far beyond the now generally dismissed view made famous by Peter Laslett, that Locke’s works are not consistent with each other, and ought to be regarded independently.

What places him between the secular and religious camps is his adopting the view of Locke as mainly a natural theologian—thus neither Hobbist nor piously orthodox Arminian. In general, this interpretational approach is sound and promising, yet several of Forde’s conclusions nevertheless I think end up somewhat off the mark. Let us take a brief look at Forde’s two part thesis, which is: (Part 1) Locke began, but did not complete, his own natural theological work. For this reason, Locke often presupposed, but could not overly rely on, this theology in his practical works; (Part 2) Locke was worried about explicitly proposing a new theology because he would be rejected by his more orthodox audience (ibid., p. 408).

Both of these claims are interesting, I think, but only approaching the vicinity of what Locke was actually aiming at. First, there does not seem to be much evidence that Locke is trying to establish a wholly new theology, but rather to accentuate the “reasonableness” within an existing cluster of theologies, namely those derived from Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles (especially Paul of Tarsus). Locke is at least as worried about the possibility of being rejected by his Savior (who he consistently referred to as Christ) at

his Final Judgment as he is his Christian contemporaries in this world. This seems to be a sufficient response to the questions perplexing Forde's analysis as to why Locke did not publish a treatise of morals or "complete" his own natural theology. Much of this work had already been written and propagated by way of the Christian Bible, a view Locke repeatedly affirms in the *Reasonableness*. It is therefore too far to assume or to suggest the possibility that Locke was so skeptical of revelation that, if he only could have worked out his own natural theology, his larger body of work would have been more emphatic or forceful with its theological commitments. It is an interesting hypothesis, but I do not see enough evidence corralled to support it.

Second, and most importantly, Forde's thesis largely misses the psychological *importance* or the *value* that Locke places on "the darkness we are in," i.e. what is frequently termed today among philosophers as metaphysical agnosticism<sup>49</sup> (to the previous point, a tough orientation to have if one is actually attempting to "complete" a natural theology), and the natural human desire for immortality.

For Forde, Locke views the rational pursuit of happiness in this world as in tension with the collective pursuit of happiness, and this is why Locke needed to ground his moral teaching in the theological assumption of an afterlife. This has some merit to it, but strangely underemphasizes Locke's attempt to demonstrate the hedonistic compatibility of

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<sup>49</sup> My use of this term refers to Locke's belief that ultimate truths about reality, whether God, spirits, or Heaven exists, are not demonstrable through philosophic argument. Although, Locke does see plenty of room for thinking through and making practical estimates on the *probability* of such things existing based on what we do know, but more on this later.

the worldly pursuit of happiness with the eternal pursuit of happiness. It is in tension, for example, with Peter Myers' claim that, "those who wish to follow the Lockean route to otherworldly reward will find that, for much of the journey at least, they must travel in the company of those intent only on the deliberate, reflective pursuit of secular happiness" (1998, p. 146). For Locke, virtue and righteousness have their own pleasures intrinsic to them regardless of whether the afterlife exists — the hedonistic problem, however, is that vice also has its own pleasures. The individual has to choose between competing types of pleasure, rather than being able to simply calculate the comparative quantities of pleasure available.

The temporal dimension of hedonistic calculation is key, as some pleasures are available immediately and others are available only after lengthy pursuit. The possibility of the pleasures of the heavenly afterlife thus has to be factored into a perspective on the human situation for it to be fully rational. The afterlife does not offset a worldly life of sacrifice and suffering for morality's sake as Forde seems to suggest, but rather adds on to the worldly pleasures of virtue which compete with the worldly pleasures of vice.

What this begins to show is that the hurdles getting in the way of his theory are more psychological than philosophical. A pragmatic approach to the big questions of human life seems to point to the prudence of moral behavior, but the human mind does not automatically embrace such pragmatism. What Forde appears to think is that the hurdles come from the unrewarded self-sacrificing quality of rational ethical behavior. However, it is actually a result of the freedom of human beings to not be fully rational in the first place. Indeed, religious leaders themselves are the worst violators of this brand of rationality, and in a sense hijack the desire for immortality that Locke sees as so promising for the general

moral improvement of mankind. This sort of hijacking is of course a long-standing problem in the history of political philosophy. In response to similar sorts of concerns, Socrates calls for the city's collective banning of epic poetry and the chanting of a poetic myth consistent with rational justice in the closing pages of the *Republic* – Locke, on the other hand, has Protestant Christianity to work with. My argument is that as Plato refined the volatile desire for immortality his culture adopted from Homeric epic poetry, Locke sets out to refine the desire for immortality residing in the breasts of seventeenth century Christians.

#### Locke's Adoption of Pauline Psychology: Faith and Reason in the *Essay*

Scholars have recognized the desire for immortality's importance to Locke's political theory, but they have not sufficiently unpacked all that such recognition entails. Analysis of this desire, for reasons unclear, rarely exceeds a couple of paragraphs, even in the most respected and thorough treatments of Locke's political thought. Among these notable works, slightly different interpretational frames have been placed around Locke's motivational use of this desire.

In Ruth Grant's *John Locke's Liberalism* (1987), for example, she writes that according to Locke:

Men are rewarded in the afterlife to the extent that their conduct on earth accords with the law of nature, the law of reason, the law of God. What this means concretely is that men are rewarded as they exercise their faculties to secure their preservation and happiness in this life without interfering with other men's efforts to do the same. (p. 47)

The afterlife mostly here incentivizes the respect for the rights of others. Somewhat like Forde, for Grant this incentive tips the scales of the calculating self-interested individual beyond affirming only selfish Hobbesian rights to also embracing Lockean duty-implying rights. The rewards bestowed from believing in the afterlife are apparently received only *there*. If the afterlife does not exist, presumably such an assumption is not individually beneficial to hold. Of course, the public benefits from these individuals seeking rewards in the afterlife by respecting each other's rights, regardless of whether those individuals actually are rewarded in the manner they expect.

Conversely, the expectation of the afterlife for some scholars also pertains to that which exceeds the basic ethics of respecting rights—the promotion of virtue and human perfection. In Peter Myers' *Our Only Star and Compass* (1998), for example, he writes that, "Locke affirms that a reasonable faith in a heavenly afterlife as a just God's reward to the virtuous engenders in the faithful an 'expectation' that 'carries a constant pleasure with it'" (citing Locke, p. 157). Myers here is citing from Locke's most famous work on education, providing evidence that there are, at least in some respects, worldly benefits—the pleasure of anticipating the rewards of the afterlife. Still, neither Grant's rights respecting or Myer's sweetened pursuit of virtue seem to be beneficial in their own right, but require these incentives be dangled out in front of the individual.

Since these accounts are both as brief as they are interesting, Locke's most developed thoughts on the human desires, and the quest for eternal salvation, call out for

more extensive analysis.<sup>50</sup> This leads us especially to the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where Locke argues (rather vehemently) that the belief in God and an afterlife is somehow inherently valuable for a human being to rationally pursue virtue or any great aims in this world (*Essay*, II.21, secs. 35, 55-56). These ideas are found in the *Essay* chapter “Of Power.” This is the longest chapter of the *Essay* (comprising 73 sections), and was substantively expanded and revised after the first publication in 1689.<sup>51</sup> Some past scholars have related this chapter to Locke’s political writings, but their focus has often left

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<sup>50</sup> There is a nice quote from Locke on salvation in the beginning of *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*: “We are all men, liable to errors, and infected with them; but have this sure way to preserve ourselves, every one, from danger by them, if, laying aside sloth, carelessness, prejudice, party, and a reverence of men, we betake ourselves, in earnest, to the study of the way to salvation, in those holy writings, wherein God has revealed from heaven, and proposed it to the world, seeking our religion, where we are sure it is in truth to be found, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things” (p. xxii).

<sup>51</sup> The *Essay* is an immense work of which I will only be analyzing a crucial section. Spellman has written of it with a significantly more encompassing perspective, which may perhaps be helpful to the reader: “Locke . . . began his enquiry with a moral question, a Christian question: what type of knowledge was really worth having in this life, what type of knowledge could and should men work to acquire? . . . In the end, the message which he delivered on the problematic question of mankind’s potential for good was, not surprisingly, a deeply depressing one, an almost Augustinian one” (1988, pp. 105-6).

aside the specific relationship between freedom and the desire for immortality.<sup>52</sup> What my analysis of “Of Power” attempts is a more thorough explanation of Locke’s motivational

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<sup>52</sup> In addition to those already mentioned, many other political theorists and philosophers have approached this chapter with a wide variety of philosophical, pedagogical, and political questions. Lee Ward (2010), mainly focuses on this chapter’s polemical aspects concerning the liberty of the mind. He states that, “Locke argues [here] that both innatist metaphysics and Hobbesian materialism fundamentally misunderstand and, in different ways, overly constrain human freedom” (p. 41). What I think Ward neglects, however, is the pivotal factor that Locke’s metaphysical agnosticism plays against this highly voluntaristic (free will) position. Schouls (1992, ch. 7) relates many of the ideas from “Of Power” in a more constricted sense to Locke’s teachings on education. Patapan and Sikkenga (2008) dedicate two paragraphs to analyzing “Of Power” in their paper on Hobbes’s critique of Platonic eros (pp. 806-7). They show that Locke indeed has some under-appreciated thoughts relevant to the major debate between Hobbes and the ancients on the desire for immortality. Tuckness (2002) claims to discover that because Locke is “committed to a hedonistic theory of human motivation,” he needed “fear of eternal punishment” in order to “motivate a magistrate” (p.

theory, taking into account the desire for immortality. This in turn provides a deeper understanding of how the natural human being from his political works functions—beyond the standard view of the equal, rational, and autonomous individual, exercising liberty and pursuing self-preservation and profitable commercial activity.

The first feature to note in this chapter is Locke’s deliberate break with the ancient, Platonic conception of the erotic longing that points inexorably to the transcendent truths. The human desires are not presented as hierarchically arranged in this manner, nor are they in a position that is naturally susceptible to philosophical elevation. Locke is clear on this when he states that, “the Philosophers of old did in vain enquire, whether *Summum bonum* consisted in Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue, or Contemplation: And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best Relish were to be found in Apples, Plumbs, or Nuts” (sec. 55). The greatest good for the human being is simply that which provides the most amount of pleasure, and the pleasure derived from bodily delights can be (and among people often are) much greater than the pleasure derived from virtue.

Presaging a deeply entrenched contemporary liberal view—for Locke, happiness can be relative. For instance, he engages with the classic comparison between “the studious Man” and “the Epicure” (sec. 43). Of these two archetypes, he states that, “Though each of them cannot but confess, there is great Pleasure in what the other pursues . . . but each is satisfied without what the other enjoys” (sec. 43). The diverse human desires are clearly being presented, especially in comparison to Plato, in a leveled, one might say horizontal

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294). Forde’s (2001) analysis relies heavily on this chapter as well; my disagreements with it were discussed above.

manner. Each type of person—from Dionysian to ascetic—is capable of being fully satisfied in the pursuit of his or her preferred objects of desire, at least as far as this world is concerned. Under Locke’s view, abandoned is the notion that knowledge of the so-called eternal verities is what truly satisfies the human soul, and is the true object of our human faculties. Also left aside is the uniquely ancient notion of freedom, namely that of the philosophy-loving soul from the tyrannical chains of the enslaving passions. Locke indeed does not seem to follow Plato at all in arguing that the best happiness of man is necessarily philosophic.

Prudence has here seemed to eclipse wisdom, which in Locke’s works can be traced to two aspects of his break with Platonic philosophy. The first dimension is the one just mentioned regarding the nature of the pleasures themselves, where Locke disagrees with Plato that certain of these have any qualitative superiority over others. Under Locke’s view, satisfaction and contentment, by whichever road, is potentially equally pleasant and conducive to happiness. At any given moment,<sup>53</sup> the satisfied epicure is just as happy as the

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<sup>53</sup> This distinction here is perhaps more apparent than real, however. When we embark down the hedonistic road of self-interest well understood, Plato argues that we will arrive at the realization that the philosophic life is the best, and that the eternal things produce more pleasure than the bodily pleasures. Perhaps some difference for Plato lies in the depth of satisfaction available to non-philosophers satisfied by bodily pleasures. In any case, the main point I am trying to make is that Locke is, at least rhetorically, much more committed to following the hedonistic, pleasure-maximizing life should it lead away from philosophy. For Locke, the moral human life largely replaces the philosophic life and is less its own

satisfied philosopher. The second dimension to Locke's skepticism is with regards to what is knowable and what is not. Derived from his empirical theory of the origin and scope of our ideas, Locke denies that the human mind can penetrate into the essences of things, or can understand "the whole." Sense data delimits the knowledge we can acquire, blocking us from higher transcendent knowledge regarding the nature of essences themselves, such as the essence of the human being commonly termed "the soul." The metaphysical essence of the human being, like the metaphysical essence of the color blue, is impenetrable by the human mind. The pursuit of such knowledge is foolish and imprudent.

Faced with this diversity of possible pleasures, however, we have to continually exercise our liberty. We have to make choices as to which of our disparate potential desires to cultivate and to satisfy. In this calculation, man's ultimate confrontation with death is introduced by Locke, rather unexpectedly, as being profoundly important. This leads to a major fork in the existential road, by which there are two mutually exclusive logics to the pursuit of happiness: (1) a logic assuming that there is no afterlife, and (2) one that assumes that there is.

Locke states here that a man's choosing to assume there is no afterlife, and his corresponding preference for "the short pleasures of a vicious life" (*Essay* p. 282) involves a

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reward than it is rational to follow in order to be rewarded with endless bliss in Heaven.

One might speculate that Locke is more sensitive than Plato to the pleasure sacrifices sometimes required by the good human being, and hence more concerned with the self-interest of the individual vis-a-vis the community than was Plato. Unfortunately, exploring this possibility more deeply would take me beyond the scope of this dissertation.

“wrong judgment . . . whilst he knows, and cannot but be certain, that a future life is at least possible” (*Essay* p. 282). The vicious life is not wrong because it is less happy in this world, but because it neglects the reasonably perceived possibilities of the next world. It is from this position that his theory, which grounds itself in a relativistic, hedonistic foundation, avoids condoning all pursuits. This is indeed regardless of how much doubt there may be concerning the afterlife, bearing in mind that it always remains a possibility. The benefit of Locke’s skeptical position that metaphysics are unknowable, while losing the apparent enticement of the philosophic life, is also to make it impossible to refute this philosophic (and religious) claim. This requires rational people to hedge their existential bets on its account. The basic instruction here is not to choose in a precipitous manner, in a manner which could be (eternally) regretted.

What Locke is evidently doing is transforming the human relationship with eternal life from one of natural longing (*eros*) into one of calculated possibility, the calculation of which we are all personally responsible. This might seem like a reasonable position, but the example of Cephalus from the *Republic* quickly comes to mind. This example should make us particularly suspicious of Locke’s position. An elderly, financially well-off character, Cephalus serves as something of a foil to Socrates, comforting himself late in life by participating in religious rituals. His character is especially intriguing because he will not bear the questioning of Socrates as to whether Cephalus is really deluding himself. He does not seem to care about the truth, at least as Socrates might make it appear. Rather than a Socratic desiring for eternal truth, Cephalus himself desires comfort and hope, as he tries to convince himself towards the end of his life that he is strategically positioned for what lies beyond. Is this what Locke means to advocate?

To answer this, we should first acknowledge that though Locke rejects the philosophic life, he nevertheless does greatly admire and extol virtue. He states that,

Let a Man be never so well persuaded of the advantages of virtue, that it is as necessary to a Man, who has any great aims in this World, or hopes in the next, as food to life: yet till he *hungers and thirsts after righteousness*; till he feels an uneasiness in the want of it, his will will not be determin'd to any action in pursuit of this confessed greater good; but any other uneasiness he feels in himself, shall take place, and carry his will to other actions. (*Essay* p. 253)

Beyond their characterization as “food to life,” the “advantages of virtue” are left frustratingly unclear here. Nevertheless, Locke here importantly puts the desires more in charge of the will than rational calculation. A man can be fully convinced that virtue is better than vice, but if he feels more need to satisfy a vice than a virtue, the vice will be what actually determines the will. Like Plato, then, it is the strongest desire that determines the will, but for Locke the strongest desire can in all reasonable seriousness be for any number of things (instead of The Good). The task of the man who wants to satisfy his hopes for the next world (like Cephalus), in order to tightly secure his willful behavior to the pursuit of these objects, must cultivate within himself a stronger uneasiness in the lacking of virtue than in the lacking of vice. Locke would encourage Cephalus to stay with Socrates and embrace the resulting uneasiness he was sure to experience. The acquisition of righteousness requires a deep uneasiness in the want of righteousness, not comfortable dogmatic ritualism.

The concession being made here is that Pauline “thirsting after righteousness” is the most readily available means to achieve salvation, and is presented as the alternative to

temporally bounded hedonism. We can “thirst after righteousness” (*Essay* p. 253) with some deliberate reflective effort, but this occurs through pragmatic choice rather than realizing our inner desire for the *summum bonum* of philosophic contemplation. Man is alone to choose whether he wants to indulge in the pleasures of this world, or deny himself these presently available pleasures in favor of virtue and its heavenly rewards. Man is to contemplate, presented with this state of things, where the greatest absent (and real) good *most likely* exists, and to put his happiness in its pursuit. The deepest human desire is known subjectively and *a posteriori*, and may be shaped to steer our behavior in seemingly innumerable directions.

Also, like Plato, for Locke the desires can be rendered impotent when one believes that any particular desire cannot be satisfied, or when one is unaware of even being in need. This was a crucial insight by Hobbes in his project of conquering man’s natural vanity in favor of restoring the rationality of worldly peace and the fear of death (see e.g. McClure (2011); Ahrens Dorf (2000)). By understanding that our curiosity for evidence of forthcoming immortality cannot be satisfied, for example, we must turn to other pleasure-producing things that we can pursue and acquire. Our desires will attach to the things we direct them towards. In a similar vein, Locke states that,

For the will being the power of directing our operative faculties to some action, for some end, cannot at any time be moved towards what is judg’d at that time unattainable: That would be to suppose an intelligent being designedly to act for an end, only to lose its labour; for so it is to act, for what is judg’d not attainable; and therefore very great uneasiness move not the will, when they

are judg'd not capable of a Cure: They, in that case, put us not upon endeavours. (*Essay* pp. 257-8)

Locke holds a middle position here between Plato and Hobbes, rejecting the possibility of satisfying a desire for immortality through philosophy, but also asserting a much more optimistic view than Hobbes of the need to prepare for the possibility of an afterlife by considering faith and Pauline righteousness. What this optimistic view does in the process is foster concern with justice, right, and legitimacy over and above temporally bounded hedonism.

### *Bias and the Suspension Power*

There is another crucial step in Locke's theory here that explains why desiring immortality specifically is so important to the freedom of the human being. That importance comes from the fact that desiring immortality is essential to allowing the human being to rise above the cognitive biases generated by pursuing immediate gratification. This additional step is intertwined with Locke's concept of the suspension power. I will start by explaining this suspension power by itself and then explain its relationship to the desire for immortality.

Lockean bias is normally associated with self-love and ignorance, as it is briefly described in the *Second Treatise*. A more complicated picture emerges, however, in the second half of "Of Power." Here, Locke understands bias—"all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into"—as the psychological failure to temporarily "suspend the prosecution of this or that desire," which leads to false opinions regarding both the prudent path to happiness and the goodness of one's actions (sec. 47). The key passage from this section is lengthy, but useful:

For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, *a power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires*, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty Man has; and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness; whilst we precipitate the determination of our wills, and engage too soon before due Examination. *To prevent this we have a power to suspend the prosecution of this or that desire, as every one daily may Experiment in himself. This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is . . . call'd Free will.* For during this suspension of any desire, before the will be determined to action, and the action (which follows that determination) done, we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due Examination, we have judg'd, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness; and 'tis not a fault, but a perfection of our nature to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair Examination. (*Essay* pp. 263-4, emphasis mine)

By way of this suspension power, the mind achieves a form of freedom from the demands of the desires, which would otherwise determine all of our behavior. Indeed, the mind is seemingly “free” only insofar as it possesses within itself this power, and can temporarily disengage itself from proceeding one way or another. This passage places profound

importance to the commonplace (perhaps even trite) term that we have with will-power.<sup>54</sup>

Through it, Locke argues that we acquire the opportunity for our reason to more accurately consider the best means of achieving happiness.

Implicit in this discussion thus far is the tension between the goods presently available and future goods. Locke makes this more explicit in other sections, for instance when he states that, “were the satisfaction of a Lust, and the Joys of Heaven offered at once to any one’s present Possession, he would not balance, or err in the determination of his choice” (sec. 58). The problem is that “most Men . . . are apt to judge a little in Hand better than a great deal to come” (sec. 63). The more far off a possible good might be, the less certain that good appears in contrast to what is immediately available. However, it is the very uncertainty of future goods that creates a necessity for reflection in the present. The necessity for reflection is what initially motivates—or one might say strengthens—the use of the suspension power, in order to allow such reflection to take place. Locke thus states that a man becomes free by his “choosing of a remote Good as an end to be pursued. Here a man may suspend the act of his choice till he has examined” whether it will really make him happy, in accordance with his pursuit of that remote good (sec. 56). The remote good Locke almost exclusively mentions, and repeatedly so, is the “infinite eternal Joys of Heaven” available in the possible afterlife (sec. 38). I only point out in passing that there appears to be an obvious relationship between these instances and the repeated invocations of the “appeal to Heaven” in Locke’s political doctrines on the justified use of force.

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<sup>54</sup> This continues to be a very important concept in psychology literature. See e.g.

*Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* by Baumeister and Tierney (2011).

Another important aspect to this is that this suspension<sup>55</sup> power is presented as available to everyone equally—it thus represents a very strong voluntarist<sup>56</sup> and egalitarian position that Locke is staking out against the hierarchical rationalism of Plato. Locke is arguing against the Platonic principle that human beings pursue “The Good,” the idea that human beings pursue different things is simply a sign that they perceive the good to be different things as a function of the fallibility of judgment. Rejecting this, Locke sees the separation between the will and the desires as evidence that works against Plato’s position. There is a pull of the will in one direction that is apparently at least vaguely cognizant of its ignorance of future potentialities and a desiring part that pursues near and immediate gratification. In this struggle it is the stronger desire that wins, the near at hand pleasure versus the future and remote pleasure, not a personally insurmountable misunderstanding of the good.

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<sup>55</sup> C.f. Rousseau: “Nature commands every animal, and beasts obey. Man feels the same impetus, but he knows he is free to go along or to resist; and it is above all in awareness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul is made manifest” (1987, p. 45).

<sup>56</sup> C.f. Calvin: “We can establish that the soul consists of two parts, the intellect and the will. The work of the intellect is to make distinction between good and bad, and the function of the will is to choose and follow what the intellect says is good, rejecting what is bad. The intellect is a guide for the soul, and the will waits for its direction. Aristotle rightly taught that in the area of physical desire, choices made seem to be in line with intellectual judgment. Intellect governs the will . . .” (1987, pp. 60-65).

An important aspect of this is the grounding of independent moral responsibility. When we fail to use our power to suspend our immediate pursuits and deliberate on them, we become morally responsible for our debased taste in what we internalize “good” to be (*Essay* 270-1). The moral consequences that human beings potentially face in the afterlife, potentially influential from their ability to suspend their will and reflect upon them, seem to alleviate the need for political society to have an educative relationship with the people as is found in Plato’s *Republic*. Indeed Locke seems to pile on a bit here in terms of the amount of individual responsibility he places on people for their actions. He states that, “Nor let any one say, he cannot govern his Passions, nor hinder them from breaking out, and carrying him into action; for what he can do before a Prince, or a great Man, he can do alone, or in the presence of God, if he will” (*Essay* 268). This also seems to be a rebuttal to a political theory that presupposes that an over-awing absolute sovereign such as Hobbes’s Leviathan is necessary to control the passions of the people. Individuals are, according to Locke, fully capable of controlling themselves as effectively as if there was a terrifying Leviathan government trying to coerce them to do so. Individuals need only suspend the determination of their will to pull up and see more clearly where the greatest absent good to them really lies.

In short, moral failure can be overcome by properly cultivating the human desire for immortality. Acknowledging the human mystery of death shows to us the “darkness” we are in (*Essay* 560), and our desire for immortality incentivizes us to the task of freely and creatively working through that darkness. Our “only star and compass” in this task is reason (1T, sec. 58), and our desire for immortality pushes us to consult it. The psychological mechanism by which man overcomes his bias and embraces rational consideration is

therefore directly tied to man's desire for immortality. Immortality is a far off object of desire we are free to choose, and which we should choose in order to realize our potential capacities for liberty and rationality.

### The Reasonableness of Christianity

We have seen that the philosopher and the philosophic life is somewhat redefined under Locke's own philosophy, if not mostly dismissed. Practical reason replaces philosophizing about the essence of Truth and the *summum bonum*, and this faculty is universally available by way of the suspension power. It does not take a cradle-to-grave totalitarian-style education system to produce the rational society. Moral truth—variously called the Natural Law, the Law of Reason, or God's Law—has become more independently accessible under Locke's theory than Plato's. The question of moral truth is elevated for the individual by a rational acknowledgement of his hedonistic desires for immortality and the darkness he is in with regards to how to achieve it. This is a significantly clearer picture of Locke's man in the state of nature than is found in the *Two Treatises of Government*.

The problem of course is that the "infinite eternal Joys of Heaven" (*Essay* II.21.38) are not known by reason alone, but by the purported revelations of prophets. To work through this we need to turn to the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, where Locke draws the complicating distinction between what reason can see on its own and what, when knowledge is proposed to it, it is able to affirm. He suggests in "Of Power" that reason by itself cannot dismiss the possibility of the afterlife. He also argues that without the possibility of the afterlife, there is little motivation to use reason to perceive basic moral truths. So, the possibility of the afterlife has to be considered, but for the possibility of the afterlife to be

considered, the idea of the afterlife has to be either proposed by another, or independently imagined. One cannot contemplate the possibility of Heaven if one has never heard of or imagined such a thing.

Locke steps up and tries to meet this challenge, offering an account of how reason gained ascendancy in the world strictly on account of itself. He states that, “The same spark of the divine nature and knowledge in man [i.e. reason], which making him a man, showed him the law he was under, as a man” (RC, p. 133). It is through man’s awareness that he is a rational creature that he first senses reason’s central capacity to reveal rules by which to guide his life, i.e. Natural Law. There is obviously a gap, however, from sensing the benefits of rationality and believing in God or Heaven by reason alone. Locke states that, “Though the works of nature, in every part of them, sufficiently evidence a deity; yet the world made so little use of their reason, that they saw him not . . . [F]earful apprehension in most, gave them up into the hands of their priests . . . [and] [i]n this state of darkness and ignorance of the true God, vice and superstition held the world” (RC, p. 135). The desire for immortality thus originally backfired, as it only pushed most people to listen, out of fear of death and punishment, to those who promoted the collective rejection of reason, and to dogmatically accept contrived superstitions. This “darkness” greatly overshadowed the light, as the numbers of adherents to these superstitions collectively generated and wielded political power. Locke states that, “Whatsoever Plato, and the soberest of the philosophers, thought of the nature and being of the one God, they were fain, in their outward professions and worship, to go with the herd, and keep to their religion established by law” (RC, p. 136).

What Locke seems to claim in the *Reasonableness* is that the ethics of his political writings—the doctrine of natural rights—actually came to the world by way of Jesus Christ;

that after His ministry man's rational capacities were able to affirm and transmit this easily affirmable doctrine.<sup>57</sup> Beyond this, however, is the central importance to the desire for immortality. Jesus Christ is important not only as the philosopher who emerged with a doctrine most compatible with Natural Law, but as the Son of God promising eternal life for obedience to this Law. Otherwise, "just measures of right and wrong" can be seen as "bonds of society, and conveniences of common life, and laudable practices," but not an "obligation . . . of the highest law, the law of nature" (RC, p. 144). "That could not be, without a clear knowledge and acknowledgement of the law-maker, and the great rewards and punishments, for those that would, or would not obey him" (RC, p. 144). Without Christ's promise of Heaven, virtue was left "unendowed, [and] very few were willing to espouse her" (RC, p. 150). And to be sure, in the context here, virtue very clearly connotes obedience to the Law of Reason. For Locke, therefore, the world that was lost in irrational superstition was necessarily coeval with the world that lacked the hope for the infinite and eternal joys of

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<sup>57</sup> This has to be factored against, however, the scholarly view that equality is a reason-based assumption in the *Second Treatise*, which itself serves as the prime postulate in his reasoning for natural rights. This equality only expressly assumes the possibility of a silent God, validating the principle as rooted in Natural Law. There is no mention there of Jesus Christ, so one might speculate that at most, Locke derives his morality from minimalistic tenets of natural theology. Since so much clearly rides on how Locke arrives at his assumption of human equality in order to understand how serious Locke views the role of religion (and Jesus Christ) in his ethical doctrines, the current scholarly debate over Lockean equality is a crucial one (see e.g. Waldron 2002; Zuckert 1994; Forde 2006).

Heaven as has been promised by Christ and his apostles. The above analysis of “Of Power” explains Locke's psychological justification for this view, which centers on a hedonistic theory of human motivation. Of course, to say that the historical Christ was necessary to the rational taming of the world does not imply belief in his divinity, or divinity in general.

#### Property Rights and Piety: Who God left the World to

I want to return now to a problem I alluded to earlier in the paper, which is that Locke's psychological theory in “Of Power” is actually formulated after the publication of the *Two Treatises*. This is easy to overlook, as the *Two Treatises*, the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, and the *Essay* are all published in Locke's so-called “miracle year” of 1689. Locke, however, rewrites “Of Power” for the second edition of the *Essay*, but never goes back to rewrite any of the political works of 1689 (the *Reasonableness* comes after each of these works in 1695). Locke either did not want, for one reason or another, to update his political works in accord with his most recent psychological views of the human being, or he did not perceive a need to.

Some need certainly seems to exist, though, as the differences between the first version and the second version of “Of Power” are quite significant. The key principle that Locke abandons is that human beings are motivated by their assessment of the greatest absent good. What he replaces this with is the idea that the desires are crucial, over and beyond what a person might rationally perceive as the greater good. From this position, Locke explains why those who know about, and even believe in, Heaven are not always motivated by it. It is not enough to believe in Heaven, but one must “thirst after righteousness,” a phrase Locke takes directly from the Epistles of St. Paul. This seems like

a fundamental enough shift to warrant an analogous revision of his political works. Locke has shifted the base of human motivation from nearly purely rational, to a hybrid between reason and the desires.

What can be noted is that there is both a good and likely reason why Locke declined to revise his political works, as well as a good and likely reason why he probably should have. Although it is too far afield to explore here, Locke could easily have seen in his political works of 1689 enough formal space to accommodate the changes that he made to this particular chapter of the *Essay*. Locke's depiction of human beings in the *Second Treatise*, for example, accounts for many cases where reason is not the decisive motivating factor, and loses out to the biases of passion and ignorance. Also, the desire for immortality is already explicitly built in via the religious rhetoric employed, especially the "appeal to Heaven." On the other hand, why Locke probably should have gone back and made the importance of desires more clear, is that this omission is arguably the biggest source of criticism his works face today, with his incorporation of religious rhetoric being a close second. For generations Locke has been criticized for advancing a rigidly rational, autonomous, almost robotic view of the human being. Finally, another worrisome issue with not revising the political works is that his revisions to "Of Power" might have been accordingly constrained.

Be this as it may, Locke's original construction of the *Second Treatise* with religious rhetoric still requires an interpretation in accordance with the preceding analysis. I think this begins with Locke's incorporation of the writings of Richard Hooker, who was a well-known Protestant writer in Locke's time. Hooker is also someone who scholars today agree to various degrees is cited by Locke for his Christian *bona fides*. In the *Second Treatise*,

Locke's rhetorical strategy not only involves trying to show off some Christian orthodoxy to disarm his critics, but also to solve the philosopher's more fundamental dilemma of getting the people to listen (cf. *Rep.* 327c). Locke realizes, like Paul and Plato before him, that people only listen out of self-interest, and questions about justice achieve their best leverage on self-interest calculation from an existential point of view.

Locke incorporating the writings of Hooker provides the stage for the concepts—over and above “power” and “right”—of love, duty, and justice in the *Second Treatise*. Without these concepts, the appeal to Heaven and invocations of final Judgment, which are some of the most commonly pointed to instances of Locke being merely rhetorical, might have vastly different meaning. What can be easily missed here is how important and revealing rhetorical purposes can be. Indeed, to recognize a purpose as rhetorical can often be conflated with its being unnecessary or dispensable. It has been speculated by scholars, for instance, that the appeal to Heaven is not a theological point at all, but a call to arms servicing the political demands of the moment. I have tried so far to offer evidence challenging this view. Locke's concern is with articulating a theory of *legitimate* government and *legitimate* revolution, which a bare call to arms would contradict. The appeal to Heaven, then, has to be taken more seriously if we are to take Locke's aim of establishing a theory of legitimate politics seriously.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, deriving human equality

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<sup>58</sup> Locke explains his use of this expression as follows: “Where there is no Judge on Earth, the Appeal lies to God in Heaven . . . [W]hether I may as Jephtha did, appeal to Heaven in it? Of that I my self can only be Judge in my own Conscience, as I will answer it at the great Day, to the Supream Judge of all Men” (ST, sec. 21).

from man's relative place under God is not simply a move to establish ontological authority, but putting this issue into its more psychologically effectual existential context.

Locke, of course, was one among many influential philosophers in early modernity who were working at rationalizing politics, especially in the wake of the preceding religious warfare of the time. Comparing Locke with Thomas Hobbes in this project is especially necessary, as so many scholars view Locke as something of a closet Hobbesian. Why Locke and Hobbes see a need for politics to become more this-worldly seems to have some important differences, however. For Locke, emphasis on industriousness and commerce is politically necessary for security from external enemies. Developing land and increasing population "is the great art of government" that will make a prince "too hard for his neighbours" (ST, sec 42). Hobbes is different. James Stoner (2004) recaps Leo Strauss's interpretation of this, stating that "the key insight of Hobbes's thinking is the moral superiority of fear to pride . . . 'fear of violent death [is] the passion which brings men to reason'" (pp. 559-60). Emphasis on this world for Hobbes, then, is more about public compliance to the sovereign than Locke's emphasis on economic prosperity-driven national security.

This makes sense insofar as the general scholarly consensus suggests that we relate Hobbes with domestic security and Locke with property and commerce. Complicating this distinction however, is Stoner's statement that "Because Hobbes already thinks men have a property in their person, Locke's development of a theory of the origin of external property in the labor of that person can be said by Strauss to be a development of liberalism on Hobbesian principles" (p. 561). Locke appears, then, to be a continuation or development of

Hobbesian principles, increasing the suspicion that Locke also wanted his metaphysical agnosticism to undercut human pride and vanity in the same style of Hobbes.

Where I think the strongest evidence points to is that Locke sought both—domestic security brought on by way of philosophical skepticism of religious superstition, but then to build further on that accomplishment by expanding on the ethics of commercial activity. Such a notion is clearly stated by Locke: “God gave the world . . . to the use of the Industrious and Rational . . . not to the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsome and Contentious” (ST, sec. 34). If I am correct, then Locke was indeed in this respect complicit with Hobbes in seeking to influence the desire for immortality in favor of a more economically-driven politics. Locke, however, ended up in an entirely different theoretical direction by locating in this ubiquitous desire the popular motivation needed to sustain the ethical dimension of the commercially orientated, rights-based regime.

### Conclusion

Top scholars such as Michael Zuckert often attempt to counter “the growing consensus about the religious . . . foundation of Locke’s thought” (2005, p. 422) by standing firmly atop the famous passage by Locke referring to reason as man’s “only star and compass” (1T, sec. 58). What my analysis shows, however, is that for Locke reason leads to the political necessity of certain probabilistic commitments—namely of God and Heaven—which validates his equating of reason with Natural Law, a crucial conceptual elevation of reason that serves several substantive and rhetorical purposes.

We have seen that presuming that God is the author of Natural Law at least rhetorically *supports* various arguments Locke makes regarding absolute justice, rights, and

equality. However, if we ultimately conclude that reason alone (without God) could still validly justify the ethical principles that Locke presents, then the question is how to understand Locke's consistently incorporating God and Heaven into his political philosophy. Are these ideas logically or practically necessary, and if so, in what sense? First, Locke posits that God is the author of reason itself, to *legitimize* the appeal to the dictates of reason. Second, Locke makes obeying reason a way of *satisfying one's desires*—the expected reward for thirsting after moral knowledge and obedience thereto being eternal life.

### Chapter 3: Tocqueville

*“Legislators of democracies and all honest and enlightened men who live in them must therefore apply themselves relentlessly to raising up souls and keeping them turned toward Heaven. It is necessary for all those who are interested in the future of democratic societies to unite, and for all in concert to make continuous efforts to spread within these societies a taste for the infinite, a sentiment of greatness, and a love of immaterial pleasures.”* (DA, p. 519, II.II.15)

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The sociology of Tocqueville’s political theory is much more ambitious than Locke’s. It is explicitly concerned with maintaining the health of American democracy, seeking both to identify the major sources of potential decay and to propose remedies. The conclusions he arrives at flow from a critical inventory of the most enduring motive energies (desires) within human nature.<sup>59</sup> These energies must be understood so that they can ultimately be channeled—by statesmen and other elites—to lead society away from corruptive practices.

Whereas Locke often assumes man’s passions to be ordered as they should be, in accord with Nature and Natural Law, Tocqueville turns to how these passions may fall out of order within democratic society, and how to prevent this from happening.<sup>60</sup> Scholars

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<sup>59</sup> See e.g. Stauffer (2014, p. 781): “Human nature is not that elastic in Tocqueville’s view. It has certain permanent features. Religious longing is one; interest is another.”

<sup>60</sup> Tocqueville states that, “General ideas relative to God and human nature are therefore, among all ideas, the ones it is most fitting to shield from the habitual action of individual reason and for which there is most to gain and least to lose in recognizing an authority” (DA, p. 418, II.I.5).

agree that religion is important to Tocqueville in this regard,<sup>61</sup> but disagree or are simply unclear on specifically *why* religion is important.<sup>62</sup> The main reason for this lack of clear consensus, I suspect, is caused by a lack of attention paid to the psychological bridge connecting the individual democratic citizen with the philosophical principle of individual

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<sup>61</sup> E.g. Kessler (1994), Mitchell (1995), Lawler (2004, ch.4), Herold (2015). An example of a detractor from this consensus, as far as I can understand, is Bilakovics (2012), in an analysis lamenting the loss of politics within democracy, presumably in part because religion cannot be relied on: “Religious authority cannot be made manifest in the here and now without degrading itself, nor be fused to politics without suffering the cynicism politics generates” (p. 234). His analysis largely follows Wolin’s influential work on Tocqueville, and the general civic and association-emphasized interpretations that tend to find in Tocqueville more of a critique of religion’s insufficiency more than its irreplaceable value.

<sup>62</sup> Zuckert (1981) for example argues that religion is important because it “indirectly supports liberty in two ways” (p. 264). It is a cause of individual self-control, and promotes the dogmatic view that only limited government is legitimate. I do not wholly disagree, but find this explanation insufficient in order to fully represent the complex psychological theory Tocqueville is bringing to bear in his endorsement of religion. I thus look to develop the precision of these extent scholarly claims and to look deeper at the underlying psychological mechanisms in the primary text.

rights; namely, the natural desire for immortality.<sup>63 64</sup> The desire for immortality explains why religion is *psychologically irreplaceable*; namely, because it sustains hope for one's personal eternal happiness and a sense of existential order. Where it becomes *democratically irreplaceable*, though, is in its buttressing of the doctrine of individual rights, beliefs essential to a democratic people's love of freedom despite its inherent vicissitudes. These ideas mutually reinforce each other, forming a sort of virtuous feedback loop between belief in rights, especially property rights, and an expectation for one's personal eternal happiness. These two elements are sown together by the desire for immortality, and constitute the heart of Tocqueville's strategy to keep democracy out of the vicious, fatal

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<sup>63</sup> Hebert (2010) and Herold (2015) are notable exceptions to connecting this desire with political liberty, though I have disagreements in some places and new points to contribute in others that will be noted below. Herold (2015), in particular, has recently argued very explicitly that the desire for immortality is central to Tocqueville's project. He states that, "One of his [Tocqueville's] most prominent themes is that religion can never die because human beings have a natural desire for immortality" (p. 525). While I very much appreciate the recognition and attention paid to this crucial concept, I disagree with his analysis overall at many points. Such contrasts are pointed out throughout the chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Tocqueville states that, "Most religions are only general, simple, and practical means of teaching men the immortality of the soul. That is the greatest advantage that a democratic people derives from beliefs, and it is what renders them more necessary to such a people than to all others" (DA, p. 519, II.II.15).

circle he sees forming between material enjoyments and atheism (or irreligion).<sup>65</sup> This specific and complex manner of theoretically connecting the psychological with the philosophical is my intended contribution to the extant literature on *Democracy in America*. This theory reflects much of Tocqueville's Lockean heritage, while being especially unique for its metaphysical agnosticism which is deeper and more problematic than was Locke's.

My analysis of the desire for immortality will primarily focus on *Democracy in America*, especially Volume II, Parts 1 & 2 of this extensive work (DA, pp. 517-21). These sections Tocqueville entitles, "Influence of Democracy on Intellectual Movement in the United States" and "Influence of Democracy on the Sentiments [i.e. feelings, desires] of the Americans." I also frequently cite from Volume I, Part 2, chapter 9, entitled "On the Principal Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic in the United States." Other sections from across *Democracy* will be taken up to help demonstrate how this desire in particular makes possible this concept of the "virtuous circle" between religion and property rights. This focus on the preconditions for respect for rights is intentionally narrower than that of other scholars in not attempting to catalogue all of the political benefits of religion for democracy.

The following proceeds through four sections. The first establishes my primary claim that Tocqueville relies on this desire for immortality in this political theory, and contrasts him with Plato and Locke in this respect. The second section analyzes the fatal

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<sup>65</sup> Tocqueville is famous, or infamous, for listing a great many beneficial items to democracy. I have endeavored to show where the desire for immortality fits into that list, and have concluded that it actually reveals what few items are most important.

circle he sees threatening democratic society. The third section focuses on the remedy, the virtuous circle, and specifically lays out his argument for how the desire for immortality should be enlisted to sustain widespread love for freedom via belief in individual rights. The fourth section discusses this theory in the broader context of political liberalism, with special focus on comparing Locke. My interpretational argument is that religion in democracy is much more than a useful counter-message to materialistic society as is typically understood, particularly with its being entrusted with sustaining a free people's all-important love of liberty.

### Ordering Tocqueville's Thought

Tocqueville can be difficult to analyze because he often evades theorists' conventional categorizations. Debates exist over whether he is more political philosopher or social scientist (Zuckert, C. 1991), more ancient or modern (Lawler 1993),<sup>66</sup> more believer or atheist (Lively 1965), more democrat or aristocrat (Lawler 2004). Nevertheless, he must somehow be orientated through the use of such categories (especially in a single chapter), at least to some extent. Rather than introduce categories new to this dissertation, however, I

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Herold (2015, p. 524): "Although scholars have noted that Tocqueville saw modern democracy as in large part defined by the ascendancy of material self-interest, they have in general tended to present him as seeking either to encourage or to roll back that development." See also Stauffer (2014), who in Herold's words, "presents Tocqueville as publicly resigned (even as he was publicly resistant to) a permanent reorientation of our moral concerns toward self-interest" (p. 524).

will mainly draw upon what has come before in my preceding chapters on Plato and Locke. Specifically, I will make what I see as the most important observations regarding where he is Lockean, where he is Platonic, and where he is neither.

I will begin by pointing out the obvious fact (to many scholars, at least) that in writing about American democracy, Tocqueville writes about a society that is significantly, if not primarily Lockean.<sup>67 68</sup> And surely enough, in approving of many of the political principles found within, Tocqueville can be found approving of many ideas that sound Lockean—property rights, *some* separation between church and state, a Christianity infused rearing of children—just to name a few. Moreover, in being a self-professedly devotee of the great French philosophers Rousseau, Pascal, and Montesquieu, he was *ipso facto* drawn to many ideas consonant with Locke’s philosophy. So while Locke is—for whatever reason

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<sup>67</sup> E.g. Pangle (1988); see also Herold (2015, p. 525), where the author states that Tocqueville’s description of “America’s Christians . . . bears a striking resemblance to the theology of John Locke” and that they were “influenced by the moderate rather than the radical Enlightenment.”

<sup>68</sup> Tocqueville is more focused on the Puritan founding than the Lockean founding and the blending of the spirit of religion with the spirit of freedom. See E. Banfield’s “The Illiberal Tocqueville” (1991) for a helpful discussion of this difference. But see also Manent (1996, p. 94), who argues that Tocqueville’s view of the two foundings is one of continuity: “What appear to be two opposite phenomena are in no way contradictory. They are two successive phases of the same process . . . [T]he ardent faith of the first Puritans gives way to the grave but superficial respect characteristic of democracy come of age.”

of Tocqueville's—not cited anywhere in *Democracy in America* (not for lack of space to do so), influence and points of commonality are discernible.

There are also, however, important distinctions between Tocqueville and Locke. For instance, many view Tocqueville as surpassing Locke in his estimation of the importance of religion to liberal political society (many scholars argue for a secular Locke, see e.g. Strauss 1953, Zuckert 1994). Although he argues that a classical education for the elite few in America is beneficial (DA, p. 451-2, II.I.16), religion is clearly desired for the large majority lacking access to such an education (DA, p. 418, II.I.5). Following in a roughly ancient vein of criticizing excessive materialism in democracies, Tocqueville's serves as a major voice in the post-Enlightenment world on the need for democracies to sustain their religious bearings.

Tocqueville's differences here with Locke, and in a sense modernity itself, seem to be motivated by influence from Plato and the ancient thinkers. Indeed, he lines up with Plato on many points. They both view democracy with wary eyes (e.g. *Republic*, bk. VIII). There is the shared concern with the loss of many ideals far more akin to Plato's philosophy

than Locke's: positive liberty, virtue, greatness, and the embrace of salutary dogmas.<sup>69 70</sup>

Both Plato and Tocqueville are troubled by democracy's excessive love of equality and immediate gratification. They seem to roughly agree that economic life within democracy requires some form of submission to a more learned, philosophic judgment regarding the noble and the base. This knowledge is hoped to serve as a psychological curative, as democratic people breathe in a materialistic atmosphere that is equally toxic and intoxicating. Lastly, Tocqueville, like Plato, place great *political importance* on cultivating widespread belief in the immortal human soul (DA, II.II.15).

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<sup>69</sup> Tocqueville "is like Rousseau in his concern with virtue and citizenship, believing with him that these are most likely to be lost in contemporary society" (Zetterbaum 1967, p. 44). He frequently praises Plato for his use of spirituality to activate these ideas. He states that, "It is not certain that Socrates and his school had decided opinions about what would happen to man in the other life; but the sole belief on which they were settled, that the soul has nothing in common with the body and that it survives it, was enough to give to Platonic philosophy the sort of sublime spark that distinguishes it" (DA, p. 520, II.II.15).

<sup>70</sup> Tocqueville states that, "men cannot do without dogmatic beliefs . . . I add here that among all dogmatic beliefs the most desirable seem to me to be dogmatic beliefs in the matter of religion (DA, p. 417, II.I.5). Cf. His statement that, "the century of blind devotions and instinctive virtues is already feeling far from us, and I see the time approaching when freedom, public peace, and social order itself will not be able to do without enlightenment" (DA, p. 503, II.II.8).

The theoretical prescriptions of each share the view that religion is the necessary poetic guide for the many's innate desires for eternal life, and religion should channel these desires in a direction that is healthy for the individual and the regime (DA, p. 519, II.II.15). This implies the cultivation of a spiritually infused self-understanding by the people, and a belief in a divine law-giving God that sustains a transcendent moral order (DA, p. 418, II.I.5). Whereas Locke tried to simplify and rationalize the Christian religion against the historical backdrop of too much religious fervor, Tocqueville's more resembles Plato's mission of securing a rational, moralizing faith against an increasingly disrobed atheism.

Nevertheless, it remains uncertain how practicable this approach to religion is when placed under Lockean liberalism's principle of private conscience and toleration in matters of faith. Even when we consider that Tocqueville recommends a classically educated elite, how can this elite help to sustain religious faith in modern liberal society? Can some sort of rarefied knowledge be attained and propagated? Are the intellectual elite within modern liberal societies supposed to still be able to see beyond modernity's epistemological barriers? We know that Tocqueville was, to use an informal expression, a "bad Catholic," and did not believe in any one, true faith, verifiable or discoverable by philosophers. As Jack Lively notes, Tocqueville "lost any real religious faith early in life, and only returned to the religious problem itself in his last years" (1965, p. 184). His vision for social leadership by a classically trained elite thus seems to be unstructured, antiquated, and consequently untenable. Not the strongest starting point for a political argument in favor of sustaining the public's religious belief.

By essentially synthesizing Lockean and Platonic ideas, Tocqueville seems to be forced into making doubtful prescriptions for America's democratic ills, which seem to

inexorably lead to pessimistic forecasts. Scholars are indeed quite keen to this negativity (see e.g. Stauffer 2014, p. 782), but the theoretical tension of attempting to fuse together Lockean and Platonic ideas is in my view the most under-appreciated source.<sup>71</sup> This leads to the following problem: Tocqueville's thoughts on modern democracy may force us to confront the possibility that Platonic freedom and Lockean liberalism have mutually incompatible foundations. Put another way, liberal freedom and Lockean liberalism may have mutually incompatible foundations. Within Lockean liberalism, then, even democracy's elites could be rendered alienated from virtues essential to both the good life and healthy public leadership. This worry is captured in Tocqueville's statement that, "as one despairs of being able to resolve by oneself the greatest problems that human destiny presents, one is reduced, like a coward, to not thinking about them at all. Such a state . . . prepares citizens for servitude" (DA, p. 418, II.I.5).<sup>72</sup> But does solving great problems, or what amounts to the philosophic life, even make sense in modern, tolerant, pluralistic society?

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<sup>71</sup> Myers (1998), in a different context, draws a similar type of comparison between Locke and Tocqueville, and also taps into the pessimism of the latter. He states that, "Although Tocqueville, like Locke, affirms the fundamental justice of the egalitarian principle, he is more rhetorically direct than Locke in warning against the debasement of that principle in the form of the levelling passion. But the difference is more rhetorical than substantive" (p. 216).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Tocqueville's statement that, "no literary genius exists without freedom of mind, and there is no freedom of mind in America" (DA, p. 245, I.II.7).

*Religion: Opiate of the Democratic Masses?*

Scholars vary widely on what the psychological effects of religion are intended to be in Tocqueville's theory. Lawler (1993), for instance, focuses a good deal on the *energizing effects* of Christianity that Tocqueville sees in America, which he argues is mainly good for ameliorating democracy's materialism. This supports his over-arching thesis of the need for *political ambition* to supply greatness in democracy, and to provide the American citizen with an artificial environment (the political arena) in which he can cultivate a psychologically buoying sense of certainty. Religion may be a necessary condition for this in some respects, but is not by itself sufficient for the perpetuation of modern democracy (p. 173).

The implicit recommendation is that Americans need to all actively work to preserve widespread Christian faith, modified by Tocqueville's cautioning insight that Christianity does political harm insofar as it diminishes the desire for worldly political greatness. Americans are not Pascalians, but ultimately resemble Pascal insofar as they are not comfortable with their modern inclination to reject a religious worldview, and are left grappling with this problem. The proper outlet for this restless energy needs to be acknowledged by democratic American citizens to be found in political life instead of the distractions of the commercial, petty life.

I do not believe that this captures Tocqueville's intended teaching very well. In Hebert's (2010) more recent study, for example, I find noticeable improvement, particularly on the importance of this relationship between religion and democracy. One important cause of this difference of interpretation between Lawler and Hebert centers on the crucial question of whether or not metaphysical knowledge is attainable through human reason. By

emphasizing the influence of Pascal, Lawler's Tocqueville is much more pessimistic on this question, which then in turn leads to the surprising implication that religion is important for democracy partly because of the restlessness it stirs up for its uncertainty in these matters, which can then be assuaged in political life where certainty is more tangible and palpable (yet artificial and sort of sad). Hebert's Tocqueville, on the other hand, holds open Tocqueville's judgment concerning how much metaphysical knowledge is available to human reason, and puts him in the same group with Plato and Aristotle in extolling the philosophic life as the best human life and metaphysical inquiry as supremely valuable and deeply satisfying. I am not entirely in agreement that this is the case either, but it is in my view closer to the truth.

Granted, this knowledge for Hebert, and hence the efficacy of this way of life, seems to be reserved to the few, which returns to the question of how this view of human nature can be accommodated to democratic society. Hebert argues that the philosophers are, according to Tocqueville, to engage in the legislative arts from outside elected office, instructing and guiding the people by acting as mediums between higher truths and the majority of human beings who need them to be represented symbolically to be understood and accepted. Operating within society, the clergy, women, and students of ancient literature together comprise a sort of alliance of believers in essential truths that act as countervailing forces against the tendency toward materialism among the wealth pursuing males (p. 152).

Nevertheless, the most important difference is Hebert's picking up on the natural desire for immortality, and the longing to be harmonized with and indeed part of a cosmic order (p. 112). This desire is not doomed to be unsatisfied in this world, as Lawler's

Pascalian Tocqueville wants to argue, but rather suffers from not being acknowledged for what it is. The desire for immortality is often a vague feeling, one that requires stimulation and tutoring for the individual to understand from where this restlessness issues, and once this is recognized, that there are satisfying objects within reach. One of these, of course, is hope and faith in religious salvation.

So, religion does not merely aggravate one's restlessness, but rather channels, ennobles, and satisfies it. Lawler mentions this possibility of religious faith, but it seems that he views this as an undesirable condition, primarily out of concern that the impetus to political action would thereby be lost (the progressive Dewey has a similar view, actually, that will be taken up in the next chapter).

The impetus for Hebert's Tocqueville, and my own, is that when one recognizes that one is part of a transcendent cosmic order, one does not become *pacified*, but rather *empowered* to act with a sense of meaning and deep efficacy in a manner that cannot be felt absent such belief, faith, and/or understanding. But Hebert gives only passing attention in all this to the crucial passage in *Democracy* that calls on elected officials to act like believers in their handling of great affairs so that the people will more easily adopt them in handling their own, small, private affairs (p. 152). It is here that Tocqueville reveals the theoretical bind he is in, and why he is actually less Platonic than Hebert thinks he is. This in turn, reveals Tocqueville's own unique contributions to this subject.

### Slavery and the Fatal Circle: Material Enjoyments and Atheism

Let us begin examining what Tocqueville views as most threatening to the health of democracy, and that which invites the main thrust of his criticism of democracy as a form of

government. For him, there is an intrinsic relationship between excessive material enjoyment on one hand and atheism on the other, in the sense that each has the effect of fueling the other. He states that, “Democracy favors the taste for material enjoyments. This taste, if it becomes excessive, soon disposes men to believe that all is nothing but matter; and materialism in its turn serves to carry them toward these enjoyments with an insane ardor. Such is the fatal circle into which democratic nations are propelled” (DA, p. 519, II.II.15). Moving away from the common understanding that being too materialistic is bad for democracy, I want to argue that the key element to focus on here is how atheism factors in. Atheism, in my view of Tocqueville’s theory, is what first and foremost leads to the destruction or loss of political freedom.<sup>73</sup> My focus will thus be primarily on the atheism side of the fatal circle, with the manner in which excessive material enjoyment factors in treated concomitantly.

Let us begin with the details of this “fatal circle,” and how it is that people supposedly fall into it and find themselves in a condition of slavery.

First, people losing their faith and embracing atheistic “materialism” has many negative effects on the love of political freedom. This is because political freedom—and in fact all forms of freedom—requires a certain psychological strength, or will power, which when over-strained becomes a problem. This is the most important meaning in his

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<sup>73</sup> Tocqueville points out that material enjoyments are contained in America: “The taste for material enjoyments does not bring democratic people to similar excesses. There, the love of well-being shows itself to be a tenacious, exclusive, universal, but contained passion” (DA, p. 508, II.II.11).

expression that “Despotism can do without faith, but freedom cannot” (DA, p. 282, I.II.9). Religious faith in this sense is helpful because it lessens the strain of political freedom by essentially limiting its scope. For example, the freedom to ponder one’s existence is reduced by religion, providing ready and stable answers to a number of existential uncertainties. By limiting the arenas within which freedom must be experienced, its overall strain is reduced, thus bolstering man’s ability to use it effectively. Tocqueville thinks that the strain of complete independence of mind in both politics and existence writ-large is too overwhelming a burden for people to bear. He thus states that, “Despotism can do without faith, but [political] freedom cannot” (DA, p. 282, I.II.9). This is essentially the same equation as above, only stated in reverse: one can be free to contemplate one’s metaphysical existence endlessly only if one’s political life is completely pre-ordered.<sup>74</sup>

Backing up a bit, let us remind ourselves: What is political freedom? In American democracy, the people experience political freedom in the following sense: they have rights to participate (directly and indirectly) in politics and government. They can assemble, they can vote, they can run for office. The people effectively rule themselves, and we have now seen why this requires faith to be sustained. But is political freedom really so exhausting?

Theoretically speaking, it very well could be. The people, after all, have to put in effort to satisfy political freedom’s requirements, which includes acquiring political beliefs that can guide the formation of policy preferences and social ideals (something akin to an ideology). Armed with these things, citizens can form judgments about which proposed

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<sup>74</sup> This echoes in some respects Plato’s claim in the *Republic* that philosophy and politics tilt away from each other, and thus the combination of both is rare (e.g. 520b).

laws ought to be adopted, and/or which candidates ought to be elected. There is, of course, no commonly recognized authority governing all of these individual decisions, beyond perhaps previously existing laws and the Constitution. Citizens will variously rally behind competing authorities, such as scientific consensus, religious revelation, tradition, or a charismatic leader. Amid all of these competing authorities, the people must nevertheless operate as a collective, and decide for themselves what laws should be passed and which people should serve in government office. The only alternative is schism, civil war, and regime change.

For Tocqueville, the democratic form of government producing all of this necessary political activity is—interestingly—a major cause “of the prodigious motion of industry” (DA, p. 233, I.II.6) he finds in America. The fervor in the political world in various ways produces a general active human energy, it draws man out of himself, in a way that naturally migrates into the economic realm. So, democracies (at least healthy ones) are characterized by great political *and* great economic activity — feeling exhausted yet?

All this competition that can be seen in both the political and economic worlds requires some form of crucial respite. Without such a respite, the restive energy will exhaust

itself in the spirit of the people.<sup>75 76</sup> They will gladly give up some of the freedoms of the political and economic worlds to acquire the rest they require, should the problem get that far.

Moreover, the people will not blame themselves for their weakness to sustain their activity in these domains. They will be forced by their own vanity to deny the efficacy of individual initiative in these worlds and come to hold to the belief that the goods of this world are dispensations of chance, not hard work (DA, p. 524, II.II.17). This belief, caused

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<sup>75</sup> Tocqueville states that, “The constant opposition reigning between the instincts that equality gives birth to and the means that it furnishes to satisfy them is tormenting and fatiguing to souls” (DA, p. 513, II.II.13). Also that, “In democratic times, enjoyment is keener than in aristocratic centuries, and above all the number of those who taste it is infinitely greater; but on the other hand, one must recognize that hopes and desires are more often disappointed, souls more aroused and more restive, and cares more burning” (DA, p. 514, II.II.13). Also: “Between themselves and the vast and final object of their desires they see a multitude of small intermediate barriers, which they clear only slowly; this view tires their ambition in advance and sickens it” (DA, p. 603, II.III.19).

<sup>76</sup> Mitchell states that, “if the self is inclined either to fall quietly into itself—Tocqueville’s term for this phenomenon is ‘individualism’—or to be anxiously carried away . . . Tocqueville would have it that human rationality, and so the commercial spirit, is made possible at all by institutions that draw human beings toward a more moderate disposition—away, that is, from the too-slow or the too-fast” (1995, p. 5).

by the competition equality brings, will be accompanied by the love of equality natural to democracy. The love for equality is an agitated love in any case for Tocqueville insofar as it can never be completely satisfied. Inequalities always persist—especially economic ones that are inherently linked to the inequalities in intelligence and foresight (DA, p. 51, I.I.3). But democratic citizens reject the relevance of this inequality because they reject the premise that there are inequalities in intelligence – or at least that any individual mind be superior to their own (DA, p. 189, I.II.5). This dissatisfaction leads to class envy, and they then finally become willing to trade property rights for government managed economic equality.<sup>77</sup> In short, the industrious energy weakens and the desire for effortless acquisition of pleasure-producing goods strengthens. Tocqueville envisions under this scenario, “an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls” (DA, p. 663, II.IV.6).

So this is how atheism leads to excessive material enjoyment and the forfeiture of political freedom, i.e. via psychological exhaustion.<sup>78</sup> What I want to keep emphasizing,

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<sup>77</sup> Tocqueville describes this in his discussion of “what kind of despotism democratic nations have to fear,” stating that it “finally reduces each nation to begin nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd” (DA, p. 663, II.IV.6).

<sup>78</sup> Herold (2015) interprets Tocqueville on this issue entirely differently. To him, the problem is not that freedom is exhausting, but that the desire for immortality needs “a

though, is that material enjoyment itself does not threaten religion until it becomes excessive, and as long as religious faith is sustained, it will indeed not become excessive. The key question then is why does religion begin to slip, and lose efficacy in moderating the taste for well-being?

### *Religion and Politics*

Because religion is so important—Tocqueville calls it America’s first political institution (DA, p. 280, I.II.9)—he worries about its becoming rejected as false in the eyes

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healthy outlet for the longing for immortality in a regime where souls are turned exclusively toward temporal and material conceptions of happiness” (p. 528). He later states that, “there is a danger that their [Americans’] ambitions will turn in on themselves and destroy themselves” and that “our pride can never be founded merely on the calculating pursuit of self-interest” (p. 529). Whereas I see the pursuit as draining being the biggest problem, Herold sees it as being too unsatisfying, and the unsatisfied desire for immortality is acutely felt, thereby creates an underlying anxiety. What I think is being misunderstood is the desire for immortality is rooted in self-interest for Tocqueville (though he also honors the more pure desires for the noble and transcendent), the desire to continue living in order to continue experiencing happiness. I again leave it to the reader’s judgment which side is more akin to Tocqueville’s practical project of saving democracy.

of the majority (which is the stand-in democratic authority<sup>79</sup>). He believes, should this happen, that it actually could only be the result of the union of religion with politics.<sup>80</sup>

The reason politics can be so harmful is because political axioms and platforms are constantly going in and out of favor. Common experience is enough to support the assertion that political parties constantly evolve in order to maximize their electoral strength. They compete in an open market-style environment, and need to advertise a product that will be desirable to the electoral consumers, the voters. Fidelity to every principle and tenet exactly as it was stated half a century ago would be suicidal behavior. Parties will always prefer to acquire power than to cling to unpopular principles and die a collective political death.

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<sup>79</sup> Tocqueville states that, "The people reign over the American political world as does God over the universe" (DA, p. 53, I.I.4)

<sup>80</sup> Herold (2015) dismisses that Tocqueville is serious about the separation between church and state being the main solution to preserving faith. He states that "one could characterize this as the agreed-on opinion of the parties, and as he states in the introduction to his work, his task in writing it was to come 'to see, no differently, but further than the parties'" (p. 526). He goes on to seem to suggest that it is "negative doctrines" like the philosophy of Spinoza that is the real threat (p. 527). He even opts to omit the separation between church and state in his analysis of what Tocqueville proposes to sustain religious faith in America (pp. 531-532). Other scholars (besides myself) disagree with Herold, such as Mansfield and Winthrop (2006, p. 86), stating that "By staying out of politics, the clergy stay above partisan hatreds and religion actually increases its influence on society."

Now, simply compare this behavior to the necessary actions that religion must adopt for its survival. If it deviates very much from its principles and tenets during the past *half millennia* it thereby risks its institutional survival.<sup>81</sup>

These different requirements can be traced back to the respective human desires that political parties and religions are based on. Tocqueville states that, “When a religion seeks to found its empire only on the desire for immortality that torments the hearts of all men equally, it can aim at universality; but when it comes to be united with a government, it must adopt maxims that are applicable only to certain peoples” (DA, p. 284, I.II.9).

One might object here that perhaps governments do too, at least sometimes, found their “empire” on something stable in the hearts of men as well. Maybe this is not the desire for immortality, but perhaps something else sufficiently stable and reliable. Yet Tocqueville explicitly denies this: “The powers of society are all more or less fugitive, as are our years on earth; they rapidly succeed each other like the various cares of life; and no government has ever been seen to be supported by an invariable disposition of the human heart or founded on an immortal interest” (DA, p. 285, I.II.9). What he means here is that the reason governments are not found to be supported on such fixed foundations is because the people would never accept them as such. Governments need to be flexible and responsive to the worldly and temporal desires of the people, which are always in flux. If governments are not adaptive and responsive, then they fall out of favor and are replaced.

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<sup>81</sup> For Madison, a similar logic applied to recognizing prudential limits on the appropriate speed of constitutional change.

The promise of immortality in exchange for love and duty therefore works for the priest in a way that it can never work for the politician. The “powers of society . . . rapidly succeed each other like the various cares of life,” because these powers are in fact *based on a particular care of life* dominant at a particular moment in time. For a politician to only service the people’s desire for immortality would be to ignore and neglect the pressing worldly desires that they are driven by first and foremost. The priest, conversely, must avoid the worldly desires because they are always changing, so that to tend to the current generation’s worldly desires would be to lose their aura of transcendent authority to future generations. Tocqueville would thus, “rather chain priests in the sanctuary than allow them to leave it” (DA, p. 521, II.II.15).

Apart from this, Tocqueville believes that religious conviction will variously strengthen and weaken from century to century. This is because the underlying desire for immortality will fluctuate in people over time. He refers to those in “*the natural state of men in the matter of religion*” (DA, p. 286, I.II.9), i.e. those not alienated by religion in the manner just described.<sup>82</sup> In this natural state, he describes two modes visible across centuries; sometimes there is religious fervor, and other times there is silent undermining. “Faith changes its object, it does not die” in centuries of fervor (DA, p. 286, I.II.9). And even in times of silent undermining, “The instinct for another life leads them without difficulty to the foot of altars and delivers their hearts to precepts and consolations of faith” (DA, p. 287, I.II.9). Periods of irreligion or atheism only exist when religion is openly

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<sup>82</sup> He echoes this idea in the statement, “Disbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity” (DA, p. 284, I.II.9).

rejected as a result of its uniting with a particular politics that has become rejected, as all politics are destined to be for the reasons discussed.

*Trading Individual Rights for Rights of Society*

The argument above has focused on the changing nature of worldly interests and the effect this has on the relationship between religion and politics. However, to say that particular worldly interests change is not meant to imply that worldly interest *per se* is not a constant. My interest might change from wanting to pursue a career early in life to wanting a family later, but this does not imply that at any point in time that have I set aside my personal interest itself. This is crucial to understanding in more detail how the “fatal circle” leads to the loss of political freedom and slavery. Though personal interest endures, the preferred means to advancing that interest is very much an open question.<sup>83</sup> People thus are always susceptible to placing society’s rights above those of the individual out of a desire to enact policies seen as advancing their own self-interest. Whether anyone one individual chooses to support or resist the agenda of the community will be influenced by whether that individual views himself as part of that community and expects to benefit by it. It is not easy to instill the principled belief that putting the needs of the community over the individual is wrong even to individuals who stand to personally benefit from the community getting its way over its minority detractors.

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<sup>83</sup> In *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution*, Tocqueville states that, “It is indeed true that in the long run liberty always brings comfort and well-being and often wealth to those who are able to preserve it. At times, however, it temporarily hinders the use of such goods” (2011, p. 151).

When Tocqueville states that, “no government has ever been seen to be supported by an invariable disposition of the human heart” (DA, p. 285, I.II.9), he refers to the fluctuating objects of the aggregate interests of society, not the individual’s natural passion to serve his own personal interest simply. Differing beliefs guide this passion to various objects and account for the fluctuations of worldly desires. Whenever beliefs change, so too do the objects of desire. In a democracy, this flux is especially pronounced because there is no fixed authority. Rather, the majority opinion drives thought, without anyone actually directing it. Insofar as people’s desires are more or less unsatisfied, they can become frustrated, begin shifting their beliefs, and begin desiring what seems more attainable. The War on Drugs, for example, has seen mixed results, and support for it has dropped due to the emergent concern over mass incarceration. Fighting the Global War on Terror has encountered similar fluctuations in support, with a variety of opinions regarding such matters as data collection by the government, even a “Muslim ban,” emerging out of the frustration over intermittent reminders that this war has not been won. Such flux is a challenge to democracy because certain principles need to be immunized from this flux as much as possible. There is no clear way to do this, however. The scariest change in opinion, from which there could be no return, is in Tocqueville’s eyes the embrace of the idea that society’s rights are more important than individuals’ rights.

One’s personal interest can at any point in time be seen as best served through upholding either the rights of individuals or the collective rights of society. For Tocqueville, all legitimate governments must tie the pursuit of personal interest with belief in individual rights. He openly loves and praises the idea of individual rights. He states that, “After the general idea of virtue I know of none more beautiful than that of rights, or rather these two

ideas are intermingled. The idea of rights is nothing other than the idea of virtue introduced into the political world” (DA, p. 227, I.II.6).

For Tocqueville, the ascension of society’s supreme right over individuals has many negative consequences. It gives up the restraints on the will of the majority to follow its immediate desires, and actually endorses its will and supports its actions. He claims that, “Up to now, no one has been encountered in the United States who dared to advance the maxim that everything is permitted in the interest of society. An impious maxim – one that seems to have been invented in a century of freedom to legitimate all the tyrants to come” (DA, p. 280, I.II.9). These contrary principles – the rights of individuals vs. the rights of society – are in constant competition with each other. The former preserves individual freedom against the arbitrary, tyrannical will of the ruling body, the later empowers the tyrannical impulse, leading to the acting on this will and by implication to trample individual rights. For this reason, Tocqueville cautions that, “In these times there is no citizen so obscure that it is not very dangerous to allow him to be oppressed, nor are there individual rights of so little importance that one can deliver them with impunity to arbitrariness” (DA, p. 670, II.IV.7).

It is thus not difficult to see why Tocqueville is so enamored of this concept. Rights elevate the people’s sense of themselves. They put limits on what can be done in society if only to help recognize the universal dignity of all mankind. He states that, “As conditions are equalized in a people, individuals appear smaller and society seems greater . . . This naturally gives men in democratic times a very high opinion of the privileges of society and a very humble idea of the rights of the individual” (DA, p. 641, II.IV.2). A diminished idea of rights is highly problematic for the consideration of what will necessarily take its place.

He states that, “The idea of a right inherent in certain individuals is rapidly disappearing from the minds of men; the idea of the all-powerful and so to speak unique right of society comes to fill its place” (DA, p. 642, II.IV.2).

The main question then is how is the idea of individual rights to be sustained in democracy?

### The Virtuous Circle: Property Rights and Religion

Tocqueville presents a special relationship between property rights and religion that theoretically should be able to prevent democracies from falling into the fatal circle of excessive material enjoyment and atheism (or irreligion).<sup>84</sup> The reason these two things go together is because of the natural desire for immortality, which connects the individual’s worldly happiness—achievable through acquiring or receiving the goods of this world—with his or her eternal happiness—achievable through individual faithfulness in a God that loves all equally.

Property rights and religion are both ideas (or more precisely involve sets of ideas). They are ethical, moral, and can involve the miraculous, and thus are not necessarily related to empirical fact. This means that people need to desire to believe them if they are to be believed in at all. Religion under this consideration is easier to maintain, due to the desire

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<sup>84</sup> Tocqueville states that, “if one renounces giving to all citizens ideas and sentiments that first prepare them for freedom and afterwards permit then the use of it, there will be independence for no one, neither for the bourgeois nor for the noble, nor for the poor man, nor for the rich man, but an equal tyranny for all” (DA, p. 302, I.II.9).

for immortality as was argued above, as long as politics and religion remain separated. Property rights, however, are something of a different story. Whereas the end sought by the desire for immortality points to religion as the obvious means, the end sought by worldly happiness does not obviously point to the need for property rights. Why not simply appeal to some notion of social and economic justice, enforceable by government redistribution? It is important, therefore, to explain why property rights are so important to Tocqueville first, and then show how religion via the desire for immortality can help sustain their acceptance in democracy.

### *Property Rights*

Tocqueville focuses on property rights as the most important political right because it is through this concept that the general idea of rights (presumably including conscience, association, speech, etc.) can be maintained. He thinks this for a variety of reasons.

First is the fortunate fact that property in democracy is widespread. This is so because castes are destroyed, estates are divided, and all this helps make democratic peoples more industrious (DA, I.I.3). In a word, the opportunity stimulates the appetite, and most are able to get some kind of piece of the pie. Wanting to keep their property, people will be willing to embrace the idea of rights to property. He states that, “Each one, having a particular good to defend, recognizes the right of property in principle” (DA, p. 228, I.II.6). People are naturally attached to their property because it satisfies their desires for worldly goods, which affords one pleasure and some degree of happiness. People can thus be brought to believe that the rights of property exist in principle, insofar as it applies to their own property vis-à-vis society.

This principle benefits society because it puts a self-ascribed restraint on all property holding citizens from using control of government to invade the property rights of others. Furthermore, the belief in property rights makes people wary of violations of everything that they enjoy, which is the same as saying their rights generally. Tocqueville believes this will stimulate the democratic citizen into civic engagement and greater self-government. He states that, “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” (DA, p. 517, II.II.14). These two forces then, self-restraint with regards to everyone’s equal property rights and public activity to protect said rights, provide government with an effective means of maintaining social tranquility without any need for the government to impose order. Freedom is harmonized with order within society.

Another benefit of property rights is that whatever you have comes from your own work. You will thus have to plan for the long term. Such foresight requires intelligence, leading to a desire for it: “The utility of knowledge is revealed with a very particular clarity even to the eyes of the crowd. Those who do not taste its charms prize its effects and make efforts to attain it” (DA, p. 432, II.I.9). Property rights thus also stimulate a very important desire to learn. It is a long-standing principle in political liberalism that a Free man is an educated person, capable of thinking independently and jealously protective of his ability to do so. This then is another way property rights supports freedom.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly from the psychological perspective, Tocqueville tells us that long term planning brings men back to religion. He states,

Governments . . . must teach citizens practically every day that wealth, renown, and power are the prizes of work; that great successes are found at the end of long-lasting desires, and that one gets nothing lasting except that which is acquired with difficulty . . . one would [thereby] bring them little by little and without their knowing it to religious beliefs. (DA, p. 524, II.II.17)

Tocqueville sees a parallel here between what a priest tells his parish about the virtues of faith and good works on the one hand and what a businessman teaches his son or daughter about the virtues of business on the other. The messages are very similar, in that they both involve a certain internal discipline that is accompanied by an understanding of resisting and prioritizing desires. They also both teach an indifference to the vicissitudes of chance, and an enduring self-reliance in terms of pursuing one's long-term objectives, and that long-term objectives are the most important. This compatibility in message strengthens their durability in the minds of those who are persuaded by them.

### *Religion and the Desire for Immortality*

The key virtue of religion has already been discussed, in that it prevents psychological exhaustion in democracy.<sup>85</sup> By preventing this exhaustion, people are more gratified in having large amounts of freedom in both the political and economic realms. They want to compete with each other and to be successful, and pursue the opportunities open to them. They want to be rich, and to have their wealth protected by the principle of

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<sup>85</sup> Kessler (1994, p. 31) states that, "The starting point for Tocqueville's analysis of religion's usefulness is not the Bible, but the human need for metaphysical certainty."

property rights. Yet this freedom is also daunting both for its lack of authority and for the immense competition of all against all that individuals encounter in these areas of life. Tocqueville thus refers to the “the agitations of the political world,” from which “the American returns to the bosom of his family, [where] he immediately meets the image of order and peace” (DA, p. 279, I.II.9). The ideal of family here is imbued with religious faith.<sup>86</sup> Religion and family provide order and stability for the big questions of existence and for man’s ultimate destiny. He believes that having these matters arranged, and God’s authority to be clear, facilitates man’s ability to exercise and indeed love his political and economic freedom.<sup>87</sup> In this manner, religion directly sustains Americans’ attachment to property rights.

In an earlier section it was also discussed that religion is irreplaceable as a social and political pillar because it satisfies man’s desire for immortality. This desire is constant and reliable, and only found suppressed when religion has completely lost favor in a people because that religion tied itself with a political program that ultimately met its destiny and

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<sup>86</sup> Tocqueville states that religion “cannot moderate the ardor in him for enriching himself, which everything comes to excite, but it reigns as a sovereign over the soul of woman, and it is woman who makes mores” (DA, p. 279, I.II.9).

<sup>87</sup> Family also satisfies the desire for immortality in a way separate from religion. Tocqueville states 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” (DA, p. 49, I.I.3).

fell out of favor (at least temporarily). Moreover, religion cannot be replaced by philosophy in these matters because societies do not seem to accommodate the universality of the philosophic life. Religion is necessary for the many to benefit from this desire.

There are two additional components which have not yet been discussed as to why religion is so important to sustaining the health of democracy. These now need to be incorporated into the discussion. The lesser component, perhaps, is that the religion Tocqueville primarily has in mind, Christianity, teaches the doctrine of rights more or less directly.<sup>88</sup> Since belief in rights is ultimately what Tocqueville is most concerned about, this aspect of the Christian religion is very important. It should nevertheless be weighted cautiously, as Tocqueville is very consistent in resting his theory on individual self-interest, which ethical theories about duties to others seem to bristle against.

He thus shows himself resigned to the fact that Christian ethics cannot always be depended on to support the liberal doctrine of rights. He states that, “Do you not see that religions are weakening and that the divine notion of rights is disappearing? Do you not find that mores are being altered, and that with them the moral notion of rights is being effaced? Do you not perceive on all sides beliefs that give way to reasoning, and sentiments that give way to calculations?” (DA, p. 228, I.II.6). It is perhaps necessary to again

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<sup>88</sup> Like Locke in his *Reasonableness*, Tocqueville “attributes the acceptance of the idea of the natural equality of all men as originating in the teachings of Christ. Curiously, despite Christianity’s triumph, until the modern age no republic had been erected on a foundation of natural rights” (Zetterbaum 1967, p. 47). Ideas require more than authority to be accepted, they must be consistent with one’s perceived happiness.

distinguish between desires for immortality and eternal peace and happiness in the next world on one side and the desires for peace and happiness in this world on the other. The desire for immortality raises the issue of ethics and justice when religion becomes its chosen object, and religion standardizes answers in the form of a moral code. Tocqueville thus talks in terms of “the divine notion of rights” and “the moral notion of rights” interchangeably (DA, p. 228, I.II.6). When religion is weak, however, its ability to propagate a morality is likewise diminished.

Nevertheless, religion is very important even in a weakened state. The desire for immortality maintains its susceptibility to strengthening. The other important component then hinted at above is the idea the religion raises the individual’s perceptual horizon, and encourages long-term planning. He states that, “Religions supply the general habit of behaving with a view to the future. In this they are no less useful to happiness in this life than to felicity in the other. It is one of their greatest political aspects” (DA, p. 522, II.II.17). As was mentioned above, property rights also stimulate long term planning. In that religion does this as well, both support each other.<sup>89</sup> To the extent that long-term planning is stimulated and made habitual in a people, they are more naturally inclined to embrace the virtuous circle—property rights and religion—that is consonant with freedom.<sup>90</sup> They will

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<sup>89</sup> Tocqueville states that, “Often, indeed, [the taste for material enjoyments] 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 (DA, p. 509, II.II.11).

<sup>90</sup> Herold (2015) seems to generally acknowledge and echo this sentiment in Tocqueville, but does not recognize, evidently, how important it is. He states that, “Tocqueville also

plan to acquire both a worldly and other-worldly estate by operating out of this long-term mindset each morning when they depart their orderly homes. They will make short-term sacrifices and take risks for an economic pay off, conducting themselves in a manner worthy of salvation. Through both of these things, Americans are always dreaming and looking in pleasant anticipation of what lies ahead.

Another way to see how religion and long term planning are related is by considering how Tocqueville thinks that without religion people naturally stop thinking long-term. He claims that: “In these countries, where irreligion and democracy meet in an unhappy convergence, philosophers and those who govern ought constantly to apply themselves to moving back the object of human actions in the eyes of men; it is their great business” (DA, p. 523, II.II.17).<sup>91</sup> He states something very similar a few pages earlier in the text, a passage that introduces this chapter:

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suggests, in one of his most remarkable statements, that habituating citizens to think in terms of their long-term interest in this world is ‘the only’ path ‘remaining to us to lead the human race by a long detour back toward faith’ (524) . . . religion is a necessary supplement to any doctrine that understands virtue as ultimately conducive to an individual’s long-term utility” (p. 531). After noting this in a single paragraph, he moves away from the point rather abruptly. See again, for more insight on why this might have been overlooked, footnote 18 from earlier in this chapter.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Tocqueville’s statement that, “passions, needs, education, circumstances—all in fact seem to cooperate in making the inhabitant of the United States incline toward the earth.

Legislators of democracies and all honest and enlightened men who live in them must therefore apply themselves relentlessly to raising up souls and keeping them turned toward Heaven. It is necessary for all those who are interested in the future of democratic societies to unite, and for all in concert to make continuous efforts to spread within these societies a taste for the infinite, a sentiment of greatness, and a love of immaterial pleasures. (DA, p. 519, II.II.15)

What he is essentially saying here is that when the desire for immortality is not directed by religion, there is a terrible problem in that people stop thinking long-term and pursuing the subset of goods unique to that style of thought. The objects they instead pursue are more immediate, and their plans to pursue these objects less demanding on the character and the intellect. He points to “philosophers and those who govern” as those with the responsibility and capability to do something about this. The solutions he expects from them, however, are not to be found very far apart from maintaining belief in property rights and restoring religion to its rightful place of honor.

Governments, he thinks, can best encourage people to be religious by being examples of faith. He states that, “I believe that the only efficacious means governments can use to put the dogma of the immortality of the soul in honor is to act every day as if they

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Religion alone, from time to time, makes him raise passing, distracted glances toward Heaven” (DA, p. 430, II.I.9).

themselves believed it” (DA, p. 521, II.II.15).<sup>92</sup> Herein, though, lies the difficulty. Politics and religious are supposed to remain separate, but when religion weakens it must be up to government to nurture it back to health. The human potential should always be there because of man’s nature. He states that:

Man did not give himself the taste for the infinite and the love of what is immortal. These sublime instincts are not born of a caprice of his will: they have their immovable foundation in his nature; they exist despite his efforts. He can hinder and deform them, but not destroy them. The soul has needs that must be satisfied; and whatever care one takes to distract it from itself, it soon becomes bored, restive, and agitated amid enjoyments of the senses. (DA, p. 510, II.II.12)

To summarize, Tocqueville is consistently occupied with the question of how persuasion can occur from the few to the many, particularly with respect to important, though abstract, ideas. The precondition or means of effective persuasion is to ensure that the general idea being propagated accords with individual interest. The saying that people

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<sup>92</sup> Notably, Herold (2015) makes no mention at all of this passage. This omission I think makes it easier to downplay the importance Tocqueville places on the separation between religion and politics. Tocqueville finds himself making this recommendation quite begrudgingly, walking the line between suggesting that governments do something about sustaining religious belief without straying into merging politics with religion. He admits it to be the best he can come up with. Why express so much insecurity and self-imposed limitation if he was not serious about keeping politics and religion separate?

believe what they want to believe is applicable here, so the task of those who would hope to aid democratic peoples (philosophers, political leaders, clergy, etc.) is to find beliefs that will both help human beings and be attractive to them by promising to satisfy some priority desire that they naturally possess. Since most desires are most of the time malleable and in flux, one must sort through these desires to find what is the most fundamental. Only then can principles, when connected to these fundamental desires, be maintained when more accidental desires suddenly shift attitudes and behaviors. The main desires Tocqueville focuses on are those for self-interest and immortality, and are satisfied best with the virtuous circle of property rights and religion.

#### Discussion: Shifting Metaphysics of Religion and Epistemology of Rights

There are two models of human desire that seem available for Tocqueville to draw inspiration from. For Plato the human desires are malleable and can be elevated from their natural base state (a consequence of natural ignorance). This baseness can be overcome through an individual's philosophical discoveries of higher objects of desire. This can in turn be followed by an elevation of that individual's desires toward those higher objects. The ability for philosophy to discover noble truths is essential.

For Locke, the human desires are also malleable. They may more easily, however, be adjusted in proportion to what man thinks he can supply himself. These capacities include the furnishing of knowledge and wealth, i.e. extracting conveniences for life from the world in which man finds himself. Man would be unhappy if he were to desire too much beyond his grasp, but luckily the desires follow quite nicely the agent's beliefs, and the beliefs can be matched to physical reality without particular need for the dubious efforts of

philosophers. There is less concern, then, for imagining ways for baseness to be overcome, and little need for philosophical discovery.

Tocqueville, for his part, writes at a time when the desire for immortality and the possibility of metaphysical knowledge have been severed from each other by Locke's philosophy. He looks back to Plato with wishfulness and uncertainty. He ultimately accepts the lack of great alternatives, and generally follows Locke in his attempt to connect the desire for immortality with a moralizing faith as is found in popular, mainstream Christianity.<sup>93</sup> Tocqueville, however, has to push deeper into the political psychology of this desire because the Christian religion, once immensely strong, appears to be on the decline.

Consider, for example, that whereas Locke viewed Christianity as "reasonable" (even despite all of man's epistemological limitations) Tocqueville views it now as little

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. Strauss (1959, p. 55), which helps us to see why the need for such efforts might have been felt very strongly: "Modern thought reaches its culmination, its highest self-consciousness, in the most radical historicism, i.e., in explicitly condemning to oblivion the notion of eternity. For oblivion of eternity, or, in other words, estrangement from man's deepest desire and therewith from the primary issues, is the price which modern man had to pay, from the very beginning, for attempting to be absolutely sovereign, to become the master and owner of nature, to conquer chance."

more than a useful, even irreplaceable, dogma—a “salutary constraint” (DA, p. 418, II.I.5).<sup>94</sup> Locke thus reserved in his political theory a more welcoming epistemological foundation for faith than Tocqueville seeks to adopt. This leads to new difficulties for Tocqueville, who must consider what the elected statesmen can do about the need for religious faith under a Lockean liberal paradigm, one where religion and politics are to be kept separate. He arrives at a solution mentioned above: calling for American statesmen to act like believers and to inspire public faith by exhibiting their own faith in the conduct of major public affairs (DA, p. 521, II.II.15).

This epistemological difference—where religion is “reasonable” for the early modern liberal, a salutary “dogma” for the later liberal—helps us to see how Locke could for his part condone elected leaders performing their so-called Christian duty of spreading the good news, even trying to rationally persuade the public of their beliefs, as he describes in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Tocqueville cannot follow Locke this far, however.<sup>95</sup>

Tocqueville’s willingness to leave aside the prospect of metaphysical truth and, in some respects, the rejection of the moral superiority of the philosophic life, while adopting an ancient approach to political science (i.e. institutions and laws are borne out of

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<sup>94</sup> “General ideas relative to God and human nature are therefore, among all ideas, the ones it is most fitting to shield from the habitual action of individual reason and for which there is most to gain and least to lose in recognizing an authority” (DA, p. 418, II.I.5).

<sup>95</sup> These differing viewpoints are largely absent from more contemporary debates over the fairness or propriety of having explicitly religious elected officials. The value for them clearly stretches beyond identity politics and constituency representation for these thinkers.

religious/metaphysical beliefs, norms and attitudes), leaves him vulnerable to criticism. The modern foundations he assumes seem to necessarily require the modern political science of the *Federalist Papers*. James Madison in *Federalist #10* abandons the task of making everyone share the same opinions in the name of liberty—the alternative solution proposed is to control the effects of a contentious pluralist society by inhibiting the capacities of private interests through competitive institutional arrangements.<sup>96</sup> Such contestation

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<sup>96</sup> Though, we can also recall George Washington’s Farewell Address, or some of the writings of John Adams, for examples of Founders who were not as modern in this sense. C. Bradley Thompson writes that, “Belief in the immortality of souls and the sanctions of a future life, [John] Adams thought, provided the incentive and moral backbone necessary to sustain a liberal society built on the rights of individuals” (1998, p. 280). Furthermore, Washington and Adams were members of the Federalist Party, and James Ceaser has written that this party embraced a quasi-metaphysical notion of nature. Ceaser states that, “For Federalists, the concept of nature in relation to political life remained anchored in the science of politicized psychology” (2006, p. 32). Politicized psychology is explained to be a science that “rested on a body of knowledge that began from elements of what we today call psychology; the primary substance or matter of nature that was of concern in politics was human nature, or the psychological makeup of individual human beings . . . The most familiar version of this science derived from English philosophy of the seventeenth century” (p. 24). Conveniently for this dissertation, Ceaser also locates John Dewey in this enduring debate over nature. Dewey is depicted as leading the progressives in “denying not only the

requires compromise, and opinions must be “refined and enlarged” to discover common ground. The great task of government is to make sure that it is populated by competent and reasonable citizens who can see and testify to the public that private interest is indeed actualized when they are faithful to this Constitutional design. The people merely need the ability to judge these qualities from afar, and the ability to act on their judgment through regular elections.

We also see the modern metaphysical agnosticism at work in Tocqueville’s emphasis on mores as well. These mores described as an inheritance of an aristocratic past, which in America’s case has fortunately blended the spirit of religion with a spirit of freedom. For him, mores that assume the transcendent existence of a personal God are not discoverable through reason or philosophy, because the existence of the divine is not legitimately discoverable in this manner. They therefore must be preserved and protected dogmatically via deference to tradition, though this is increasingly difficult if not impossible in the modern era.

This leads Tocqueville into a very complicated relationship with natural rights (Zetterbaum 1967, p. 39) as well as philosophy (cf. Zuckert, C. in Masugi (ed.) 1991, ch. 5) and Kessler’s response (1994, pp. 38-9). I want to note here that the difficulties with rights and philosophical discovery are closely related. From the onset of modernity, many political philosophers seem to have lost the distinction between conditional (or probabilistic) metaphysical knowledge and metaphysical certainty. The moderns seem to have rejected

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reality of any idea of permanent nature, but also its utility as a standard for political life.

Any view of permanent nature . . . has an undemocratic effect” (p. 63).

the ancient and medieval philosophical practice of dialectical interrogation of metaphysical (and hence moral and political) questions, where the strongest argument withstood attempts at refutation yet were understood to be themselves eternally vulnerable to refutation. This tentative nature of knowledge historically was not regarded as a call for panic, or abandonment of such methods altogether until now. Metaphysical absolute certainty thus was not something that the ancient philosophers somehow *believed in* that the moderns exposed as a grave error. What many moderns polemicized against may rather be seen as something of a straw man.<sup>97</sup> Having demolished this straw man, and swept up in their own momentum, modern philosophers publicly invalidated even the prudential, yet genuine, trust in conditional metaphysical knowledge. Tocqueville sides with the post-Lockean, Enlightenment era moderns on this debatable epistemological understanding, while still

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<sup>97</sup> Consider the following non-modern view: concerning how little thoughts of the afterlife apparently motivate our behavior, Leibniz states that, “This is partly because men are very often not really convinced: whatever they say, a secret doubt prevails in the depths of their souls . . . Few people even conceive that the future life, as true religion and even true reason represent it, is possible; so far are they from conceiving its probability, not to mention its certainty” (*New Essays*, sec. 190). The legitimacy of the continuum of metaphysical truth sketched here, from possibility to probability to certainty, as being entirely available to the human mind, is largely rejected in the modern writings of a Montaigne or a Pascal (or perhaps a Kant, Leibniz’s countryman from a later generation). Such writings certainly influenced Tocqueville both directly and indirectly.

clinging to the ancients' views on how theologically grounded psychology relates to the health of the general polity.

Locke was more careful and appreciative of this distinction. It explains why Locke could hold to a position of metaphysical agnosticism in the *Essay* and a doctrine of Natural Law and Natural Rights in the *Second Treatise*. This very dialectical method is even invoked in the *Second Treatise* when he justifies the principle of natural equality on the grounds that God has not communicated to mankind “any manifest Declaration of his Will set one above another, and confer on him by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted Right to Dominion and Sovereignty” (ST, p. 269). That is, our assumption should be natural equality until an argument for inequality refutes it. Such a dialectical analysis, as I use the term here, is one where differing positions are brought into dialogue with one another. The strongest position has the strongest premises and a valid form. It can draw on empirical claims and probabilistic knowledge. It need not prove itself irrefutably true, but only be more likely than the examined alternatives. There are other parts to Locke's justification for equality, but they all follow this same general style of reasoning.

Tocqueville, on the other hand, did not see strong validity to this method. He shows himself more empirical and thus oriented towards the practice of politics rather than abstract rationalist theorizing.<sup>98</sup> He has his reader consider the usefulness of dogmas, such as the

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<sup>98</sup> Ceaser states that, “All general ideas, Tocqueville maintains, distort reality in some degree by comprehending the distinctness of different objects under the same concept . . . however, the proper response was not to deny the value of general ideas, but rather to recognize their limitations and avoid using them in an extreme or abstract fashion” (1991, p. 302).

immortality of the soul or popular sovereignty, independent of their truth.<sup>99</sup><sup>100</sup> Mill may have been right about truth being part of an idea's utility, but it is not the whole of that utility, at least as it appears in Tocqueville. This reveals something I think that is quite radical in Tocqueville, a political religiosity grounded in an enlightened agnosticism, which may contribute to the particular manner in which we find later secular-progressive thinkers attacking religion in democracy.

The most important example of this response in political liberalism is found in the work of John Dewey, which is taken up in the next chapter.

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<sup>99</sup> Tocqueville states that, "men cannot do without dogmatic beliefs . . . I add here that among all dogmatic beliefs the most desirable seem to me to be dogmatic beliefs in the matter of religion (DA, p. 417, II.I.5).

<sup>100</sup> An important countervailing view to this is found in Mill: "The truth of an opinion is part of its utility" (*On Liberty*, ch.2 sec.10). The investigation of the political usefulness of propositions apart from their philosophical truth is a contradiction if we suppose that truth itself has supreme use, and that truth itself is not ontologically based in political expediency.

#### Chapter 4: Dewey<sup>101</sup>

John Dewey is a major figure in the history of democratic thought in the United States. He is distinctive because he objects to many of the foundational principles of modern liberal democracy, like religious conscience and private property, on behalf of the ends of political liberalism. The primary of these ends, for him, is the universal maximization of liberty, with liberty being understood in the positive, human capacity enhancing sense. The end of expanding liberty is considered paramount and authoritative; no liberal foundation should ever be sacrosanct that fails to deliver on the liberal commitment of enhancing liberty.

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<sup>101</sup> The following is the chapter abstract included for a recent research conference, which remains appropriate. Since I have not written abstracts for each chapter, I only share it in footnote: *There is a longstanding debate in the liberal tradition over the utility of religion for democracy-- some theorists defend religion as singularly beneficial to it, while others deny its importance. This debate is comprised of arguments for the proper separation between religion and politics, the importance of religious liberty, and the triumph of science over prejudice. In this paper I analyze philosopher John Dewey's argument that Christianity is a harmful competitor to the public's commitment to democratic ideals, and impedes social action. Dewey's views on religion and human psychology lead him to conclude that there is a natural "religious function" that can be tapped into, if Christianity will be abandoned, to propel democratic progress. I argue that this view misunderstands the desire motivating religious faith--the desire for immortality--raising serious doubts that the purified democratic motivation he envisions will ever materialize.*

In this vein, we find him attacking the status quo foundation, arguing that by respecting in particular a right to “private intelligence” liberal ends are being obstructed — it actually limits liberty, and is in fact illiberal, due to the prejudice against science the spreads across society and into public policy as a result.<sup>102</sup>

What is private intelligence? The idea basically is that from the principle that individuals’ beliefs are protected as a matter of private conscience, facts too become regarded as private. This subjectivist view of facts is what Dewey calls private intelligence. This leads to the bad idea that social intelligence (scientific consensus) can be rejected by citizens. This idea has produced political apathy and disillusion, in Dewey’s view: “Decline in the prestige of suffrage and of parliamentary government are intimately associated with the belief, manifest in practice even if not expressed in words, that intelligence is an individual possession to be reached by means of verbal persuasion” (LSA 75).<sup>103</sup> The

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<sup>102</sup> Dewey defines liberty as “that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others” (PP 123).

<sup>103</sup> A methodological note is necessary regarding my choice of texts and how I read them. I rely primarily on five of his shorter works, listed in chronological order as follows: *The Public and Its Problems* [PP] (1927), *Individualism, Old and New* [ION] (1930), *A Common Faith* [CF] (1934), *Liberalism and Social Action* [LSA] (1935), and *Freedom and Culture* [FC] (1939). This spans Dewey’s life from his late 60’s to age 80. They thus can safely be considered “late works.” I pay less attention to, for example, his essay entitled “The Ethics of Democracy,” which he wrote in 1888 at age 29. I do this because I find his political thought in these later texts to be internally coherent as a group, and indeed that each text

burdens of persuasion under the current social order are too high. The public (or community) ought to be able to cultivate intelligence scientifically and propagate it somewhat seamlessly to a receptive citizenry. The present necessity of the scientific community to persuade recalcitrant citizens adhering to their rights to private judgment and resisting the community is derided as social and political folly.

Secondly, respecting expansive rights to private property has exacerbated the problems facing liberal society — an exploitative oligarchy has emerged out of American democracy, and has proven effective at manipulating the public’s oft-considered private beliefs and desires. Dogmatically respecting these “private rights” has in effect frustrated the people’s “spiritual” growth (in terms of intelligence and capacity<sup>104</sup>), and has thus served ends contrary to those of liberalism.

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highlights some key facet of his thought for forming a complete (or reasonably complete) picture. I pay almost no attention to his earlier writings, which seems to be relatively safe from an interpretational standpoint. Festenstein states that, “There are notable fissures between Dewey’s earlier and later ethical thought. Dewey [ultimately] abandoned idealist metaphysics, drifted further from his immanentist Protestant heritage, and dropped many of the notions of his earlier social theory” (1997, p. 49).

<sup>104</sup> For example, Dewey calls “the spiritual factor of our tradition” “equal opportunity and free association and intercommunication” (ION 9). He later states that “One of the main difficulties in understanding the present and apprehending its human possibilities is the persistence of stereotypes of spiritual life which were formed in old and alien cultures” (ION 72).

He consequently proposes that we change our foundation fundamentally, and restore the authority of the great community over the so-called private individual. One scholar puts it this way: for Dewey, “democracy implies, as it had for Jefferson, Emerson, and Walt Whitman (1819-1892), and as it would for Jane Addams (1860-1935) and Du Bois a public culture or ethos as the Greeks understood it that ‘extended to matters of the mind, heart, and spirit’” (Rogers 2012, p. 5). While waving liberalism’s banner, Dewey seeks to replace its long-standing commitments to private rights with what many political theorists would consider the “ancient” alternative: the fundamental rights and prerogatives of the community.

Dewey’s quest to remake the principles undergirding the liberal project is perhaps most radical in its calling for the collective abandonment of Christianity and all other historical religions. Scholars both sympathetic and critical of Dewey have yet to fully explore this argument, or to sufficiently articulate its significance for the liberal tradition. His main target in historical religions is the constant promise of some sort of spiritual Heaven after death. He views this promise as a harmful parasite on the natural, social progressive impulses of human nature—impulses which need rejuvenation and harnessing in order to drive social progress forward. This chapter argues that this attack on Heaven is best understood for readers of the liberal tradition as a response to liberalism’s traditional use of the desire for immortality to elevate the individual vis-a-vis the community. As will be shown, by rhetorically focusing exclusively on the desire for Heaven instead of the desire for immortality (a seemingly subtle distinction, but one with major consequences that will be explained), Dewey fails to engage with the most politically important aspect of what he is revolting against.

### *Dewey's Conventional Criticisms*

Dewey's work is in many ways generative of the United States' social policy as it stands today, having influenced the political ideas essential to FDR's New Deal,<sup>105</sup> as well as LBJ's Great Society. This remains true despite the fact that Dewey's popularity has waned quite a bit, having been obscured by Karl Marx's burly shadow,<sup>106</sup> and somewhat

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<sup>105</sup> Sidney Milkis writes that, "From Dewey New Dealers discovered the effectual truth about how to get around the American hostility to centralized administration, how to persuade Americans that expansive national power was consistent with their revered traditions" (1993, p. 39). This despite the fact that Dewey was often critical of the New Deal's "unprincipled practicality" (p. 44). In her chapter in *Modern America and the Legacy of the Founding* (eds. R.J. Pestritto and Thomas G. West), entitled "Transforming Formal Freedom into Effective Freedom: John Dewey, the New Deal and the Great Society," Miller states that, "While establishing social or governmental responsibility for individual security was by no means unimportant, Dewey nevertheless believed that FDR basically mistook the means for the end" (2006, p. 192). Festenstein (1997) notes how Dewey has actually been criticized for his association with the New Deal by the likes of Louis Hartz: Hartz criticized "the 'pragmatism' of the New Deal which 'saw no more clearly than the great Dewey himself, the absolute moral base on which it rested'" (p. 18).

<sup>106</sup> One scholar, writing on the differences between Dewey and Marx, states that, "Marxism [unlike Dewey's thought] neglects the importance of cooperation as a tool for social

replaced as the left's leading thinker by the likes of John Rawls and Michael Sandel. This is partly because of historical circumstances. Just as the acceptance of the New Deal changed the dimensions and style of conservatism in the U.S., the collapse of the Soviet Union and triumph of liberal capitalism changed the dimensions and style of progressivism in Western countries like the United States. This has left few major voices in American public discourse seriously arguing for the dismantling of the New Deal by right-leaning intellectuals, or for a dramatic expansion of its programs by those on the left.<sup>107</sup> In a word, Dewey has recently been too progressive, too radical, for the times. Yet as economic inequality becomes more entrenched as a result of globalization and the continuous expansion of free trade, progressive ideas should only be expected to become more popular. Indeed, they may (potentially) remain the most viable alternative to the status quo order, if we can only first properly assess its perhaps most ambitious premise: that religious faith can and should be snuffed out, once and for all.

A broader goal of this chapter will be to better understand the good and the bad from Dewey's particular vision of human nature and the political community, which time has shown to remain an intriguing challenger to a liberal capitalist order sustained by religious faith.<sup>108</sup>

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progress and overlooks the utility of intelligence as a way of resolving class conflicts” (Damico 1978, p. 53).

<sup>107</sup> Though the 2016 presidential election cycle has recently defied this description.

<sup>108</sup> Dewey's attack on religion seems to have received limited attention in the extant literature. Looked at one way, the word “religion” does not even make the index for several

Beyond the unfortunate historical circumstances diminishing Dewey's public stature, he also has many (conservative) critics. They have generally been successful in diminishing him in the public's eye, dismissing his views of human nature, his aspirations for political society, and the means he proposes for attaining those aspirations. Yet Dewey is I think right to defend himself against the brunt of these attacks by pointing out first and foremost that his political ends are generally consistent with the liberal tradition. And, he is right to conclude that since there is widespread discontent with society's progress towards advancing those ends, it is certainly a legitimate exercise to reexamine some of liberalism's assumptions. Indeed, for conservatives, it sometimes seems that even if man's nature were not flawed, they would wish we think it so out of respect for tradition and the need to preserve our attachment to the status quo liberal order. Though there is clearly baby and bathwater here, it remains insufficiently clear in current scholarship which in Dewey's thought is which. Therefore, I want to discuss some of the major criticisms of Dewey's progressivism, and offer some reasons as to why his aspirations for liberal society, and the means he proposes, can still hold their own today.

The most cutting critiques have focused on his unique understanding of human nature. Typically, however, these criticisms have been too sweeping and imprecise, sometimes even seeming to boarder on reflexive or instinctual.<sup>109</sup> A good example of this

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prominent studies of his political thought, including Festenstein (1997), Damico (1978), and Savage (2002).

<sup>109</sup> This unfortunate problem is forgivable, for we lack sufficient empirical evidence regarding the aspects of human nature relevant to competing political visions of society. But

comes from a 1935 piece by Reinhold Niebuhr, in which he paints Dewey with the broadest brush in accusing him of misreading human nature entirely. Niebuhr ridicules the idea that “nothing but a cultural lag prevents men from viewing the social policies in which they are involved with the same degree of objectivity they use in delving into the mysteries of biochemistry or astronomy” (PW, 1993, p. 157).<sup>110</sup> Excellent it would be, Niebuhr suggests, if human beings could arrange their political institutions and develop their policies in accord with perfect scientific objectivity. Unfortunately, this theologian believes, individuals simply cannot (ever) so readily ignore their own private interests.

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psychologists of all stripes have been working on enhancing our understanding of human nature, and these findings need to be incorporated into our assessments of arguments in political theory. In an attempt to directly add to our stock of such evidence, and to make it more accessible to political theory, the next chapter adopts a quantitative methodological approach to some key questions raised in this dissertation.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Dewey on changes in culture lagging far behind industrial revolution: “Industrial habits have changed most rapidly; there has followed considerable distance, change in political relations; alterations in legal relations and methods have lagged even more, while changes in the institutions that deal most directly with patterns of thought and belief have taken place to the least extent. This fact defines the primary, though not by any means the ultimate, responsibility of a liberalism that intends to be a vital force” (LSA, p. 63). Note: PW will be used as abbreviation for *John Dewey: The Political Writings* (ed. D. Morris & I. Shapiro, 1993).

More recently, James Ceaser laments Dewey's abandonment of a philosophical *foundation* to his worldview and system of thought. He states that, "Dewey called himself a Darwinian, but he made clear that he was not following a strict biological or automatic struggle. Mankind's distinctive tool for dealing with the world and for meeting the challenge of survival was human intelligence" (2006, p. 61). The idea criticized is that the progress of society itself can and will light its own way, as Darwinian evolution supposedly does in the development of the species. There can be scientific experimentation by policy makers, and that which is fittest will survive.<sup>111</sup> To someone like Ceaser, though, the idea of abandoning foundations is far too uncertain a strategy, and societies that experiment wrongly could face quite serious, existential risks.

Other critics allege that "he willingly leaves to others the task of working out the institutional forms and details of his political teaching . . . [And] places almost full dependence for the achievement of the good, democratic regime upon the existence of an educated, public-spirited, and active citizenry" (HPP, p. 866). One can see, however, both

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<sup>111</sup> Scientific inquiry and experimentation is indeed central to Dewey's social theory.

Inherited premises (making up the "foundation") that protect the status quo and limit the growth of mankind should be rejected. When society's (spiritual, not economic) growth stagnates short of the political society desired, new premises must be sought out and adopted. Nor is this an altogether unfair characterization of Dewey: to take one example, he writes in an influential essay on law that, "The problem is not to draw a conclusion from given premises . . . The problem is to find statements of general principle and of particular fact, which are worthy to serve as premises" (Eisenach, ed. 2006, p. 142).

sides of the issue here: Dewey wants democratic society to travel beyond its current intellectual horizon, which prevents him (and everyone else for that matter) from dictating what exactly needs to be implemented in terms of public policy and institutional reform. Still, for the likes of Allan Bloom this vision remains untenable, as it boils down to the fact that Dewey is effectively setting liberal society on the course to relativism and nihilism:

Liberalism without natural rights, the kind we knew from John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, taught us that the only danger confronting us is being closed to the emergent, the new, the manifestations of progress. No attention had to be paid to the fundamental principles or the moral virtues that inclined men to live according to them . . . And this turn in liberalism is what prepared us for cultural relativism and the fact-value distinction. (1987, pp. 29-30)

For Bloom, the final conclusion of Dewey's political society is a collective abandonment of shared ideals—it is therefore, as a self-described form of idealism, self-contradictory.

This criticism, however, is once again rooted in a social conservative view of human nature, one that assumes man's flaws require traditional principles in order to embrace any salutary values at all. The fear-mongering over a nihilistic society could also be depicted as belief in things not seen. Should we even arrive in the abyss of nihilism, it will not likely be so easy to determine whether it was the partial abandonment of traditional Lockean liberal principles that brought it about, or the fact that the abandonment was too little, too late. Where, though, Bloom is most wrong on Dewey, it seems to me, is claiming that “no attention has been paid to the fundamental principles . . . that inclined men to live according to them.” But the truth is quite the opposite: so much attention has been paid to the

fundamental principles by Dewey that he announces to have discovered a valid and necessary alternative to religious faith for moral motivation.

Which brings us to the ubiquitous critique of Dewey (and progressives in general) that these visions are all excessively optimistic, which Patrick Deneen has characterized as irony-laden dogmatism. Deneen argues that Dewey never doubts science itself (which seems accurate), or the supposed progressive trajectory of mankind within democracy. In this Deneen finds a species of faith significantly more dogmatic than the historical religions Dewey decries (2005, p. 186). He also notes how Dewey ironically (even hypocritically) portrays a structural continuity between Christianity and democracy in its so-called revelations and unfolding of truths to man (p. 179). But one could easily argue with Deneen as with Bloom that Dewey has every right to theorize about the possibilities of human nature.<sup>112</sup> Absent a more penetrating critique, these criticisms over the loss of foundations, the threat of nihilism, and dangers of optimism wear thin, leaving Dewey in a largely defensible position.

What these critics have most failed to do is adequately understand that motivating Dewey's project is a radical critique and reconstruction of religious faith.<sup>113</sup> For him, any

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<sup>112</sup> Dewey: "To suppose that an *a priori* conception of the intrinsic nature and limits of the individual on one side and the state on the other will yield good results once for all is absurd" (PP 75).

<sup>113</sup> The critics chosen here were chosen for their ability to introduce lines of attack on Dewey's thought relevant to this dissertation, but of course it is not exhaustive. For a helpful discussion of other criticisms of Dewey's political thought (and defenses), including

apparent good that some see religion causing comes by way of religion's hijacking one of man's natural motive energies, namely the desire for ideals. (This is a desire Dewey sometimes equates with the more familiar concept of "humanitarianism" (see LSA 30).) Indeed, no defense of religion or the desire for immortality can explicitly be found in the above criticisms. Whereas social conservatives generally view religion as ennobling and restraining bad human nature, there is a palpable disconnect between this belief and the conservative responses to Dewey's rejection of religion. It is surprising that analyses of Dewey has not been more centered on religion, given that he accuses it of constructing man's bad human nature by way of the desire for immortality (he balks at even using the term, such seems to be the depth of his dislike for this desire). Perhaps this is a consequence of an uncertain understanding among conservatives themselves regarding why religion is important.

Dewey's challenge is that if flawed human nature is a social construct, would not the next phase of liberalism require an abandonment of those principles—religious conscience and private property—explicitly embraced to ameliorate the threats to the individual posed by man's intellectual limitations and selfishness?

### The 2 Main Problems Facing Democracy

John Locke's liberalism is frequently Dewey's primary target, which was in many ways codified into the American creed early on by the *Declaration of Independence*. In

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those of Richard Rorty, Randolph Bourne, Louis Hartz and others, see Festenstein (1997, ch. 1).

particular, he objects to the principled commitment to private intelligence as a legitimate concept, one rooted in the religiously associated right to private conscience. Instead, he thinks that the knowledge derived from scientific inquiry must be disseminated through the public for growth and progress to occur, calling into question the justifiability of rejecting such knowledge in the name of one's personal faith and conscience. Religious faith was once thought important for one's personal salvation (one's personal problems implying personal rights), but now our common fate is understood by Dewey to be dependent upon our ability to unite behind scientific intelligence (our collective problems implying collective rights). Historical religion stands in the way of this ability, as rights to private conscience preserve a prejudicial adherence to false beliefs.

He also objects to the notion of natural rights to private property, which are in his view a major political obstacle to progressive change. The competition of the capitalist economic system, flowing naturally from principles of private property, is especially harmful to the public's spiritual growth. This harm can be broken down into two parts: 1) the competitive and materialistic manner in which capitalism shapes the public's attitudes about work and national prosperity. He states for instance that, "the educative influence of economic and political institutions is, in the last analysis, even more important than their immediate economic consequences" (ION 63); and 2) the economic conditions that these attitudes create and sustain, which undermine the abilities of most — even those with progressive attitudes about work — to find edifying and spiritually fulfilling labor for themselves.

*Problem 1: Private Intelligence*

For Dewey, private intelligence is a nonsensical term that only secures the place of ignorance within society; intelligence is in actuality a social phenomenon. He states that, “a thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, socially accessible. Record and communication are indispensable to knowledge. Knowledge cooped up in private consciousness is a myth. . . A fact of community life which is not spread abroad so as to be a common possession is a contradiction in terms” (PP 137).

He traces this premise to many surprising conclusions. For instance, he criticizes the current policy of universal suffrage, a rhetorical move almost unthinkable in today’s political discourse. He states that, “Our system of popular suffrage, immensely valuable as it is in comparison with what preceded it, exhibits the [(misguided)] idea that intelligence is an individualistic possession, at best enlarged by public discussion” (LSA 74). By giving to all equal voting rights within democratic society, the idea takes root that all intelligence is equal and somehow dependent on the individual. To have a right to vote any way one chooses is to equally legitimize the various conflicting judgments of all. This runs counter to the idea of intelligence as an objective matter to which individuals must defer their own subjective impressions. Those who criticize Dewey as putting society on a road to nihilism would do well to consider this line of argument, given how strongly he advances the idea of objective intelligence.

The critique of universal suffrage, though, is not to say that Dewey is especially skeptical of the potential capacities of democracy, however. He states for instance that:

Each of us knows, for example, some mechanic of ordinary native capacity who is intelligent within the matters of his calling. He has lived in an environment in which the cumulative intelligence of a multitude of

cooperating individuals is embodied, and by the use of his native capacities he makes some phase of this intelligence his own. Given a social medium in whose institutions the available knowledge, ideas and art of humanity were incarnate, and the average individual would rise to undreamed heights of social and political intelligence. (LSA 73)

The main problem facing society, and why universal suffrage is a temporary issue, is rooted in the present set of institutions and principles, not man's native capacities. We can see once again that a characteristic optimism is indeed always nearby. But the combination of thought is striking: he in one place will object to universal suffrage, and in another speculate that "the average individual" is capable of an immense expansion of intelligence. Echoing this thought, he also states that, "Until secrecy, prejudice, bias, misrepresentation, and propaganda as well as sheer ignorance are replaced by inquiry and publicity, we have no way of telling how apt for judgment of social policies the existing intelligence of the masses may be" (PP 155).

It is not the fault of the individuals within society that they are effectively obstructive to social progress, but rather the fault lies with noxious inherited principles like private intelligence. Dewey does claim to believe in toleration and dissent, but this too is described in a very unorthodox manner with respect to the modern liberal tradition. He states that:

. . . toleration in matters of judgment and belief is largely a negative matter.

We agree to leave one another alone (within limits) more from recognition of evil consequences which have resulted from the opposite course rather than from any profound belief in its positive social beneficence. As long as the latter consequence is not widely perceived, the so-called natural right to

private judgment will remain a somewhat precarious rationalization of the moderate amount of toleration which has come into being. Such phenomena as the Ku Klux and legislative activity to regulate science show that the belief in liberty of thought is still superficial. (PP 67)

So whereas the classical liberal will look at the Ku Klux Klan and argue that this is necessary space for expression in the maintenance of a free people, Dewey sees freedom being fundamentally misunderstood. Holding to false beliefs is not freedom, but an individual slavery that through the majoritarian principle results in collective slavery.

In *Freedom and Culture*, Dewey addresses what liberal freedom truly should be. There, he seeks to redefine the essential meaning of liberalism, and the separation between church and state in particular. Dewey adopts some of the ancient view that people are necessarily shaped by their cultures, and that social harmony is dependent on fundamental agreement on vast areas of human opinions, habits, and dispositions. To arrive at this level of agreement, freedom is going to have to be re-defined from its early modern formulation.

Religious freedom currently occupies in the history of Western civilization a central role in cultural matters, which in the modern view takes place in society, away from the authority of the state. But for Dewey culture is the embodiment of intelligence, and is thus so essential to freedom, that the state must have some ability to nurture its growth. He also recognizes this political aspect of religion in *A Common Faith* (discussed more below), and notes that culture (and religion's) political importance to the West is all but lost among modern scholars. The crude division we all assume to properly exist between society, culture, church, and religion on one side and the state on the other was merely a temporary means to a historically bounded end, one that has now far outlived its utility. Liberalism's

larger ends thus prompt a willingness to return to a more ancient model of culture, since culture is essential for political life to progress.

Christianity, the traditional guardian of spiritual growth in American democracy, for Dewey actually now hampers spiritual growth directly in a number of ways. It does this for one by promoting skepticism of man's abilities as well as society's (e.g. The Fall). And, the very nature of knowledge and growth to a Christian is at many points incompatible with sophisticated notions of scientific knowledge and growth (e.g. the authority of Scripture). Intelligence needs to be understood socially, and private opinions need to be somehow brought to submit to that reality. He states that, "We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium" (PP 160).

Dewey's perception of the current intellectual condition of Americans is very negative. For Tocqueville, to contrast, Americans should be celebrated for their enjoyment of a general enlightenment across society, and it is this enlightenment that Tocqueville sees as necessary for anyone to chase after uncertain future opportunities: to live and love their freedom. Enlightenment is understood in terms of practical foresight of possible consequences, such that one is able to overcome intimidation of the new and unexplored by way of confidently measuring, we can surmise, the future costs, risks, and benefits. Americans are smart enough to take care of themselves, and to lead largely autonomous economic lives.

Dewey, in contrast, views enlightenment as the process of cultivating higher intellectual capacities and disseminating the latest in scientific knowledge from virtually every discipline to society as a whole. So whereas for Tocqueville private conscience is

compatible with practical enlightenment and healthy economic activity, for Dewey it is far less so. Where Tocqueville sees useful dogmas capable of preserving negative freedom in democracy, Dewey sees sanctimonious barriers to higher forms of positive, capacity-based freedom for democracy. This is why Dewey feels justified in wanting to change this plank of the liberal foundation in order to promote liberal ends: he wants to allow people to be much, much more intelligent, and hence empowered to make better personal and political decisions.

### *Problem 2: Private Property*

Dewey seeks to make distinct the goods of technological advance and innovation which science has yielded on the one hand from their economic experience under capitalism on the other. He states that, “Scientific insight taking effect in machine technology has been the great productive force. For the most part, economic individualism interpreted as energy and enterprise devoted to private profit, has been the adjunct, often a parasitical one, to the movement of technical and scientific forces” (ION 45).

A major false attitude that persists, which people with a lot of wealth help to maintain, is that the creative capacities of individuals are developed and stimulated out of materialistic competition and want. Work is a means to an end for the individual, and the end is society's bait of materialistic acquisition. What happens in this competition-based model is that individuals compete to acquire more than each other, and those who are successful form one antagonistic class and those who are not form another. There is then less commitment from each with regard to collective prosperity, and far more commitment to the maintenance of private property on the side of the wealthy, which results only in more

spiritual degradation on the side of the poor. He states that, “the unique fact about our own civilization is that if it is to achieve and manifest a characteristic culture, it must develop, not on top of an industrial and political substructure, but out of our material civilization itself” (ION 60). Materialism must be harmonized with spiritual fulfillment; work must itself become an edifying end-in-itself for individuals across the socio-economic spectrum.

It is useful at this point to recall the defense of private property from Tocqueville. Consider his distinction between industriousness in democratic America versus industrious activity under the ancient regime. For Tocqueville, estates were created and destroyed from generation to generation in America, as opposed to pre-existing aristocracies, where estates were preserved through the law of primogeniture. This is part of the great flux of democracy—an energy is produced because the absence of great inherited wealth divides social classes and opens the doors of opportunity (DA, I.I.3, and I.II.6). Tocqueville also does note the new competition of “all against all,” and that this actually has some dampening effect. But this problem is presented mostly as a reminder that opportunity has to exist, or we should expect industrious activity to dissipate.

Dewey’s argument suggests, however, that there really is no such leveling of the playing field achieved through estate law reform. That instead, the rich do very well to maintain their families’ socio-economic advantages over the poor, and that the poor rightly become resentful and antagonist to this class (as occurred under the ancient regime) rather than stimulated with industrious competitive energy. The old, harmful economic forms have bled through the new political situation, and the principle of private property is largely to blame (ION ch. 7, “The Crisis in Culture”).

In this comparison, we cannot lose track of the fact that Dewey and Tocqueville are as political liberals both extremely concerned about the societal effects of unrestrained materialism and its effects on “spiritual” growth (see again Strauss 1968, pp. 28-9 for what constitutes a liberal in the “original” sense). What is different is that the underlying catalyst for this materialism is not seen the same way. For Dewey, it is not related to the love of equality or the weakening of religion, but to the love of private profit generated by the capitalist economic system. Under the capitalist system, the shaping of desires is recklessly surrendered to the competition of all against all over the accumulation of private property. Whereas bad materialism for Tocqueville is accompanied by psychological exhaustion leading to a celebration of laziness, for Dewey it is marked by economic action bent on oppression.

Even still, for Dewey the socializing of the economic system by itself, and transitioning into a system of collective ownership of wealth, could only ever be part of the progressive solution. This is because it would leave in abeyance how to arrive at a place with edifying work and enlightened democratic idealism. What could occur is that the old individualism, marked still by competitive oppression, would simply be more widespread. There would be richness in the level of shared prosperity but poorness in democratic citizenship and spiritual growth. He states that, “There are many who believe that socialism of some form is needed to realize individual initiative and security on a wide scale . . . But they too often seem to assume that the result will be merely an extension of the earlier individualism to the many” (ION 40). Without a change in heart and mind to accompany a sharing economy, there would be uncertain and possibly dangerous outcomes, as seen in the Soviet Union, of which Dewey was ultimately a critic (PW 230-248).

Neither can this difficulty be solved by any regime of externally imposed, top-down citizen shaping, which Dewey opposes. What he wants instead to occur is the preparation of conditions that would allow individuals the freedom to pursue their natural desires to develop their capacities, with the awareness of their individuality's dependence on social relationships. Unlocking the right desires in human nature, and channeling them in the right direction, remains this theory's most important component. What Dewey essentially needs is an alternative to liberalism's longstanding dependence on the desire for immortality, which he either finds insufficiently compatible with democratic idealism or simply ignores.

#### Dewey's Progressive Solution — Clearing the Way for New Desires

Dewey understands liberalism as a tradition of finding solutions to pressing social problems of the day — the major sources of injustice. Injustice is a complicated term here, of course, but understood most fundamentally as harm to innocent individuals in society. There is consequently no clear and permanent set of liberal principles, for him. Rather, liberalism has and will innovate to find new ways of better realizing the values of liberty, conscience, and intelligence.

Dewey sees this consistently playing out in past liberal thinkers. Locke's liberalism was directed against the British government's arbitrary seizure of property, Bentham's broke down the old legal forms that obstructed free economic activity (LSA 44), and Mill's identified the emergent problem of spiritual weakness. And what supposedly motivates this steady march? The natural human desire for a society that embodies commonly held ideals—the desire for a more perfect union (LSA ch. 2). Under this telling, the desire for

immortality is implicitly rejected as a motivating force within the liberal tradition, and unnecessary.

*Subtle Misdirection: Dewey's Neglect of Immortality*

In this dissertation so far, theorists have been shown to utilize the desire for immortality in different ways for various pressing political needs. The need arises for all because there must be discovered motivations that can be depended upon in order to sustain the attitudes and behaviors requisite for liberal society to hold together. Religion's promise of immortality provides such a motivation. Dewey, in contrast, is among the most forceful critics of religion in political liberalism. The following statement makes clear where he views himself in this debate:

On the one hand, it is held that relation to the supernatural is the only finally dependable source of motive power; that directly and indirectly it has animated every serious effort for the guidance and rectification of man's life on earth. The other position is that goods actually experienced in the concrete relations of family, neighborhood, citizenship, pursuit of art and science, are what men actually depend upon for guidance and support, and that their reference to a supernatural and other-worldly locus has obscured their real nature and has weakened their force. (CF 66)

Dewey has framed the two major parties to this debate over religion quite carefully. On one side, he claims that some argue that the necessary "motive power" for "the rectification of man's life on earth" comes from man's "relation to the supernatural." Dewey does not delve into the specifics as to what about man's "relation to the supernatural" stimulates "motive power." He does not mention the desire for immortality

explicitly. Rhetorically, though, this clearly has the effect of disparaging those who believe in the supernatural, by which Dewey means to implicate the religious, or even more specifically, Christians. Dewey's strategy here, as is common for him, is to heavily scrutinize the poetical imagery of religion, especially the spiritual dwelling place called Heaven.

On the other side of this debate, Dewey places the desires for goods that are not imaginary—goods that “are actually experienced,” that “men actually depend on.” Dewey thus wants to force a choice, oversimplified at best, between whether people are better motivated by goods they can only imagine, or goods they certainly know can be experienced. He then adds the accusation that by trying to harmonize both types of goods, religions' ideas of the supernatural “weakened” the “force” of the desires for goods “actually experienced.” We cannot enjoy the pleasures of this life because they are said to be incomparable to what awaits us in the afterlife. Instead, we are to desire goods that we cannot comprehend. This leaves desire in a weakened condition, because desires become strongest when they are in pursuit of clear and vivid expectations of pleasure. Religion is therefore parasitical to the worldly motivations necessary for liberalism to work and progress as it should.

Dewey consistently suggests that the religious longing for Heaven is not born out of a natural desire to survive death, but out of a dissatisfaction with the present physical world. He can thus argue that there is no need to channel your dissatisfaction with this world into hope for a better world, ready-made by a higher power — rather, let us begin changing the only world we have *now*. Interestingly, Dewey is essentially lowering the horizons of man. He asks man to exchange hope for eternal happiness for greater gratification in the here and

now, in order for the world to progress in a positive direction. He thus asks man to adopt a self-conflicting perspective on his condition — that temporal gratification should be the goal, while long-term planning and service to the community is the means necessary to reconstructing this world into one capable of satisfying these desires. Focus on your immediate dissatisfactions in order to motivate you into being a self-sacrificing citizen, working towards a greater common good for the society which will outlive (and forget) you. It may not be entirely self-contradictory, but it does possess in my view a vexing inner tension.

Dewey's theory of religious desire also explains where the historical idea of "God" comes from: it is basically another conceptual outgrowth of our natural desires for ideals (CF ch. 2). Because human beings naturally desire ideals, religions have been able to connect these desires with "God" by conceptualizing God as a substantial entity within which these ideals exclusively adhere.

Yet for Dewey there is simply no need for anyone to arbitrarily stipulate the existence of a God for "His" ideal values to be authoritative. Ideal values by themselves are authoritative, and we know this because we allow our ideal values to guide and shape our conduct on a daily basis. Authority is revealed in every day practice and assent to our variously held principles rather than by some decree by a powerful being, or even by insights from philosophical inquiries into the nature of justice. When we self-consciously act in accordance with our ideal values, this is actually the religious function of experience made visible in its natural form, which operates independently from the inspirations of historical religions.

As we consider this view, the question we need to keep in mind is this: Is the religious desire to go to Heaven more like the desire to survive death, or is it more akin to the desire to exist in a perfect place? We see here that Dewey finds desiring living in a perfect place to be ridiculous when we can work at creating a perfect place here on earth. But what does Dewey make of the very closely related desire to survive death, i.e. for immortality? This question is difficult to answer because Dewey simply does not typically acknowledge it. Death, which he rarely mentions, should evidently be understood in the following way: as an urgent fact of life that says to us that our time is limited for our ability to experience the goods of this world that are “actually experienced.”

Dewey seems to choose against, interestingly, simply accepting the motivational power of the desire for immortality and channeling it away from the supernatural, as he does the desire to live in Heaven. He could have suggested satisfying the desire for immortality by, for example, symbolically living on through one’s children or one’s society. But to be satisfied in this respect could also limit the urgency felt by the individual to reform society immediately — one should not find too much solace in the fact that others will complete the unfinished work of the present. The point is that our hopes must be focused on the here and now, so Dewey may have calculated that psychologically this requires the dropping of the desire for immortality entirely. To even discuss the idea too much would be to give it problematic credence. His rhetorical aim could very well be for it to be discredited, which could explain the lack of statements from him about it. If this is not the case, the other alternative would be to ask whether Dewey misunderstands the array of basic desires motivating religious faith to begin with. Keeping that possibility in mind for now, let us dig deeper into what he *has* stated regarding this issue.

For Dewey, by rejecting belief in Heaven we acknowledge that our dissatisfactions with the way this world is arranged will never be compensated by God. But if this world could be changed in isolation, we all would have done this already under our own initiative. This should lead to the realization that worldly happiness is impossible in isolation: the community must progress as a whole for change to occur and for worldly life to be satisfying. An essential Deweyian truth, necessary for people to realize in order for democracy to grow and progress, is that the relationship between the individual and society is one of part in relation to whole. He states that, “both worlds, individual and social, are hopelessly ambiguous, and the ambiguity will never cease as long as we think in terms of an antithesis” (PP 142). Consequently, the satisfaction of the individual is dependent upon the development of the cultural wealth of society as a whole and the common experience that cultural wealth provides to its members. The unequal socio-economic disadvantages that occur out of chance, moreover, should be more strongly rejected as unacceptable once the awareness sinks in that there is no compensation for the disadvantaged outside the limits of this world.

Developing a robust culture alongside democratic citizens’ individual capacities in tandem requires the release of an inner motivational energy currently stifled under the present regime. This energy is not merely the desire for worldly goods, however. Greed is certainly not the motivational drive that Dewey wants to base his political theory on, which is flawed for its compelling individuals to compete more than cooperate with each other within society. Instead, he describes this inner, heretofore misunderstood energy as “the religious . . . function of experience” (CF 40). This function is describe as a natural part of the human psyche, which when employed correctly produces a motivation for the pursuit of

an idealized world. One scholar puts it this way: “one might, in contemporary philosophical jargon, read him as saying that religious qualities of experience *supervene* on those other, more fundamental, qualities, or that they *emerge* from the latter” (Pihlstrom 2010, p. 216). Those other more fundamental qualities or experiences are “scientific, moral, social, political, [and] aesthetic” (p. 216). Put crudely, the religious function can perhaps best be understood as a passion injector for the spirit, capable of activating deep feeling and powerfully driving behavior.

For elaboration of this “religious function of experience,” we should turn to *A Common Faith* (1934). Here, Dewey makes the fundamental distinction between “the religious” aspect of human experience from particular historical religions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc. “The religious” is partly a feeling engendered by certain beliefs and attitudes, specifically the deepest beliefs concerning how the world is arranged. Furthermore, “the religious” is found in our ability and desire to imagine idealized versions of how the world could be arranged in a more perfect world. Religiously infused sentiments, in their uncorrupted form, are consequently observable in the efforts of some to pursue their ideal visions of the world. He states that “the ultimate issue as to the difference between a religion and the religious function of experience” is that religions hold that “moral and spiritual characteristics” are “of religious value for us because of . . . [their] embodiment in” some substantially existing entity (CF 39-40). What religions get wrong is that these characteristics have religious value for us in and of themselves.

What Dewey ultimately aspires to propagate is the realization that the religious qualities of human experience can subsist—indeed should be “emancipated”—apart from the extant “historical religions” reigning in the world today. He believes that we need to

choose this mode of religious experience, and completely drop traditional religious faith. To substitute, he calls for a common secular faith, variously termed a natural or human faith, i.e. completely devoid of the supernatural or of so-called divine revelation whatsoever (CF 80). This is considered a superior, truer, religious faith and should be embraced in order to unleash the uncorrupted religious motivations that human beings are capable of experiencing and collectively harnessing. It is by virtue of this that democracy can at last pursue the realization of ideal visions of the world.

It is important to recall at this point the complaints of the religious social conservative that secular-progressives are in vain attempting to make immanent the eschaton, in what amounts to a hopelessly doomed, utopian quest (e.g. Deneen 2005). They see progressives as attempting to, through strictly human means, construct heaven on earth, disregarding the Fall and the corrupted nature of man (Niebuhr 1935), which necessarily prevents this project from ever being a successful one. Dewey turns this critique on its head, however, claiming that it is the Christians who have misguidedly imagined a real Heaven in their minds as a place somehow already existing. This fantasy is deleterious in practical effect, as it saps the motivations in this world to pursue the progress needed to arrive at a more ideal situation we crave so deeply in the only world we will ever experience. Historical religions tempt man into trading the present, seen and felt reality for a false future world. Christianity is what dooms the progressive project, not man's psychological endowment from nature which has heretofore been often misunderstood.

Religions are also thought by Dewey to be oppressive on the imagination because they force naturally occurring religious experience into an interpretive paradigm externally imposed. He observes that there is growing widespread dissatisfaction with the paradigms

assumed by existing religions, theorizing that this dissatisfaction is not so much related to modern philosophy as it is to the impracticality of these paradigms to everyday life.<sup>114</sup> (One might object to Dewey that philosophers like Kant should get more credit from their colleagues.) The problem now is that the individual may, and increasingly does in modern scientific society, find inconvenient and unconvincing the externally imposed paradigms proffered by religion. This in turn undercuts the validity, meaning, and power of the natural religious experience, and the baby of natural religious motivation is completely thrown out with the bathwater of false revelation.

Dewey does not openly worry that there might be a need to distinguish and define religious experiences more narrowly than what he proposes, where seemingly anything that affects the individual at a deep level of conviction is “religious.” He lists some examples of objects that can arouse this effect, citing forms of art like poetry (which oddly seems to almost immediately draw Dewey back into the usefulness of historical religions, which are essentially poetic). In fact, he goes so far as to reject the current practice of distinguishing religious experiences from aesthetic ones (CF 34). Altogether, a natural desire for idealistic society is conceptually extracted from the desire for Heaven, subtly eclipsing a natural

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<sup>114</sup> “There are many religionists who are now dissatisfied with the older “proofs” of the existence of God, those that go by the name of ontological, cosmological and teleological. The cause of the dissatisfaction is perhaps not so much the arguments that Kant used to show the insufficiency of these alleged proofs, as it is the growing feeling that they are too formal to offer any support to religion in action. Anyway, the dissatisfaction exists” (CF 10).

desire for immortality as the core hypothesized component of religious faith in the liberal tradition.

In short, the removal of historical religion combined with a simultaneous recognition of the natural religious function of experience would both allow human beings to recognize the problems of the world as our problems, and will allow human beings to fully desire to act in harmony with others in pursuit of what seems ideal, informed by the knowledge and intelligence of modern scientific society. Not only can humans act to collectively achieve shared ideal values in the world, but they will recover the legitimacy of mystical experience, without having to interpret such psychological phenomena in supernatural terms.<sup>115</sup> Dewey identifies what Christians often mean by “God” with something much more functional: the “active relation between ideal and actual” (CF 47). And he consistently emphasizes the crucial psychological importance of this fact for social change: “A clear and intense conception of a union of ideal ends with actual conditions is capable of arousing steady emotion . . . In a distracted age, the need for such an idea is urgent. It can unify interests and energies now dispersed; it can direct action and generate the heat of emotion and the light of intelligence” (CF 48).

What is perhaps most revolutionary about this reimagining of “religious” desire is that it has been completely severed from the individual’s personal desire for his or her own

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<sup>115</sup> Dewey states that, “Interpretations of the [mystical] experience have not grown from the experience itself with the aid of such scientific resources as may be available. They have been imported by borrowing without criticism from ideas that are current in the surrounding culture” (CF 34).

everlasting life. The implication is that the desire for immortality is unnatural, a corruption of our nature brought about by false ideas proposed by false prophets throughout human history. This may either prove to be an intractable flaw in the whole idea, or could serve as a compelling alternative theory for the psychological basis of social-political motivation. I will return to this question later.

*Solution 1: Reform "Religion" to Expand Associational Life*

Democracy requires, for Dewey, an adherence to democratic values, or what could be called a democratic culture. It also requires the natural religious function of human beings. This special desire stimulates the attachment to the values and ideals that democratic culture can transmit throughout society and across generations. For the religious function to behave naturally, however, historical religions need to be put aside. The government has some unspecified role in this, but for now, Dewey has left us with what could be called policy objectives.<sup>116</sup>

It is crucial for democratic culture to be scientific if it is to serve its most important function to democratic society.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, if culture is not scientific, then it must be based on prejudice, and thus should be kept private in accord with Lockean arguments for

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<sup>116</sup> Echoing this analytical problem, Festenstein states that there is "an important vagueness about the agents and authority of social action" (1997, p. 75).

<sup>117</sup> Dewey asks, "Can society, especially a democratic society, exist without a basic consensus and community of beliefs? If it cannot, can the required community be achieved without regulation of scientific pursuits exercised by a public authority in behalf of social unity?" (FC 104).

toleration. If, however, culture is put on a scientific foundation instead of one that rests haphazardly on chance prejudices—such as the dogmas and dispositions of historical religions—then the original justification for the state needing to be separated from “church,” and politics from “religion,” is rendered unnecessary. Historical religions, which deaden free inquiry, should be supplanted by a scientific attitude.<sup>118</sup> Dewey states that, “A culture which permits science to destroy traditional values but which distrusts its power to create new ones is a culture which is destroying itself” (FC 118). What emerges is a natural scientific culture, activated and inspired by the natural religious function, which does not require the old divisions between society and state, or a pluralism where society tolerates all sorts of non-scientific, prejudicial belief systems.<sup>119</sup>

We get there first through changes in associational life. Robert Horwitz observes that, “Dewey speaks glowingly of the possibilities of ‘growth’ which stem from membership in associations devoted to scientific and artistic pursuits, education, social service, and the

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<sup>118</sup> Dewey states that, “the future of democracy is allied with the spread of the scientific attitude. It is the sole guarantee against wholesale misleading by propaganda. More important still, it is the only assurance of the possibility of a public opinion intelligent enough to meet present social problems” (FC 114).

<sup>119</sup> Dewey states that, “Our hypothesis is neutral as to any general, sweeping implications as to how far state activity may extend . . . At times, the consequences of the conjoint behavior of some persons may be such that a large public interest is generated which can be fulfilled only by laying down conditions which involve a large measure of reconstruction within that group” (PP 80).

like” (HPP, p. 862). Dewey thinks these associations are growing, and applauds what he sees as society’s movement away from church membership.<sup>120</sup> He states that:

The shift in what I have called the social center of gravity accompanies the enormous expansion of associations formed for educational, political, economic, philanthropic and scientific purposes, which has occurred independently of any religion. These social modes have grown so much that they exercise the greater hold upon the thought and interest of most persons, even of those holding membership in churches. This positive extension of interests which, from the standpoint of a religion, are non-religious, is so great that in comparison with it the direct effect of science upon the creeds of religion seems to me of secondary importance. (CF 58)

Dewey does not want to harmonize historical religion with society or modernize it in any way. Beyond keeping—and redefining—the word “religion,” perhaps only for rhetorical purposes, his underlying goal is to completely replace religion with scientific, associational culture. This is what he means by the “secondary importance” of “the direct effect of science upon the creeds of religion.” Organized religions may try to adapt to changing historical circumstances, caving to pressure from the scientific community, but democracy cannot seriously progress unless religion is completely removed from society.

With this phrasing I am making Dewey sound much more radical than scholars sympathetic to his project usually will explicitly portray. For example, Savage (2002) writes

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<sup>120</sup> Dewey states that, “nowhere in the world at any time has religion been so thoroughly respectable as with us, and so nearly totally disconnected from life” (ION 7).

that “societies deal with [intellectual] conflict in a variety of ways (suppression in totalitarian systems, competition in pluralist systems, cooperation in consociational systems); Dewey is merely offering a method to deal with conflict that utilizes social intelligence . . . Collective authority and freedom are reconciled by the method of social intelligence” (p. 119). Savage then, for apparent rhetorical outreach to his reader, follows this statement with a discussion of a parable of Jesus from the New Testament meant to explain Dewey’s hope that we strive toward our highest ideals (p. 120). Savage must see, however, that (mere?) methods have policy and institutional implications. They do not occur in a vacuum. There thus seems to be a reluctance here to recognize the gravity of what Dewey is calling for, i.e. the end of religion.

The reason Dewey is so hostile to the independent pursuit of the salvation of one’s soul is mainly because it creates an artificial tension between our motivations for individual spiritual growth and our passion for creating an ideal society. Dewey states that, “What is termed spiritual culture has usually been futile, with something rotten about it, just because it has been conceived as a thing which a man might have internally—and therefore exclusively. What one is as a person is what one is as associated with others, in a free give and take of intercourse” (Dewey 1944, p. 122). Outside of our social associations, there is actually no “person” left to achieve salvation—such efforts in isolation are futile.

Dewey thinks of the good human life in terms of the unfolding of personality through participation in one’s community. This is the progressive version of “spiritual growth.” It is a highly intellectual process of absorbing culture and aiding in the spread of culture to one’s fellow community members. As was stated above, Dewey “places almost full dependence for the achievement of the good, democratic regime upon the existence of

an educated, enlightened, public-spirited, and active citizenry” (HPP 866). The desire for Heaven now so prevalent among religious communities is based on a false understanding of the world. Such belief is a historical anomaly, parasitical to the desire for social growth, and corrupting of our understanding of what social growth is. The desire for immortality, I must keep emphasizing, is not even acknowledged.

This understanding of human nature revealed in Dewey’s desire to end organized religion and expand associational life helps to explain why private intelligence is such an unnecessary principle for a healthy society, and actually is very harmful. This brings us to the second part of Dewey’s solution, dealing with what he sees as the unnecessary and harmful principle of private property, which also impacts associational life, as well as the workplace. While ending religion and increasing intellectual and moral associations will be a major step forward, the sharing of internal governance of these associations and the distribution of resources in society remains a major concern in the quest for a more democratic society.

### *Solution 2: Socialize the Workplace*

For Dewey, the psychological assumption that underlies capitalism, that people pursue their own self-interest, does not need to be abandoned so much as re-imagined. He states that, “Even if the principle of self-love actuated behavior, it would still be true that the objects in which men find their love manifested, the objects which they take as constituting their peculiar interests, are set by habits reflecting social customs” (PP 128). If social customs are modified, then the self-love that “actuated” behavior could be brought into line with a more democratic and progressive society. Indeed, in a passage quoted in the previous section, he refers glowingly to the “positive extension of interests” taking place as non-

religious associational life expands. One's interest need not be satisfied exclusively through competitive acquisition of wealth redounding primarily to one's own private bank account.

The Lockean liberal status quo is much to blame for self-love not “‘actuating’ behavior more in line with a more democratic and progressive society.” What the principle of private property inevitably produces is a social custom of oppression and conflict with others for the benefit of this conflict's winners. These winners then rationally aim to propagate the belief that everyone's self-love can best be satisfied under it, and that these economic customs should be kept up.

Democracy therefore needs new economic customs that hold out new objects of desire. Dewey calls for a labor that is not merely exchanged for material wealth, but labor that is edifying and satisfying in itself. Spiritual growth must grow out of labor, not be a development that potentially occurs apart from it, should the individual even by happenstance in a Lockean society be motivated to pursue it. Dewey is not, then, especially concerned with promoting egalitarian economic prosperity such that the amount of everyone's wealth increasing is the final end to be achieved. This would be perpetuating undemocratic desires and customs, reinforcing the harmful ideal of private and exclusive happiness. There is a need for more broad based wealth, but this desired change is simply a means to the new collective end of democratic growth. What Dewey wants most of all is for people to increase in intelligence, strengthen their capacities, and elevate their taste in intellectual and artistic goods. By engaging in labor and associational activity that is compatible with these things, the desired society can emerge.

He emphasizes again and again that man's capacities should be developed by focusing on establishing the conditions in which people will freely and eagerly develop their

own capacities. The motive reason why people (outside the privatized, capitalist system) should want to develop their capacities is because they are members of associations and workplaces bent on, directly or indirectly, manifesting a better societal environment. They will want their associations and businesses to succeed, and to feel empowered and to be recognized for their own potential to aid their associations and workplaces in achieving their goals.<sup>121</sup> In turn, good associations and workplaces will realize their duty and self-interest in facilitating the development of the capacities of their members and employees. The vision that emerges is profoundly cooperative, focused on widespread individual development, and exceedingly confident in its ability to rival the goods produced by the competitive model born out of a capitalistic economic system.

Dewey regards habits of long term planning as essential to the elevation of people and the associations to which they are parts, and he focuses here on the ability to foresee consequences. It is the foresight of consequences that give associations and their members' stimulation and purpose, such that they can see and evaluate what good consequences are possible and what bad should be avoided, and thus plans can be devised accordingly. According to Damico, for Dewey, "Moral activity is thus very much a matter of intelligent problem solving. This means that the moral order is not something settled once and for all but something constantly changing and dependent on the deeds of men" (1978, p. 25). Democratic citizens require problem solving skills and practice developing these skills,

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<sup>121</sup> Dewey states that, "Competition will continue, but it will be less rivalry for acquisition of material goods, and more an emulation of local groups to enrich direct experience with appreciatively enjoyed intellectual and artistic wealth" (PP 159).

therefore, in order to become true moral agents. Moral activity requires more than submissive adherence to externally imposed rules, and the individual unskilled at this is not a participant in moral activity.

Whereas Tocqueville sees generally diffused enlightenment across the democratic social state, seeking to overcome apparent obstacles to his own prosperity, Dewey claims that it is the associations to which the individual is a part that must involve all of its members in the process of determining and perceiving collective future consequences. Under the private property based regime, this kind of work arrangement is not to be expected. When workers are not involved in the direction of the company they work for, and are not permitted the necessary information to witness and judge the consequences of the decisions of the company or organization, the workers' associated faculties are not exercised, and their motivations are detached from the pursuit of consequences favorable to the organization that could then be enjoyed in just proportion. Dewey thus argues that social control<sup>122</sup> of the means of production is simply what allows conditions to be arranged such that America's ideal of "rugged individuals" can emerge.<sup>123</sup> Cultural resources, art, are

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<sup>122</sup> Dewey states that "concentration of attention upon real and vital issues such as attend public control of industry and finance for the sake of social values would have vast intellectual and emotional reverberations . . . [I]t will . . . be a significant step forward in the recovery of a unified individuality" (ION 58).

<sup>123</sup> Dewey distinguishes between the "older individualism" and the "new individualism." A key difference is that "the older individualism assumed a romantic form. It was hardly necessary to elaborate a theory which equated personal gain with social advance" (ION 39).

important to the development of the spirit, which provides for a more genuine liberty and self-sufficiency.

The state does continue to pose potential threats, as some associations and businesses will inevitably become more aligned with the state's governmental powers than others. As Rogers points out, "in many situations, Dewey argues, the claims of the public cannot flow fluidly into the administrative power of the state. Instead, publics must seek to build power externally, the result of which functions as a counterweight to public(s) that are entrenched via the state and wield arbitrary power" (2012, p. 29). By growing democracy in society within the formal structure of a democratic political regime, Dewey expects power to consolidate in a sprawling multiplicity of locations. This community of power centers is understood to ameliorate the potential for government abuse, and to reassure that the reconstitution of property from a private good to a public good will not threaten the public as was feared by Locke. As a result of building up all sectors of society, there no longer is a single public within society, but numerous publics capable of placing a check on any one particular public that happens to exercise state power seeking to harm other publics without state power.

From the institutional perspective, Dewey wants, much like Tocqueville, for an array of associations within society to act as sources of power and authority outside of

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It did not take associational life seriously enough. Dewey states that "Individuals who are not bound together in associations, whether domestic, economic, religious, political, artistic or educational, are monstrosities" (ION 40-1). The new individualism, naturally, incorporates personal gain with social advance via such associational activity.

government and independent of economic elites. Rather than have the rich and the government fighting between each other for influence and support from the people, he seeks a political society where each individual possesses power and influence through voluntary associations.

What is key, and what distinguishes this from special interest groups where people merely pay a small fee and carry a membership card around in their wallet, Dewey seeks a much more involved relationship between associational leadership and membership. Because of the entirely voluntary nature of these associations, however, the motivational component is essential. The associational dream can never work unless people *want* to associate and are willing to participate in the manner Dewey (or Tocqueville) expect them to participate, i.e. toward advancing the ideal society. Especially since Dewey has sworn off explicitly the desire for material acquisition and implicitly the desire for immortality, he must somehow release the desire for ideals in a manner that has seemingly never been done before.<sup>124</sup>

All of this cooperative, associational activity, is activated by the replacement of the desire for Heaven with the desire for ideals. This is not a vague hope to unleash the human spirit or the secular providence of progressive growth lacking any practical foundation.

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<sup>124</sup> Dewey states that, "As for ideals, all agree that we want the good life, and that the good life involves freedom and a taste that is trained to appreciate the honorable, the true and the beautiful" (ION 8). He later states that, "Nothing would conduce more, for example, to the elimination of war than the substitute of specific analysis of its causes for the wholesale love of 'liberty, humanity, justice and civilization'" (ION 80).

Rather, Dewey has articulated a thoughtful model of human nature, identified the institutions that are corrupting it (religion and liberalism's embrace of individual rights), and justified his analysis with clear and specific reasoning. The most significant weakness of his analysis, I have tried to point out along the way, is his ignoring of the desire for immortality and the natural seriousness of death to the individual. This is not the problem Dewey's critics usually point to, but I believe it is the crucial underlying issue to Dewey's political vision. We thus have competing models of human nature, differing most importantly on whether the desire for immortality is natural and politically relevant. On one side is the pre-Dewey liberal tradition, and on the other side is Dewey himself. Though it would have been a great benefit to Dewey's theory to engage directly with the desire for immortality, definitively determining which model of human nature is the correct one must ultimately require a great deal of quantitative analysis.

### Conclusion

From Plato's *Symposium* to the *Declaration of Independence*, the pursuit of happiness has been a private pursuit that requires no explanation: a first truth. The right to this pursuit, in Jefferson's telling, is self-evident. The starting point for Locke and Tocqueville, running somewhat parallel to this idea, seems to be private interest instead of happiness. Still, individual happiness and private interest, whatever their subtle distinctions might be argued to be, convey similar meaning. The main concern is the individual, and the individual's concern is a personal concern. Dewey's alternative is quite different. He presents the pursuit of ideals as what lies above and behind the false shadows cast in front of us by our oppressors. The idea of the isolated individual divides and conquers the majority

beneath the economic oligarchy. The pursuit of happiness does require, suddenly, justification. The new self-evident truth seems to be something resembling a reformulation of the Cartesian cogito into “society is, therefore I can be.” Self-evident is the authority of the most true or most beautiful ideals. But what is equality? What is liberty? Who has seen the true Forms of these ideas? What is perhaps most troubling about Dewey is that he asks us to reject what seems most deeply rooted in us, rather than assimilating it into a framework where such apparent essentials might be at least satisfied, if not indeed elevated toward at least widespread concern for the ideals Dewey sanctifies. This is what the desire for immortality in the political liberalism of Plato, Locke, and Tocqueville has been all about: a reliable motivation for members of society to yield in their collective capacity to the inherent rights of individuals to be Free.

We can recall that Plato feared the oppressive tyrant, democratic mob rule, and the influence of false poets or prophets prevailing in society instead of that of philosophy. Socrates’ execution was the key political sin opposed and addressed. Locke later feared unlimited, arbitrary government—basically one group within society violating the rights of another group. Everyone’s natural rights should be respected inside of the social compact. Tocqueville feared democratic tyranny, and the shrinking greatness (even dignity) of the individual. We see a constant struggle within these different societies, articulated by these theorists, to prevent the emergence of oppressive political forms, with the goal of allowing the individual the freedom to safely and independently pursue his or her own happiness.

Here is one of the key points of contention: is liberalism mostly concerned with the (eternal) happiness of the individual, or the perfection of society? Plato is crucial to this question, who indeed sought to outline an ideal regime in his *Republic*. But this regime was

essentially a means to an end — the happiness of the whole, with regard for the individual and engagement with the necessary trade-offs between different kinds of individuals' competing needs. Locke likewise stipulated the need for limited government, but this also was a means to the end of protecting the rights of individuals to live lives of their choosing. The effort was not to perfect society for perfection's sake, but to secure the experiencing of human happiness. And for each, the desire for immortality was necessary, both to make the theory work internally, and to sell the theory to their audience.

Compare then Dewey's critique of believing in Heaven. He argues that people believe in Heaven because they desire to live in an ideal world. This assumption would imply that Plato's member of the ideal regime is not happy because he is able to experience goods that he finds pleasing and expect more in the afterlife, but first and foremost because he believes that he lives under the authority of ideals. But the truth seems to be the opposite — Plato's regime is ideal because everyone can experience goods that please them, doing so in peace and harmony with each other. Furthermore, I cannot help but think of my own personal experience, where I find that people typically believe in Heaven to 1) experience things that give them pleasure, and 2) to survive death. The idea of Heaven is often a vague idea in people's minds, and people usually imagine it differently. Indeed, a common reason for rejecting the idea of Heaven is that some people do not necessarily want to live in a "perfect" place, but would be happier in an imperfect one. Some also, of course, say they feel comfortable with oblivion. I have always struggled to understand that. In any case, we all tend to be wary of utopia and protective of our subjective views of what makes us happy as individuals, even when an all-knowing and all-powerful being supposedly would be in charge.

Consider too that Heaven is said to exist at no cost to any of us, and is guaranteed by God to remain perfect forever. Is not each of these details another appeal to the hedonistic understanding of what makes human beings happy: immediate gratification with as little personal sacrifice or effort as possible? To say then that liberalism is about desiring an ideal place and locating this desire as somehow implicit in the traditional desire for a spiritual Heaven must be seen as far-fetched. Bringing about an ideal place requires incredible work and sacrifice. The means are as repelling as the ends are attractive, or perhaps even more so. It is also a vague idea. One's personal Heaven placed on earth would necessarily have to adjust to the imagined Heavens of others. God might guarantee each of us the paradise suited to us, but no such arrangement can be promised by the artificial environmental creations of man. It is hard to save Dewey from his conservative critics, I must conclude, even as I do find their criticisms lacking. His theory does appear to speculate too far away from common experience and too optimistically in order to be compelling, let alone convincing. On the other hand, maybe he is right to suspect that this impression is simply a creation of religions' not-so noble lies. I reject his theoretical proof of this desire, yet this does not definitely refute the desire itself. Maybe he sees something he was not able to rationally justify. Certainly not everyone is going to believe that the desire for immortality is so crucial to liberalism, either. We thus need to begin empirically arbitrating this dispute with additional data and analysis, which is attempted in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: The Immortality Salience and Democratic Citizenship Survey

From the four thinkers analyzed in the preceding chapters, four distinct theories for how the desire for immortality can be used to promote justice in political society. The basic proposition for each theory is presented below, labelled P1-P4. “Desire for Immortality” is abbreviated DfI.

### **Plato**

P1: DfI given hope and direction through philosophic knowledge of immortality (O1) leads to freedom and regime resistance.

### **Locke**

P2: DfI given hope and direction by pragmatic Christian faith in immortality (O2) leads to freedom and regime resistance.

### **Tocqueville**

P3: DfI given hope and direction by dogmatic belief in immortality (O3) leads to freedom and regime resistance.

### **Dewey**

P4: DfI replaced by the desire for democratic ideals (O4) leads to freedom and regime resistance.

There are four distinct objects connected with the DfI, three of these are meant to stimulate and guide it, one is meant to replace it with a different desire altogether. Plato, Locke, and Tocqueville all want to appeal to the DfI in order to increase some notion of freedom and regime resistance. Dewey alone wants to replace the DfI with a different desire, but like the other three still seeks to promote freedom and regime resistance.

Let us compare the objects of desire and the intended effects in each of these theories.

I have labeled the four objects of desire O1-O4. For O1-O3, there are many similarities. The objects of Locke and Tocqueville are the most similar. The primary

difference is that for Locke, Christian faith has a rational basis, derivative of man's epistemological limitations. It is justifiable pragmatism, then, to have a strong desire for immortality and to pursue it through ethical behavior. Tocqueville denies such a rational basis, yet maintains that the desire for immortality must be appealed to through the dogmatic belief in immortality.<sup>125</sup> Plato recognizes no such epistemological limitations, and believes that the desire for immortality can be appealed to through philosophic knowledge, specifically of the philosophic truth of man's spiritual immortality. Thus whether it is pragmatic, dogmatic, or philosophic, O1-O3 seek to appeal to the DfI directly, suggesting that people hope for immortality. Dewey breaks from this approach by changing the object from immortality to democratic ideals (O4), intentionally changing the motive desire from the DfI to the desire for democratic ideals.

The effects of appealing to the DfI in P1-P3 are likewise similar. Plato, Locke, and Tocqueville are all concerned with protecting the freedom of the individual, and motivating the individual to protect his or her freedom through regime resistance. The differences in their theories are largely driven by the different types of regimes they see as necessary to resist, and the types of oppression threaten the individual. Fitting Dewey (P4) into this is

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<sup>125</sup> The differences here between the models of Locke and Tocqueville are so confined to the nuances of epistemology that I have declined to test them as 2 distinct models. Rather, I test the Tocqueville model, which is more familiar to a contemporary subject pool and thus more manageable to test in my survey experiment (the problem of finding an appropriate treatment to represent the Locke model also would have been daunting). The Locke model has therefore been left untested at this time.

too complicated to work out here. What can be noted is that the disagreement between Dewey and Tocqueville reveal that resisting the regime must first be preceded by forming a judgment concerning who rules. Dewey sees a capitalist oligarchy ruling which must be resisted, whereas Tocqueville sees a democracy which must be resisted. For Dewey, democracy cannot be oppressive, and what democratic oppression would really constitute is a democracy become corrupted into an oligarchy. The solution to democracy is thus more democracy.

The objective of this chapter, however, is not to offer a theoretical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these different understandings. Rather, this chapter seeks to empirically test the hypothesized relationships in these competing theories between the DfI and the promotion of freedom and regime resistance.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> A tangible example to relate this testing to is President Obama's political project of hope and change. We see in these theories each of these concepts, and indeed these theories provide one possible explanation for how these concepts relate to each other. More importantly, this testing can help us understand why hope and change has been relatively unsuccessful, at least in the views of the public. We need only note that Obama's rhetoric is not aimed at replacing the desire for immortality with the desire for ideals, but rather to incorporate both of these appeals into his rhetoric, which are indeed reflective of the President's own spiritual identity, which is by all accounts a religious one. Not many would likely lump Obama in with the evangelical style of George W. Bush or Jimmy Carter (see Berggren and Rae 2006, "Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an

In designing this test, decisions had to be made in order to maximize the explanatory benefit while working within my resource constraints in time, money, and expertise. I decided on conducting a survey experiment, with treatments representing the objects of desire as the independent variable and attitudinal questions pertaining to politics, society, and ethics as the dependent variable. Such a design should be able to shed some light on whether these different appeals to the DfI actually do influence attitudes that these thinkers believed to be crucial to sustaining and/or promoting freedom within political society. More details of the experimental design will be discussed below.

### Fitting Into Extant Literature

The desire for immorality is not something that would be easy to study empirically. Desires in general are not taken much notice of as an object of empirical study, unless we are talking about excessively harmful desires that are studied by psychologists and medical doctors. Consider the fact that many social scientists, specifically economists, as a rule assume that people reveal their desires—whatever desires there may be for any given person or group at any given time—in the choices that they make. Social science largely has given up on trying to discover the true nature of man and cataloguing the elements of this hypothetically existing underlying nature. What is studied more often is behavior, self-

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Evangelical Presidential Style”), yet nor does Obama embody the same secular progressive spirit of an LBJ. It may be that the Dewey and the Tocqueville models have the potential to produce change, but when combined together diminish some of those effects. After the results section I will return to this question.

reported attitudes, and individual preferences, and those factors that are capable of predicting them.

Methodologically, this is a much easier task to grapple with, and I have humbly adopted this approach for this empirical portion of my study of the desire for immortality in modern democracy. Rather than test the hypothesis that there is a natural desire for immortality, I will study human attitudes and preferences as they are shaped and influenced by appeals to the desire for immortality. I do this by instrumentally making immortality more salient in survey experiment.

There is a relatively small but growing literature that influenced this choice in approach, specifically in the psychological subfield of experimental existential psychology (XXP). This subfield is characterized by applying the methodological familiarity and expertise in psychology with conducting experiments to questions born out of “a loosely defined existentialist movement . . . [which] began to emerge, initially as a reaction to orthodox Freudian theory” (Greenberg et al, 2004, p. 6). The background of this literature is less important than its primary themes and the methodological precedents it has established, which I believe help to validate the research design adopted here. XXP scholars follow Irvin Yalom in posting that there are “four basic concerns . . . [that] exert enormous influence on all people’s lives: death, freedom, existential isolation, and meaninglessness” (p. 6). Though “many people claim that they never think about such things . . . these basic concerns are ubiquitous and influential regardless of whether we realize it or not” (p. 6).

A study by Kastenmuller et al (2011), building on the “terror management theory” (TMT) that is a central pillar of the current XXP literature, conducted an experiment using immortality that particularly influenced my research design. In the study, the researchers

manipulated the belief in literal immortality in order to study the hypothesized causal relationship between terrorism and prejudice towards Muslims. The experiment had a two phase treatment. In the first phase, some subjects were exposed to images of terrorism (others were placed in a control group). In the second phase, some subjects were exposed to either of two fake news stories (or a control group). One news story claimed that scientists had discovered that the immortal soul actually exists and that human beings are immortal. The other news story claimed that scientists had demonstrated that there is no immortal soul. Subjects led to believe that the immortal soul exists showed less prejudice to Muslims following exposure to terrorism photos. The authors concluded that belief in immortality reduces death-related terror, and that this reduction in terror in turn reduces prejudice towards Muslims (p. 604). There is some precedent therefore, to using appeals to the desire for immortality as an experimental treatment, and having that treatment yield significant attitudinal changes.

The previous theoretical chapters of this dissertation show that elites, in the form of political leaders, public intellectuals, or the clergy, are typically the means by which the public has its desire for immortality appealed to, at least in the minds of the thinkers analyzed. This relates directly to theories of the primary influence of elite discourse on public opinion, as can be seen specifically in works such as John Zaller's *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992). He states there that, "To the extent that few like but none can avoid, citizens in large societies are dependent on . . . political elites" (p. 6). This is therefore a longstanding view not only in the history of political thought, but in modern quantitative social science.

Likewise, William Mcguire states in his *Personality and Attitude Change: An Information-Processing Theory* (1968), preceding Zaller by several decades, that “susceptibility to social influence is . . . the oldest topic in social psychology” (p. 176). However, Mcguire’s model posits that, “The audiences of the mass media, and even the subjects in laboratory research on attitude change, tend to have little intrinsic interest in the topics discussed in the persuasive message so that their attention to and learning of its contents tend to be rather precarious” (p. 185). He suspects that individual personality characteristics are the great mediator between the message sender and receiver. These views are perhaps more relevant to my survey experiment with regards to the subject pool, namely University of Houston undergraduates. Fortunately, there is scholarly precedent for conducting survey experiments on undergraduates at the University of Houston and obtaining valid and significant results (Michelbach et al 2003; Tedin et al 2010). And following Mutz (2011), this research could serve as the foundation for a population-based survey experiment in the future, where individual personality characteristics could better be accounted for in analyzing treatment effects.

The third section of literature this study relates to comes from scholars of the U.S. presidency, specifically those who study the role of religion in the conduct of this office. Among these works are *Religion and the American Presidency* (2009), which is a collection of articles edited by Gaston Espinosa, and *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (2006) by David Holmes. The Espinosa collection focuses on thirteen presidents from George Washington to George W. Bush. Explaining the reason for the book, Espinosa states that, “The tragedy of 9/11, the intense conflicts over religion and politics in Israel, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the role of religion in the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections have

brought the issue [of religion] into sharp focus [in presidency studies]” (2009, p. 1). This raises the important point that religious issues are ubiquitous in global affairs, and the president of the United States cannot avoid them in crafting his rhetoric in policy in both the domestic and foreign policy domains.

There is an important gap between these literatures that is filled by this study. Whereas the XXP literature recognizes the psychological concerns of existence as driving various attitudes and metrics of well-being, it does not typically see in religious-statesmanship a prime shaper of those very existential concerns. In the religion and the presidency literature, the importance of religious-statesmanship is acknowledged, but not for the reasons the XXP literature or the political theorists studied in this dissertation propose. The idea that presidents, by using religious rhetoric, can appeal to the desire for immortality and influence attitudes consonant with political freedom, is a new hypothesis that has not been tested, yet speaks to these various literatures in meaningful ways.

### Data and Methods

I designed the survey experiment to contain 3 treatment audio clips and a control audio clip. Participants were randomly assigned into groups that would be exposed to one of these possibilities. The treatment groups represent the distinctive manners in which the desire for immortality is instrumented in P1 (Plato), P3 (Tocqueville), and P4 (Dewey — see footnote 1 which explains why the Locke model has been omitted).

P1 is less familiar to liberal democracy, but is where the discussion of the desire for immortality began: classical philosophy and natural theology. Scholars in this tradition still exist today, so I thought it would be both legitimate and academically interesting to include

it as a treatment in the experiment. It has the benefit of filling out the alternative objects available to the desire for immortality (as the list is a finite one), for literal immortality can be believed in as an object of faith or as an object of reason (however valid some of us might view ancient and pre-modern reasoning today). To the extent that belief in literal immortality can motivate us to be better persons or better citizens, then, the philosopher may potentially be more inspiring than even the religious rhetoric of the pious statesman. For this treatment, I selected a lecture given by Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland, also edited to about a 15 minute duration, segmented into 2 clips with attention check questions after each clip.

P3 is perhaps the most common model adopted by American presidents in modern times. Appealing to immortality is common in the speeches of political leaders in the United States, especially when tragedy strikes. Furthermore, political speech itself has a special role with the desire for immortality in liberal democracies. Politicians cannot act on belief in immortality formally speaking – they cannot pass religious laws in United States, for example. So if they are to appeal to the desire for immortality, they must do so far away from the legislative process. They must use appeals to the desire for immortality as non-legislative rhetorical devices, and indeed such appeals are generally accepted by the public as benign and innocuous. Tocqueville and Dewey were aware of this space for what might be called liberal statesmanship, which is why they both wrote so much concerning elite leadership in the public discourse of society. One place where they mainly disagreed over was whether the desire for immortality is beneficial, or should be dropped in favor of the desire for democratic ideals.

In designing an empirical study of a cause and effect relationship such as this, the researcher is motivated to select the treatments carefully so as to create the strongest effects possible and appropriate for study. Thus the first treatment I selected, representing religious-statesmanship (Tocqueville's recommendation), is an approximately 15 minute audio clip. Half of the audio clip is President George W. Bush delivering a consoling speech, suffused with religious rhetoric, to the nation following the 9/11 attacks. The other half is then Senator Barack Obama delivering a speech on the role of faith in politics. The 9/11 tragedy in the background of this treatment deepens the existential angst at the start of the audio clip (stimulating the desire for immortality via its natural complement, the fear of death), and the combining of Republican and Democrat presidents highlights the bi-partisan nature of this sort of appeal to religion as a positive good in American life. Obama even refers to a common "hunger" that is not satisfied in the hustle and bustle of everyday American life, before pointing to religious faith as a satisfier of this hunger.

For P4, I excerpted LBJ's "Let us Continue" speech delivered to Congress following the JFK assassination. This treatment audio clip is also 15 minutes, and is divided into two 7 ½ minute segments, all from LBJ's speech. Since this is safely in the category of historical presidential speech, I did not see a need to obviate partisan feelings on the part of the survey experiment subjects. But this speech certainly possesses the same quality of stimulating existential angst, as LBJ is at times intensely morose regarding the fallen president. Yet, LBJ never invokes religious appeals or religious sounding rhetoric. We should recall as well that John Dewey was still highly regarded during this time and his influence was still present in national politics, especially for New Dealers like LBJ. In any event, LBJ's proposed response to the assassination of JFK is not prayer and trust in God's

plan, but for the country to carry on his work in the legislative arena, to continue the unfinished work, and by doing so to make it possible for JFK ideal vision for American society to become manifest.

Finally, there was a control group that listened to brief clips of Hollywood movies, one of *Wall Street* (1987) and the other from *Inherit the Wind* (1960). This control was meant to give a mild push against the desire for immortality and the desire for democratic ideals, raising some gentle speculation about the veracity of the Bible (against the former) and extolling the virtues of capitalism (against the latter).

The expected effects of these appeals (the dependent variable) can be summarized as follows: Plato expects an increased concern with ethical behavior that cashes out into a willingness to resist unjust regimes. Immortality desiring should stimulate long-term planning and a desire for truth. Tocqueville is concerned with a descent into tyranny if the belief in rights and the love of liberty are not maintained. He thinks religion's dogmas can help with this problem. Dewey is concerned with the woefully stalled progress of democracy and the threats posed by the increasing concentration of economic power. Dewey believes that historical religions are an accomplice to these problems, and need to be replaced by a common faith in democratic idealism. These theorists are not primarily thinking about society's ability to respond to existential threat (as in the 9/11 attacks on the United States), but on how to awaken an otherwise inattentive society to resist its less flattering tendencies, and to proactively either sustain or progress toward a healthy and vibrant political society.

Undergraduates from the University of Houston were recruited to participate in this survey experiment. Conventional survey software was used, and students were instructed to

over the course of approximately 10 days to complete the online survey at their convenience. Attention checks were included in the form of factual questions pertaining to the content of the treatment audio clips. Table 1 shows the summary statistics of the demographic information pertaining to those experiment subjects that passed the attention checks. Note that the subject pool was very diverse on nearly every demographic variable.

The survey is designed for a 2-stage analysis following the experimental treatment exposure. Immediately following this treatment stage, subjects were first queried on their theological beliefs. To gather this information, I adopted from Kastenmuller et al, (2011) and Ai and McCormick, (2010) the *Connection of the Soul* scale. This scale consists of three subscales: items representing atheist beliefs, Western religious beliefs, and Eastern religious beliefs. Each subscale contains 3-4 items to which the subjects rated their agreement on a 10 point scale.

Table 1: Summary statistics

<u>Variable</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>
Male	816	0.45	0.50	0	1
Age	816	20.52	4.03	18	74
Conservative	816	1.82	1.03	0	4
Judeo-Christian	816	0.47	0.50	0	1
White	816	0.29	0.45	0	1
Class	816	2.85	2.38	0	7
Political	816	1.51	1.21	0	4

Table 2: Group sizes following attention checks

<u>Treatment</u>		
<u>Groups</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Religious	115	14.1
Progressive	202	24.8
Philosophic	179	21.9
Control	320	39.2
Total	816	100

Subsequent to the COS, the subjects were presented with 4 sets of questions and survey items. The first set was of 7 items, each item being a statement of a political attitude promoted by John Dewey considered by him as essential for democratic progress. The next question set contained 4 political principles singled out by Tocqueville as being crucial, which were adopted from a list constructed by Hebert's (2010) qualitative study of *Democracy in America*. The third set of items consisted of types of life goals and priorities. A final set of questions reformulated the life goals question set, asking subjects to rate how willing they would be to sacrifice any of those items in order to achieve their more important (though left unstated) life goals. Specific questions were not included to study the effects of Plato's model, as elements from across these question sets were deemed to be sufficient.

### Results of Stage 1: Treatments' Effects on Theological Beliefs

Table 3: COS difference of means among treatment groups

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Diff. from Control</u>	<u>Cohen's d</u>
	Religious	115	2.29	3.02	-1.03***	-0.31**

Regarding my life, after death everything is over.	Progressive	202	3.45	3.37	0.13	0.04
	Philosophic	178	2.66	3.23	-0.65**	-0.19**
	Control	318	3.31	3.46	.	.
Physical existence is the only existence I have.	Religious	115	1.63	2.72	-0.89***	-0.30**
	Progressive	202	2.48	3.03	-0.05	-0.02
	Philosophic	178	2.12	3.10	-0.41	-0.13
	Control	318	2.53	3.12	.	.
After death there is NOT an "afterlife."	Religious	115	1.97	2.95	-0.65*	-0.20
	Progressive	202	2.86	3.42	0.25	0.07
	Philosophic	178	2.42	3.30	-0.20	-0.06
	Control	318	2.62	3.40	.	.
After death the life of the body and soul stops.	Religious	115	1.90	2.74	-0.58*	-0.19
	Progressive	202	2.80	3.42	0.33	0.10
	Philosophic	178	2.40	3.21	-0.08	-0.02
	Control	318	2.47	3.21	.	.
After death I come to paradise.	Religious	115	6.22	3.43	0.48	0.14
	Progressive	202	5.48	3.58	-0.25	-0.07
	Philosophic	178	5.96	3.48	0.22	0.06
	Control	318	5.73	3.53	.	.
After death my soul goes to an absolutely peaceful place, the Haven.	Religious	115	6.40	3.47	0.45	0.13
	Progressive	202	5.75	3.69	-0.20	-0.06
	Philosophic	178	5.78	3.57	-0.17	-0.05
	Control	318	5.95	3.55	.	.
After death I become an angel.	Religious	115	3.18	3.48	-0.61	-0.17
	Progressive	202	3.39	3.64	-0.41	-0.11
	Philosophic	178	3.44	3.50	-0.35	-0.10
	Control	318	3.79	3.67	.	.

After death I come to the community with god.	Religious	115	6.33	3.61	0.48	0.13
	Progressive	202	5.41	3.85	-0.44	-0.11
	Philosophic	178	5.88	3.86	0.03	0.01
	Control	318	5.85	3.86	.	.
After death my soul connects with the world spirit.	Religious	114	4.70	3.52	0.29	0.08
	Progressive	202	4.30	3.43	-0.12	-0.03
	Philosophic	178	4.33	3.54	-0.08	-0.02
	Control	318	4.42	3.62	.	.
After death I am unified with the collective consciousness.	Religious	114	4.13	3.35	0.39	0.12
	Progressive	202	3.98	3.40	0.23	0.07
	Philosophic	178	4.02	3.47	0.28	0.08
	Control	318	3.75	3.35	.	.
When overcoming my ego, I reach enlightenment (Nirvana).	Religious	115	4.39	3.60	-0.30	-0.08
	Progressive	202	5.44	3.44	0.75**	0.21**
	Philosophic	178	5.17	3.51	0.48	0.13
	Control	318	4.69	3.60	.	.
<i>Note: For each item, treatment group means are subtracted from control group mean; t-tests results are reported as ***<math>p &lt; .01</math>, **<math>p &lt; .05</math>, *<math>p &lt; .10</math>. Cohen's d tested using 95% confidence interval.</i>						

The first two items of the COS, which deny an afterlife (variable labelled NOAFTER) and affirm that physical existence (variable labelled MATTER) is the limit of existence, revealed the largest differences across treatment groups compared to the control group. The groups were also tested altogether with one-way ANOVA, with 3<sup>rd</sup> item MATTER ( $p = 0.03$ ) and 5<sup>th</sup> item PARADISE ( $p = 0.04$ ) showing statistically significant differences across all groups. Also notable is that many of the mean differences compared

to the control group, although not statistically significant according to the Student *t* tests conducted, do show the expected sign and with roughly the expected size effects.

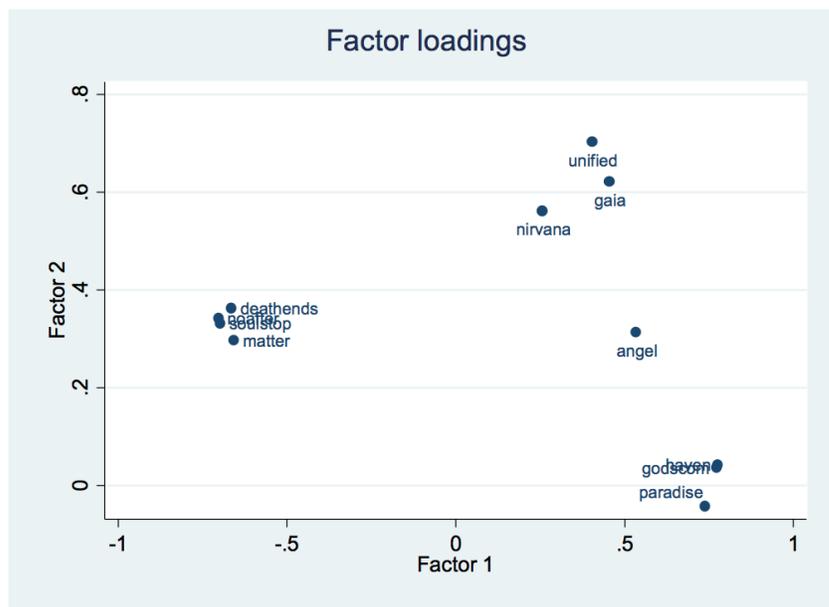
In general, the religious treatment, and to a lesser extent the philosophic treatment, resulted in more Western religious beliefs. The progressive treatment, on the other hand, resulted in more atheistic beliefs. The notable exception in the effects of the progressive treatment exists in the final item of the COS, which references the overcoming of the ego and the achieving of nirvana after death. It is unclear why this association exists, but there is room for reasonable speculation. Perhaps the progressive treatment emphasizes the inadequacy of Western religions without offering a satisfying alternative. The ego being a familiar psychological term since Freud popularized it, it could be that the progressive treatment legitimizes this more scientifically resonant term, while satisfying an open need for existential solace.

#### *Factor analysis – the COS primary factor*

Another way to analyze this scale is with factor analysis. The subscales embedded with the COS serve as indicators for an underlying religious perspective, specifically either atheist, Western religious, or Eastern religious. A principal factor was extracted from this data, with an eigenvalue of 4.31. Eigenvalues higher than 1 are considered to be significant by conventional standards. A second factor extracted also achieved an eigenvalue above this level, scoring 1.74. Since the first factor's eigenvalue is nearly 2.5 times as large, and the factor loadings for it are substantially more intuitive and safely interpreted, I chose to primarily use it for the analysis moving forward.

Figure 1 shows the COS items plotted in 2-dimensional space created by the factors just discussed. This graph shows the clear separation between the atheist subscale and the two religious subscales along Factor 1. It also provides a sense of what Factor 2 represents, as clearly the Western religious subscale and the Eastern religious subscale are clustered at opposite ends of the Factor 2 dimension. What would make this factor difficult to interpret is the fact that the atheist subscale is clustered in the middle of Factor 2. The most out of place item is “angel,” which measured agreement with the statement, “After death I become an angel.” This item is as expected on the religious side of Factor 1, but on Factor 2 is caught in between the Eastern and Western religions, and achieves scores similar to the atheist subscale.

Figure 1: Factor loadings of COS items on two extracted factors



The subscales of the COS load basically as grouped units onto the primary factor.

The first four items which state atheistic beliefs have a high negative loading (-0.66, -0.66, -

0.70, -0.70). The next four items that state Western religious beliefs have a high positive loading (0.74, 0.78, 0.53, 0.77). The final three items that state Eastern religious beliefs have a more modest positive loading (0.45, 0.40, 0.26). This factor therefore seems to represent primarily belief in spiritual life after death and a personal god, and runs counter to atheist beliefs. It is expected that such a factor would also generate positive, though more modest, factor loadings from the Eastern religious beliefs, as there is a common belief in spirituality, with the difference deriving from the individualism of this spirit and the distinctiveness of it with the larger spiritual entities within the universe.

I generated factor scores based on this primary factor extracted from the COS. This gives every observation in my dataset a score based on how well each subject's responses to the COS correlated with this underlying factor. The mean factor score for each treatment group is reported in Table 4. Notice that these means are as theoretically expected. The religious and philosophic treatment are positive, with the religious group much (5 times) higher than the philosophic group in terms of its mean score ( $M = 0.18$  vs.  $M = 0.03$ ). Meanwhile, the progressive group is negative ( $M = -0.09$ ), in fact 3 times more negative than the control group mean, which is the closest to zero among the groups ( $M = -0.03$ ). This factor provides a greater overall measure of the effects of the treatments on the subjects' post-treatment theological beliefs, which is crucial for the second stage of analysis.

I tested the significance of these differences of means reported in Table 4 with ANOVA and Student  $t$  tests. Tested all together, the one-way ANOVA resulted in weak significance ( $p < 0.10$ ). I then tested each group head-to-head. Two differences were statistically significant. The difference of means between COS T1 (T1 = the religious statesmanship treatment) and the control was significant,  $p = 0.04$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.22$ . The

difference of means between COS T1 and COS T2 was also significant,  $p = 0.02$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.28$ .

Table 4: Mean COS factor scores on primary extracted factor, by treatment group

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
COST1	114	0.18	0.92
COST2	202	-0.09	0.98
COST3	178	0.03	0.99
Control	318	-0.03	0.93

I also analyzed the utility of the COS factor scores by conducting multivariate regression, with the COS factor scores as the dependent variable and the treatment groups (and control group) as the independent variables. As in Table 4, the results are all generally as expected. The religious group was consigned automatically by the statistical software (STATA) as the reference group, as essentially the treatment groups are functioning as dummy variables. The coefficients for the progressive, philosophic and control group are all negative (-0.27, -0.14, -0.20, respectively), meaning that compared to the religious group, being in any of these other groups lowered the predicted value of the COS factors, i.e. they made people less religious. The relative sizes of the coefficients are also intuitive, the progressive being the highest, followed by the control group and the philosophic group. And the statistical significance tests are also as expected. The progressive and control group are significant ( $p = 0.02$  and  $p = 0.05$ , respectively), and the philosophic group coefficient is not. Since both the religious and philosophic group are seeking to promote spiritual beliefs, their effects should be more similar— which they are.

The bottom line here is that the treatments did influence the experiment subjects' theological beliefs, and they did so in the manner expected. This by itself is an important research finding, which speaks to various literatures concerned with the ability of intellectual leaders, especially political leaders such as presidents, to have an impact on the public's (religious) opinions. This finding also speaks to scholars interested in the relationship between religion and politics. It is generally thought to be benign when presidents use religious rhetoric, but this study shows that when presidents do this they have some (though likely temporary) impact on the religious beliefs of the target audience, i.e. the public. Recent highly publicized polling has showed a steadily shifting stance among the public away from institutional religion ([www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/)). It has at the same time, not coincidentally, been observed that the last taboo identity to have in national politics is that of the atheist identity ([www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/12/the-last-taboo-atheists-politicians-100901](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/12/the-last-taboo-atheists-politicians-100901)). This taboo is sure to be eroded if present trends continue, which would mean more openly atheistic rhetoric on the part of political leaders. This experiment provides some evidence for believing that this would increase atheism (again, likely temporarily) in the public. To judge whether or not this would be a good thing is a major question of this dissertation, as Tocqueville and Dewey have diametrically opposed answers to this question. Let us now look at how political attitudes were affected in the next portion of the survey experiment.

### Results of Stage 2: Assessing Effects on Political Attitudes and Priorities

There are two primary options for assessing the effects of the treatment groups on political attitudes and priorities. The most straightforward way is to simply look at the differences in the mean scores across treatment groups, or exclusively in reference to the

control group. However, more accurate to the underlying model is to suppose that these effects will be mediated by theological beliefs.

Treatment => Theological Beliefs => Political Attitudes

What could happen is that the effect of the treatments is strong enough to alter theological beliefs, but the carry over effect off of this religious belief change to political attitudes is very difficult to detect. Weak treatment effects are a serious challenge to this kind of empirical test. Increasing the duration or content of the treatment, length and frequency of exposure would all presumably be able to increase the impact of the treatments on the experiment subjects, but such testing requires more by way of resources, not the least of which involving time and financial support. There is also a push in the survey experiment literature to put more value on population based samples that are capable of being both representative and randomly assigned (see Mutz 2011). These methodological limitations of the current design point to what can and should be done in future research. But if the current design, which admittedly deals with weak effects, is nevertheless able to detect effects that are statistically significant, these future plans for further research are that much more motivated and directed by the findings generated here in how that research should be executed. Rather than simply test differences in mean scores across groups, then, I also chose to conduct regression analysis of the COS factor scores on the subsequent survey items pertaining to political attitudes and priorities.

#### *Dewey items*

Rather than test every possible group match up for statistically significant differences in their mean scores for the subsequent survey questions, I began exploring for signs of

underlying differences by testing groups all together with one-way ANOVA. Beginning with the statements representing good Deweyian (democratically idealistic) political attitudes and priorities as the dependent variable, the ANOVA testing found no differences for any of these items among the groups when tested all together.

The following are some examples from the seven Dewey items included in the survey, on which experiment subjects were asked to rate their agreement on a scale of 0 to 10. Statement items included: “Participation in politics and social issues gives meaning to my life.” “After death, I will live on through my own individual contributions to society.” “Politics is the best means to advance social issues.” “Science and technology should be used by the government to benefit society as a whole.”

#### *Tocqueville items*

The list of Tocquevillian statements the survey subjects were asked to rate their agreement on is shorter, consisting of 4 different statements. These statements are: “It is important to be obedient to the law.” “Limited government is preferable to big government.” “All human beings are related to each other in a special way.” “There are higher moral and intellectual goods that people should pursue.” Of these, only the limited government question drew significantly distinct responses from all treatment groups when tested with one-way ANOVA ( $p < 0.10$ ). Comparing individual means in head-to-head testing, however, revealed no statistically significant differences in group mean scores.

#### *Priority items*

The priority items have to do with the individual-centric vs other-centric priorities that the survey experiment subject reports as having, post-treatment. Each item was rated on

a 1 to 5 scale, from very important to very unimportant. Some items included more self-interest related things like “having a car” or “being able to buy things.” Others were more other-regarding, such as “having children” and “helping other people.” ANOVA showed two items with significant differences among all groups. One was “fulfilling your potential” ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the other was “helping other people” ( $p = 0.02$ ).

Comparing the groups against one another with Student *t* testing revealed some interesting underlying treatment effects. On the variable “potential,” 3 head-to-head group match-ups were statistically significant. The progressive treatment group was associated with an increased importance in “fulfilling your potential” for the subjects compared to the control group ( $p = 0.03$ , Cohen’s  $d = -0.19$ , T2-T4). (Note here that, due to the manner of coding, negative values for the Cohen’s  $d$  measure of effect size indicate responses closer to “very unimportant” than “very important.”) The progressive treatment also showed a medium-sized increase in importance vs. the religious treatment ( $p = 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.30$ , T1-T2). Lastly, the religious treatment was associated with a decrease in importance in “fulfilling your potential” when compared to the philosophic treatment ( $p = 0.06$ ,  $d$  not significant at 0.23).

Only one head-to-head group match-up was significant for the “helping others” item. The progressive treatment group resulted in an increased level of importance attributed to this “helping others” item when compared to the control group ( $p = 0.01$ ,  $d = -0.23$ ).

This series of tests showed the progressive treatment group to be most significant in altering personal priorities, with increases compared to the control group in both “fulfilling potential” and “helping others.” The religious treatment group seemed rather to lower the

importance of these items for experiment subjects, compared to the progressive group and even the philosophic group.

### *Sacrifice items*

To gauge the survey experiment subjects' capacities for short-term self-sacrifice for more distant life goals, the list of priority items was re-used with a different prompt. Instead of asking how important these items were to the subject, in this portion of the survey they were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I am willing to sacrifice \_\_\_\_\_ in order to achieve my most important life goals." Once again, two items produced significant differences in ANOVA, and once again, "fulfilling my potential" was one of those items ( $p = .09$ ). The other item showing significantly different variances across all groups was an item unique to the list of sacrifice items, "nothing" ( $p = 0.02$ ).

The progressive treatment group was less willing to sacrifice "fulfilling my potential" compared to the control group ( $p = 0.02$ ,  $d = 0.21$ ). This matches up well with the results from the priority items testing, where the progressive group valued fulfilling their potential with greater importance. No other Student  $t$  tests were significant among the groups for this variable.

The religious treatment group had the most significant effects on the issue of not being willing to sacrifice anything. The religious group disagreed with this notion more than all of the other groups at levels that were statistically significant. Comparison to the control group showed the strongest difference ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.38$ ). Next in order was the comparison to the philosophic group ( $p = 0.03$ ,  $d = 0.26$ ). Comparison to the progressive group was also significant ( $p = 0.05$ ,  $d$  not significant at 0.23). To complete the reporting of

all of the effects discovered here, I wrap up by noting that the progressive group had very weak significance in its difference to the control group ( $p = .08$ ,  $d$  not significant at 0.16).

Overall, the religious treatment stands out for increasing disagreement, compared with all other groups, with the statement “I am willing to sacrifice nothing in order to achieve my most important life goals.” It seems that the religious group deemed sacrifice necessary, even if what precisely needed to be sacrificed was left unclear. Vague messages such as this are not entirely surprising, nor are they necessarily a bad thing for politics (according to Tocqueville). It may be that a general willingness to sacrifice is precisely what a political leader needs to have in the public in order to lead the public toward taking on large, long-term projects.

#### Analyzing results with COS as a mediating variable

Table 5 shows the results of multivariate regression analysis of the COS factor scores on the Dewey and Tocqueville survey items. This analysis confirms that theological beliefs are indeed mediating at least some of the effects of the treatments on these two dependent variables corresponding with the political attitudes emphasized as important by Dewey and Tocqueville. Furthermore, the sign on the COS coefficient in each model is in the expected direction. Having a higher factor score on the primary factor extracted from the COS results is a relatively large and negative effect on the Dewey index variable score. Conversely, there was a smaller, but still relatively large and positive effect on the Tocqueville index variable. The directions of these effects are consistent with the empirical assumptions of each political theorist, namely that the attitudes that Dewey sought to cultivate were negatively affected by religious beliefs, while the attitudes that Tocqueville sought to cultivate were argued to positively benefit from religious beliefs. Also, it is crucial to note

in evaluating the sizes of these coefficients between the Dewey model and the Tocqueville model that each dependent variable has as different scale. The Dewey DV is scaled 0 to 70, while the Tocqueville DV is scaled from 0 to 40.

Seeming to complicate this story, however, is the effects the Judeo-Christian variable has in the model.

Table 5: Multivariate Regression Analysis of COSFS on Dewey and Tocqueville Survey Items

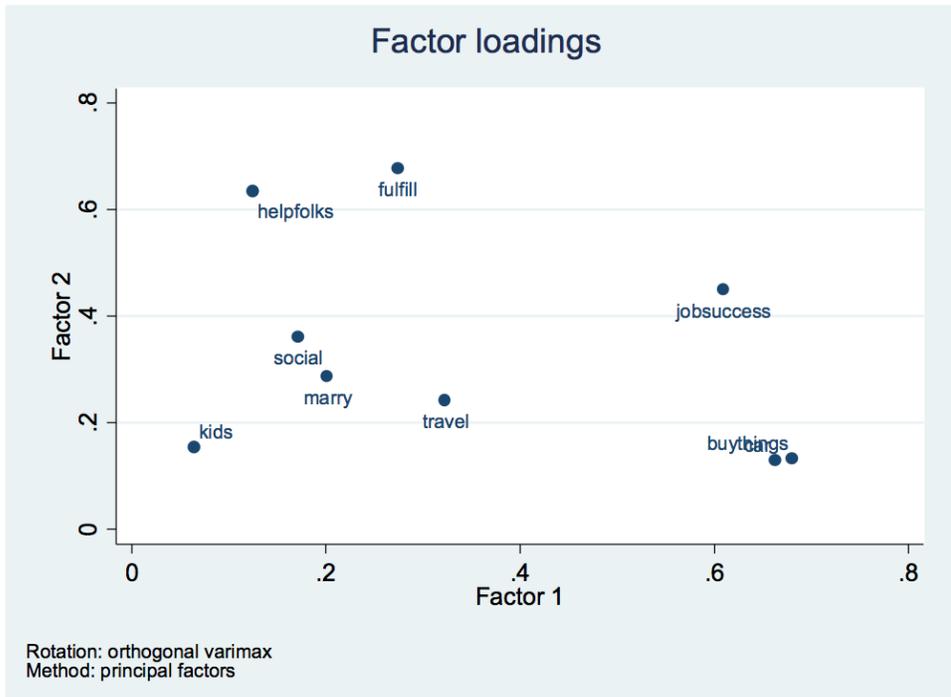
<u>Variable</u>	<u>Dewey</u>		<u>Tocqueville</u>	
COS	-2.52	***	1.29	***
	(0.51)		(0.26)	
Religious Treatment	0.34		-0.11	
	(1.52)		(0.77)	
Progressive Treatment	-0.51		0.62	
	(1.30)		(0.66)	
Philosophy Treatment	(omitted)		(omitted)	
Control Group	-0.97		-0.22	
	(1.18)		(0.60)	
Male	1.69	*	-0.65	
	(0.94)		(0.48)	
Age	0.08		0.08	
	(0.12)		(0.06)	
Conservative	-1.26	**	0.68	***
	(0.46)		(0.23)	
Judeo-Christian	2.64	**	0.88	*

	(0.94)		(0.48)	
White	0.32		-0.15	
	(1.02)		(0.52)	
Class	0.09		0.12	
	(0.19)		(0.10)	
Political	3.04	***	0.44	**
	(0.38)		(0.19)	
Constant	30.11	***	24.17	***
	(2.82)		(1.42)	
<i>N</i>	788		807	
R-Squared	0.15		0.08	
Note: *p<.10. **p<.05. ***p<.01.				

### *Priorities and Sacrifice Items*

Rather than constructing an index variable by summing the values of each item within a set of questions, for the priorities and sacrifice items, factor analysis was again deemed the most appropriate methodological approach. Figure 2 shows the results of factor analysis loadings for the priority list items, after an orthogonal varimax rotation was deemed appropriate in order for the factors to be usefully interpreted.

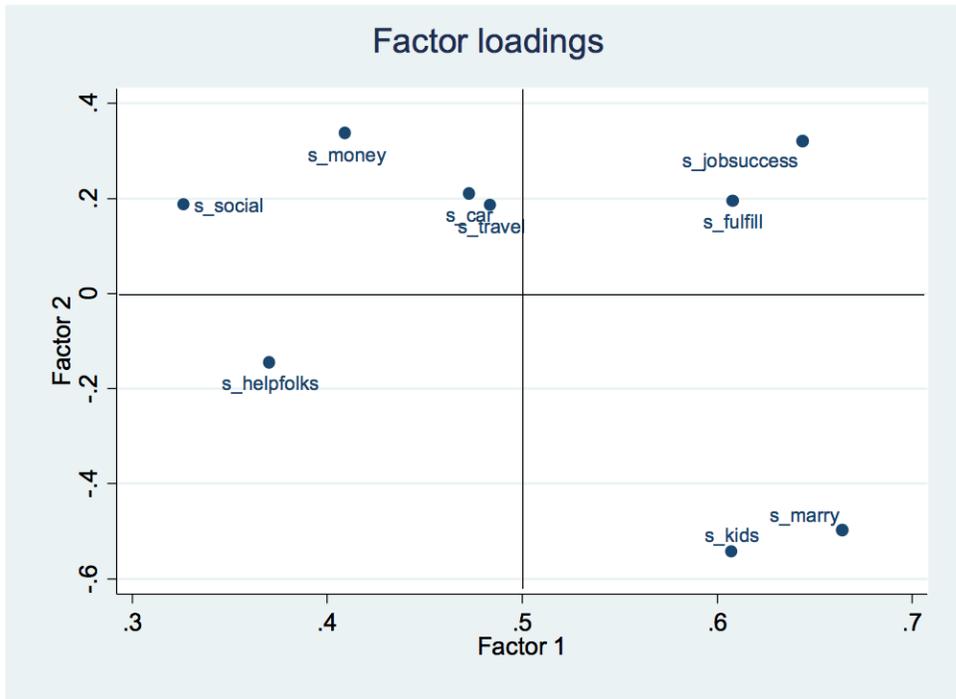
Figure 2: Factor loadings for priority list items



Factor 1 is the focus here as its eigenvalue is 3.1, while that of Factor 2 is only 0.77. What we can see here is that having a car, job success, and the ability to buy things are at one end of the principal dimension, while having kids, helping others, and being involved in social and political activities are at the other end. This can be reasonably interpreted, therefore, to represent individualist goods at the higher end and communitarian goods on the other end. Both Tocqueville and Dewey are interested in limiting individualism and promoting communitarian values, though they obviously conceived their competing ideals in very different ways. In short, this information is expected to be useful in evaluating the effects of the experimental treatments, specifically regarding the extents to which they comport with the theorists' expectations on these matters.

Factor scores were generated for Factor 1, and will later be used as one of my dependent variables. Next, Figure 3 shows the results of factor analysis loadings for the sacrifice list items, this time not requiring rotation.

Figure 3: Factor loadings for sacrifice list items



Factor 1 shows a dimension that can be characterized as individualist values (American Dream goods) on the higher end and communitarian values on the lower end. Factor 2, though it has an eigenvalue slighter lower than 1 (0.93) shows a divide between serving others on its lower end and independent achievement on its higher end. Thus if we analyze Figure 3 by quadrants, the lower right contains items representing individualist values and serving others; the upper right represents individualist values and independent achievement; the upper left represents communitarian values and independent achievement; the lower left represents communitarian values and serving others. The goal is to derive a theoretically useful dependent variable out of this section of the survey experiment. For

purposes of simplicity for analysis and interpretation, the decision was made to generate factor scores for both factors and add them together. This index variable, called “SACRIFICE” will have highest values for those who scored highest on both factors, meaning that they were most willing to sacrifice both individualist goods and independent achievement. SACRIFICE will conversely have lowest values for those who scored lowest on both factors, meaning that they were willing to sacrifice both communitarian values and serving others in order to achieve their most important (and probably more self-interested) life goals.

### *Regression Analysis*

What have now been generated are distinct dependent variables for the 4 sets of questions following the COS: the Dewey questions, the Tocqueville questions, the priorities questions, and the sacrifice questions. By breaking down the data into subsets according to each subject’s treatment group, we can now analyze with multivariate analysis the relationships between the COS and the subsequent question sets, and we can observe how these relationships may change depending on the treatment received by each subject.

Below are a series of 4 tables, Table 6a-d, presenting these separate analyses, each having a different dependent variable. Demographic variables were included in all of the models to provide a view into whether these variables played a role in shaping what kinds of effects were created by the various treatments.



both theoretical and empirical, as some evidence supporting it was reported in Table 5. I should not expect the relationship to change very much between the 4 models, as my theoretical expectation is that the link between religious beliefs and Deweyian attitudes does not change. The treatments are expected to influence political attitudes, to be more Deweyian or Tocquevillian, only by influencing first the religious beliefs.

This, however, did not entirely pan out. While the progressive, philosophic, and control models show strong similarities in the effect significance and size of beta coefficient on the COS variable, the religious treatment model was different. For it, the COS variable did not achieve statistical significance, and the beta was nearly half the size (at least) of that found in the other models. What is verified is the direction of the relationship across all of the models, which is negative, indicating that as conviction levels in religious beliefs increase, Deweyian political attitudes decrease. But why did the effect lose significance for the religious treatment group? The most obvious answer would be that there is a problem in the causal diagram being presupposed, and rather than,

Treatment => Religious beliefs => Political attitudes

. . . perhaps the relationship is more like this:

Religious beliefs => Treatment Effect (=> Omitted Variable?) => Political attitudes.

But we also have to remember that the religious treatment, more than any other of the treatment groups or control group, increased religious convictions as indicated by a higher mean score on the COS factor scores (see again Table 5). It is unlikely, of course, that these treatments are generating religious beliefs in minds where previously there were no opinions. Rather, the treatments likely either temporarily reinforce or temporarily

mitigate pre-existing religious thoughts and considerations. The question then is why would reinforcing the religious treatment group's religious beliefs eliminate the statistical relationship between their beliefs and their political attitudes?

For clues, it helps to look at the other variables achieving significance in the 4 models, and the sign and magnitude on these variables. First it is helpful to get out of the way the fact that the "Political" variable was a very strong predictor across all models. Since many of the items on the Dewey question set have to do with the efficacy and importance of politics, it is quite natural and expected that this variable should perform so well. Furthermore, ideology was not a significant variable, suggesting that not only was the Dewey question set abstract enough such as not to set off any ideological trigger cues, but that seeing politics the way that Dewey wanted people to view it is not serving as an ideological wedge issue. Both conservatives and progressives apparently view the function of politics in similar ways, despite their presumably strong disagreements on the direction politics should go in.

The next variable to look at across the 4 models is the "Judeo-Christian" dummy. This variable takes a value of 1 if the subject self-reported as a denominational Christian (a Protestant, Catholic, or Mormon) or as being Jewish, and 0 otherwise. Subjects coded as 0 on this variable included "nones," "other," "prefer not to say," and Muslims. This is, of course, only one way to look at the concept of religiosity, as there are many other reasonable ways to code this variable. There are also other variables in the survey that ask different kinds of questions having to do with the subject's views about religion. Nevertheless, the way I have selected to operationalize this variable has yielded interesting results. What we find in Table 6a is that this variable is significant for the progressive ( $b = 4.64, p < .05$ ) and

philosophic treatment ( $b = 5.32, p < .05$ ), but not the control group or the religious treatment group. This means that on average, being associated with an institutional branch of Judeo-Christianity is associated with roughly a 5 point increase on the Deweyian political attitudes index, for both the progressive and philosophic treatment groups, controlling for all other variables in the model. Here, moreover, we find converse effects taking place between religious ID (the “Judeo-Christian” variable) and religious beliefs (the COS variable) on political attitudes, but only for the progressive and philosophic treatment groups (though that the signs on the coefficients are opposite holds for both the control group and the religious treatment group). Since the “Judeo-Christian” variable is tapping into institutional ID, much would seem to depend on how the individual views the political influence of his or her religious institution. To the extent that your religious institution has political sway, that might make you more faithful (no pun intended) in the social importance and efficacy of political change and progress, namely because you believe that your religious institution (and through it, yourself) have a meaningful role in directing it. This would help to explain why the progressive treatment yields this positive relationship (though Dewey might simply use this as supporting his argument for the importance of associational life, generally speaking).

Somehow, the philosophic treatment had very similar effects to the progressive treatment, which is surprising, as my expectation is for it to have more similarities to the religious treatment. In fact, the countervailing relationship between COS and “Judeo-Christian” was slightly more pronounced for the philosophic treatment group. So, what is functionally similar between these two treatments? One similarity is that they both raise the salience of our mortality and questions regarding how to understand death and our place in

the universe. And, they both offer answers, with LBJ calling for a commitment to democratic progress following the JFK assassination, and J.P. Moreland arguing philosophically that human beings have souls. They each do this without reaffirming Christian revelatory teachings, unlike what the religious treatment group experienced. What is not clear is whether the progressive treatment and philosophic treatment are achieving the same effect on this relationship in the same way. Specifically, are the institutional Judeo-Christians increasing their hope in democratic progress, or are the others, those coded 0 on this variable, decreasing theirs?<sup>127</sup>

What is again interesting is that the religious treatment group does not show this relationship. What instead emerges as the differentiating variable is the subject's age. On average, a 1 year increase in age is associated with a 0.9 increase in the Deweyian political attitudes index, controlling for all other variables in the model. That is nearly a 1-for-1 increase, which is very strong and highly significant ( $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, the R-Squared value for this model is much higher than all of the other models (0.30), meaning that between the variables for age and political interest, 30 percent of the variance in the dependent variable is being captured. Age is a difficult variable to interpret, and could be tied up in life cycle or period effects. Studies have shown that different generations will tend to have different attitudes towards politics and government due to the environment circumstances during their impressionable years, and as people get older there are other political tendencies that can emerge (such as a slight inclination toward conservative

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<sup>127</sup> Can I go back into the data and try to answer this?

ideology<sup>128</sup>). Age is not a significant variable in any of the other models in this table, and it is unclear how to advance the interpretation of this variable beyond this point. It could be that by affirming religious tenets in the speeches of Bush and Obama, they were able to bracket the issues surrounding personal salvation aside from attitudes about politics. Whereas when these tenets are left unmentioned, the individual feels need to reference them personally in forming their attitudes about the purpose and value of politics and democracy. When they do make such reference, the effect will be different depending on whether they reference their self-described religious ID or their particular religious beliefs. The former increases Deweyian political attitudes, whereas the latter decreases them.

This leads me to consider what I have called throughout this dissertation the “compatibility thesis.” It was Dewey’s belief that historical religions, by privatizing opinions and sustaining a skepticism towards scientific knowledge, stood in the way of democratic progress. It is towards this that I have disagreed the strongest, as in my view there is no such *necessary* antagonism. Certainly religious beliefs can be antagonistic with science and democracy, but it is not clear that there is some necessary hostility that will always persist. What the data seem to show here is that there may be a natural tendency for religious beliefs to be hostile to democratic progress, but that political and religious leaders can effectively demonstrate their potential compatibility. It may be that this is why the religious treatment eliminated the statistical connection between religious belief, religious

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<sup>128</sup> According to Robert Erikson and Kent Tedin’s *American Public Opinion* (2011), a life-cycle effect of an individual growing older is that, on average, he or she will start political life more liberal and become somewhat more conservative over time (pp 147, Table 5.6).

ID, and Deweyian political attitudes. In this treatment, political leaders from both of the major political parties are shown professing their religious beliefs as political leaders, and utilizing those beliefs in order to achieve the abstract political goals of national solidarity and personal agency. Since religious beliefs and politics are being presented as compatible, the natural antagonism between them is minimized into insignificance.

The compatibility thesis also explains the relationship found for the “Judeo-Christian” variable. It seems reasonable to suspect, given the above explanation of how religious groups can act as political interest groups, that institutional religions also teach their followers that politics and religion are compatible, and that religion has a crucial role to play in the direction of democratic progress. On the other hand, we can reasonably suspect that those with deep religious convictions, but are not part of a church or synagogue with political clout, will become more adversarial with the direction and power of politics in shaping society.

Next, let’s look at Table 6b, which uses the same right hand side of the model while swapping out the Dewey index for the Tocqueville index as the dependent variable. As expected, the COS variable continues to exhibit predictive power for political principles, and the direction here is in the expected direction. This index did not survey questions having to do with political progress, but rather with the dignity and nobility of mankind, the preference for limited government and obedience to law. These items are consistent with the major religious tenets related to the faith items of the COS. Similar to the Dewey index, this variable did not trigger much by way of ideological cues, except for the control group (“Conservative”  $b = 0.75, p < 0.10$ ).

The fact that the “Class” variable is negative and significant exclusively for the progressive treatment group is interesting. This means that on average, being one step higher on the model’s (economic) class ladder is associated with a 0.34 point decrease on the 0-40 Tocqueville political attitudes index, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Table 6b: Regression analysis of Tocqueville attitudes, data subset by treatment group

Tocqueville (DV)	Religious Treatment	Progressive Treatment	Philosophic Treatment	Control Group
<b>OCS</b>	1.33 * (0.70)	1.14 ** (0.53)	1.28 ** (0.52)	1.45 *** (0.44)
<b>Male</b>	0.29 (1.26)	-1.68 * (0.97)	1.40 (0.98)	-1.55 ** (0.78)
<b>Age</b>	0.28 * (0.15)	0.00 (0.17)	0.20 (0.15)	-0.01 (0.09)
<b>Conservative</b>	0.75 (0.55)	0.62 (0.46)	0.58 (0.51)	0.75 * (0.39)
<b>Judeo-Christian</b>	-0.68 (1.23)	1.27 (0.96)	1.93 * (1.01)	0.77 (0.79)
<b>White</b>	-0.74 (1.30)	0.24 (1.12)	-0.56 (1.03)	0.11 (0.87)
<b>Class</b>	0.41 (0.26)	-0.34 * (0.20)	0.30 (0.21)	0.23 (0.16)
<b>Political</b>	0.75 (0.47)	0.52 (0.41)	-0.33 (0.40)	0.77 ** (0.32)
<b>Constant</b>	18.84 *** (3.47)	27.86 *** (3.52)	21.33 *** (3.36)	25.28 *** (1.94)
N	114.00	199.00	178.00	316.00
R-Squared	0.14	0.11	0.12	0.10

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*p<.10. \*\*p<.05. \*\*\*p<.01.

LBJ’s progressive speech, therefore, seems to have resonated most among those in higher income brackets, such that they would disagree more strongly with Tocqueville’s principles of elevating man’s dignity while limiting government’s power. This may once again have to do with the self-perception people have regarding their ability (and right) to

influence government in order to direct society in a progressive direction. Perhaps people with more wealth feel more efficacious in politics, leading their attitudes to be more susceptible to mobilization following the progressive treatment. However, in the previous table, "Class" was not significant in predicting Deweyian political attitudes, and in fact the sign on the "Class" variable was negative. So, why would subjects in a higher income class both be less inclined to believe in democratic progress and less inclined to believe in limited government and obedience to law? The only answer I can speculate to is that there is an elitist mindset here that is skeptical of democracy, irreverent of law, and yet feels itself entitled to direct society.

Table 6c: Regression analysis of individualist priorities, data subset by treatment group

Individualist Priorities (DV)	Religious Treatment	Progressive Treatment	Philosophic Treatment	Control Group	
<b>OCS</b>	-0.21 *	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	
	(0.11)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	
<b>Dewey</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01	**
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	
<b>Tocqueville</b>	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	
<b>Male</b>	0.18	0.10	0.11	0.13	
	(0.20)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	
<b>Age</b>	-0.02	0.01	0.04	**	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)		(0.01)
<b>Conservative</b>	0.01	-0.02	-0.07	-0.03	
	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	
<b>Judeo-Christian</b>	-0.20	0.06	0.20	*	0.16
	(0.20)	(0.11)	(0.12)		(0.10)
<b>White</b>	0.13	0.00	0.01	-0.11	
	(0.21)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	
<b>Class</b>	0.00	0.01	0.04	*	-0.01
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)		(0.02)
<b>Political</b>	0.04	0.09 *	0.02	0.12	***
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	
<b>Constant</b>	0.48	-0.69	-0.81	*	-0.20
	(0.66)	(0.45)	(0.42)		(0.32)
	N	110.00	194.00	175.00	306.00
	R-Squared	0.10	0.05	0.08	0.07

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*p<.10. \*\*p<.05. \*\*\*p<.01.

The other variable that warrants attention in this table is “Judeo-Christian,” where we now find a differing relationship between the philosophic treatment group and the others. I believe the compatibility thesis would again explain why the religious treatment group model has no significance on this variable, and why it carries the weakest relationship on the

COS variable (and age was again significant, consistent with the previous table).

Unfortunately, I cannot provide a plausible interpretation for the philosophic treatment group's unique effect here. This treatment has proven more difficult to interpret vis-à-vis the Tocqueville and Dewey debate than originally anticipated. Which, still, is not to say that the findings themselves with this treatment are not themselves interesting, whatever their proper explanation might be.

Table 6d: Regression analysis of preference for self-sacrifice, data subset by treatment group

Self-Sacrifice (DV)	Religious Treatment	Progressive Treatment	Philosophic Treatment	Control Group
<b>CCS</b>	0.06 (0.15)	-0.03 (0.09)	0.05 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.08)
<b>Ind. Priorities</b>	-0.21 (0.13)	-0.28 (0.11)	** -0.30 (0.13)	** -0.12 (0.08)
<b>Dewey</b>	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
<b>Tocqueville</b>	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
<b>Male</b>	-0.44 * (0.26)	-0.27 (0.17)	-0.31 * (0.18)	-0.41 *** (0.14)
<b>Age</b>	0.04 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 ** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)
<b>Conservative</b>	0.03 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.07)
<b>Judeo-Christian</b>	-0.02 (0.25)	-0.02 (0.17)	0.18 (0.19)	-0.09 (0.15)
<b>White</b>	0.12 (0.27)	-0.20 (0.19)	0.14 (0.19)	0.16 (0.16)
<b>Class</b>	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)
<b>Political</b>	-0.01 (0.10)	0.05 (0.07)	0.06 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.06)
<b>Constant</b>	-0.62 (0.86)	0.99 (0.70)	1.04 (0.69)	0.70 (0.45)
<b>N</b>	110.00	194.00	175.00	306.00
<b>R-Squared</b>	0.09	0.08	0.11	0.07

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*p<.10. \*\*p<.05. \*\*\*p<.01.

The final two tables, Table 6c-d, produced the least amount of significant findings. The R-Squared values are all lower than those found in the previous 2 tables, meaning that the models do a poorer job of accounting for the variance in the dependent variables. The dependent variables here are individualist priorities in Table 6c, while Table 6d's dependent variable is a reformulation of the same variable, only instead of asking how much the

subjects valued various items such as marriage and job success, they were asked whether they would be willing to sacrifice these items in pursuit of other more important goals. The main theoretical interest for these related to the debate between Tocqueville and Dewey over the relationship between religious beliefs and individualism and materialism. Whereas Tocqueville views religious beliefs as lessening these two factors, Dewey views religion as entrenching both at the expense of collective commitment to democratic progress.

Table 6c gives some evidence supporting Tocqueville's view, as the COS variable is negative for all 4 models, and is strongest and statistically significant in the religious treatment group model ( $b = -0.21, p < 0.10$ ). This is a reversal of the effect of the religious treatment on the COS variable from the previous two tables. This means that there is a categorical difference between predicting political attitudes and personal priorities. The compatibility thesis argues that demonstrating the compatibility between religion and politics severs the relationship between religious beliefs and abstract political principles. How people want to live their own lives, however, is apparently more strongly linked to religious beliefs, and having political leaders affirm those beliefs to them has a significant impact on subjects' personal priorities, inclining them to be less individualistically or selfishly orientated.

Finally, the most significant takeaway from Table 6d is that individualist priorities are indeed negatively related to subjects' willingness to be more self-sacrificing to benefit others. Both the progressive and philosophic treatments strengthen this relationship, with the religious treatment group not achieving significance, but being close.

## Conclusion

Though the details are somewhat murky, the big picture presented by this empirical analysis has largely comported with theoretical expectations. The desire for immortality is a potentially important political issue, as presidential rhetoric is capable of either appealing to it or replacing it with democratic idealism, depending on the political goals sought. Different kinds of existential rhetoric first demonstrated different and predictable effects on theological beliefs. In turn, theological beliefs demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with political attitudes. Finally, political attitudes are quite distinct from personal priorities, and the relationship between these and theological beliefs functions differently. Elite rhetoric seemed to more directly shape personal priorities and attitudes about sacrifice, independent of theological beliefs. Perhaps this simply shows how far the gap always is between abstract principles and personal behavior. As Ovid wrote, “*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.*”

## Conclusion

In closing, I would like to emphasize my intended contributions to the extant scholarly literature, and in the process to summarize the major interpretative claims of this dissertation. I have organized these contributions into three categories:

I. This dissertation broadly articulates the desire for immortality's political purpose in political liberalism, as represented in the writings of four major thinkers in the liberal tradition. It proceeds by examining Plato, John Locke, Alexis De Tocqueville, and John Dewey on this desire. Although Plato and Dewey may be counted by some to lie outside of this tradition, they at least provide helpful guide posts for the reader to contrast the rarely disputed liberalism of Locke. The position I have adopted is that the theoretical ends of all four thinkers are essentially liberal, and represent liberalism in both its ancient, modern, and hybrid manifestations.

### *A Tie that Binds: The Compatibility Thesis*

The compatibility thesis, which I argue is present for Plato, Locke, and Tocqueville, states that for the individual, eternal happiness is compatible with temporal, worldly happiness. Rather than there being a difficult tradeoff between these two desirable conditions, it is argued that they are complementary. But not all forms of temporal, worldly happiness are compatible with eternal happiness. The reason being is that there is a difference between a happiness that is good for the soul and a happiness based solely on maximizing bodily pleasures. The happiness that is good for the soul comes from being just and reasonable. Such a soul is well ordered, and its appetites are moderate. This moderation supports good judgment. Good judgment allows a person to cultivate desires that can be satisfied over the long haul with minimum risk of harm to the individual.

Moderate desires prevent a person from being carried away such that they cause harm to others. Causing harm to others threatens the individual because the victims of the individual seek retribution, and if there is a god / are gods, god or the gods ensure such retribution. This attitude psychologically restrains individuals in society from harming others through the laws. It also motivates a willingness to resist unjust laws in order to secure the ability of the individual to meet death with a just and hopeful soul. Each thinker, however, must be looked at individually in order to understand the differences, and to see the radical departure from this oft-assumed thesis in Dewey's theory.

### *Plato*

The compatibility thesis in Plato is visible by analyzing three dialogues together: *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Gorgias*. The *Symposium* presents the argument that the desire for happiness is endless and implies a desire for immortality, whether we are aware of it or not. The *Republic* illustrates in the drama of its opening that the question of justice becomes salient for non-philosophers as they enter old age and recall the poets' tales of the afterlife. This leads to a discussion of how we should like the regime *to be* rather than justifying the regime *as is*. The *Gorgias* presents the argument that since justice matters to human beings because of their desire for immortality, they must stand up for justice against unjust regimes. Worldly happiness is compatible with eternal happiness because worldly happiness is impossible without leaving this life full of hope. The unjust life unconcerned with immortality eventually becomes, and dies, haunted and restless.

### *Locke*

The compatibility thesis in Locke is notably distinct from Plato's in two main respects. The first is that the moral law is largely defined and perceptible through reason.

This means that the philosophic life is no longer an ideal, but among the various choices in life one may choose for oneself. Living a moral life, however, is the rational thing to do. It is rational because it is consistent with freedom (we should recall the title of the crucial *Essay* chapter of this analysis: “Of Power”). It is also rational because there may be an afterlife promising immortality and eternal bliss, which is only accessible by living the moral life. It is similar politically in its recommending revolution to a people suffering under an unjust regime. The suffering is worldly, however. People are not to stop flattering the regime to save their souls, but to stop acquiescing to the regime to save their property. Their concern with salvation is not a motivator for revolution, but a tempering device. The appeal to Heaven ensures we conduct ourselves in accord with justice when we engage in violence.

### *Tocqueville*

The compatibility thesis in Tocqueville lies in his virtuous feedback loop between property rights and religion. Property rights are held by those who pursue worldly happiness in an ethical manner. The great sin is to use the power of government to sacrifice individual rights in the interest of society, and society’s interest in democracy is decidedly committed to equality. To resist the temptation of this sin, people need religion. Religion supports all of the struggles inherent amid the immense economic competition of all against all. It supplies order and hope. It confines what is conceivable in the political sphere. It makes freedom tolerable in the least and spiritually fulfilling in the most because religion guarantees security against complete failure.

Property rights lead man to think long term and to be self-reliant; it leads man to religion by appealing to his economic ambitions. Religion in turn is what reminds the

property owner that his desires extend beyond the limits of this life, and uses that reminder to bend his outlook beyond the foreseeable horizon to the imagined divine from which emanates the moral law and the doctrine of individual rights. But when people reject the acquisitiveness of the property owner, it can be more difficult for religion to be appealing. Religion offers treasures, and he who rejects treasures is unreachable. And when people reject religion, it can be difficult to tolerate the freedom under democracy, or to quiet the appetites. This is the fatal circle democracy must avoid that forms between irreligion and excessive material enjoyments. For a democracy to be religious, it must believe in property rights. For a democracy to believe in property rights, it must be religious. Desiring immortality is thus compatible, indeed necessary to, worldly happiness and political freedom. More important is dogmatic belief in the immortal soul than philosophic inquiry into its substantial reality.

### *Dewey*

Dewey rejects the compatibility thesis as traditionally understood by liberals. Worldly happiness is impossible for people living in democracy when they pursue their own immortality. The broken world they tolerate in the here and now, moreover, is never compensated for. Death ends the life of the individual. The crucial human desire that is compatible with worldly happiness is the desire for ideals. It is the natural desire for ideals that can motivate an entire people to fulfill the promise of democracy which is worldly happiness for all. Evidence that this desire exists can be seen in religious desire, where the ideal place in Heaven and the ideal person in God is the focus. These ideals can be authoritative, can motivate our behavior, in their natural and disembodied state. By

recognizing that individuals do not exist without social intercourse, the imperative of enriching the culture through the realization of ideals becomes clear.

*Epistemology, Faith, and Political Freedom*

Whether philosophy is possible accounts for much of the variation among these thinkers. Can we know anything about the nature of the soul? For Plato, philosophy is a success. It helps us begin to believe and to understand how to live. For Locke, philosophy is a failure, but there is a silver lining. The afterlife cannot be refuted, so it is rational to prepare for the possibility, and reasonable to be excited in anticipation of its joys. It is reasonable to obey the Natural Law, which is to say it is reasonable to be reasonable. For Tocqueville, philosophy is a failure, but the demands of democracy on the good human life require that we believe. The real hope that we see in Plato and Locke has been lost, and the affirmation of the temporal world is beginning. We see that affirmation reach its ultimate conclusion in Dewey, who alone of these four thinkers rejects the political value of immortality. Dewey sees like Plato that society must be a collective enterprise and that certainty must support faith. That certainty is found in science, and that faith is attached to democracy's progressive liberation of man. The motivation to remake society comes from the realization that death is final, and our time as individuals to seize the opportunity to experience and be enriched by the ideals manifested by society is daily dwindling.

Regarding whether philosophy is possible and the soul is knowable is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is thus possible to this researcher that any or none of these thinkers is correct. Interrogating this question is an ongoing activity by philosophers to the present day. One read's Aristotle's *De Anima* (1986), Swinburne's *The Evolution of the Soul* (1986), or Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception*

*of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (2012), and must entertain the possibility that science may never achieve its final victory over philosophy, the very victory assumed by Dewey to have already occurred.

This makes studying the desire for immortality as a psychological matter with political implications a valid line of inquiry for the foreseeable future, much though many may resist accepting it as such. Whether desiring immortality does help with resisting the regime as Plato, Locke, or Tocqueville believed it would (though in different respects) remains an intriguing possibility for addressing contemporary society's anxious need to alleviate its persistent struggles for security, harmony, and self-improvement.

II. A mixed-methods research design is tested that climbs over methodological walls separating disciplinary fields and subfields, with arguably compelling results. The viability and validity of complementing this qualitative work with a survey experiment constituted the second major aim of this dissertation. By focusing on assumptions of human nature, a clear opening was visible to formulating these assumptions into empirically testable hypothesis. Experiments have been increasingly common in social science, having been able to learn from the methodological approaches of the psychology discipline and adapt them to help answer social and political questions.

#### *Survey-Experiment Design*

Designing the survey and formulating the hypothesis helped with two vices of qualitative work: (1) practical relevancy of the thesis to the broader discipline and (2) allowing for causal models to be more or less extractable from the analysis.

Designing the survey at the same time as the theory chapters, however, posed difficulties. While designing the survey was in itself a helpful exercise towards understanding the logic of how the theoretical chapters fit together, sometimes the theoretical analysis would not cooperate with the original expectations. This left the survey experiment at times less tightly connected to the rest of the project than originally hoped for.

My most serious example of this involves how I constructed the survey questions intended to measure political attitudes consistent with the perfect Deweyian citizen. To be blunt, my understanding of the perfect Deweyian citizen shifted during the course of my qualitative analysis of his political thought. Originally what had been expected was that Dewey was focused on establishing in the citizenry the belief that immortality was indeed achievable, but only symbolically. That is, society will live on forever, and through our contribution to society's progress, our death can have meaning, and that meaning will ripple forever through the progressive stages of democratic society. Immortality was a good desire, but it simply has been misconstrued as being satisfiable by literally living on forever as a disembodied spirit.

Although Dewey does see value in this perspective for dealing with the reality of death, I did not find that it was the deep motive energy hoped to propel democratic progress. This left some imperfections in the survey questions asked, which if I had the opportunity to re-design would happily make changes to. It also created many framing problems, both at the level of the individual chapters, especially chapters 4 & 5, as well as the project as a whole. Rather than a dichotomy between desiring literal and symbolic immortality playing out in the liberal tradition, I found a dichotomy between desiring the immortal individual and the eternal ideals (to borrow a conceptual distinction from Hannah Arendt's *The Human*

*Condition* (1958)). In Plato and Christian theology, the desire for personal immortality and the desire to witness the eternal ideals or perfections. Through these, Locke and Tocqueville in their own way continue promoting this combination desire. In Dewey, we see the attempt to subtract out of this desire the part that is most intellectually suspect, at least to modern scientific eyes: the desire for immortality. This leaves the desire for ideals, and the speculation that this desire is by itself sufficient. Further, the desire for immortality has corrupted man, and by eliminating it, man's natural religious function can serve its most crucial purpose of motivating the creation of the ideal democratic culture.

III. This dissertation experiments with the possibility of a social science strongly guided by the compelling ideas and visions brought to light by the humanities. There is no necessary connection between quantitative political science and economic theories of human behavior. That changes in quarterly GDP growth serve as helpful in including in models of presidential vote choice does not imply that only economics matters to the direction of political change. Political scientists studying electoral behavior a generation from now may find existential psychology more helpful than the latest economic theory. We should expect that the divide within political science between the theorists and the empiricists is holding the discipline back. A house divided cannot stand is wisdom worth considering, assuming we can at least agree that the subfields currently housed in the larger discipline belong there.

Consider what the social science portion of this dissertation begins to suggest in terms of recommendations to political society. My findings suggest that political leaders that act religious will on average promote religiosity in their listening audience. The tension

between religiosity and democratic values is a natural one, absent a political leader reconciling them together for the people. An openly atheistic political leader would then have the opposite effect. Religious segments of the population would become more antagonistic to democratic progress. To the extent that polarization is a threat to the American democracy, so too may be electing political leaders that are unable to articulate the compatibility between democratic progress and religious faith. Although if further research confirms these findings, they would be very important to propagate to the public. Yet perhaps nothing could be more foreign to the political science prevailing today than to make such suggestions. As scientists we must remember that reality does not bend to the prejudiced expectations of its trusted articulators, whether they be scientists or religious leaders, liberal or conservative. It is revealed in observation, and our observations are directed by theory.

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