AESTHETIC LIBERALISM: BEAUTY AND POLITICAL ACTION IN THE AGE OF INTEREST

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Throughout the nineteenth century, a number of major liberal thinkers incorporated aesthetic categories such as “beauty,” “sublimity,” “glory,” and “grandeur” into their sociopolitical thinking. Whereas their aesthetic languages are typically associated with either military imperialism or private aestheticism, I ask whether this moment in liberal history also offers a kind of political aesthetics that, by transcending this binary, can newly inform our debate about liberal democratic politics.

Answering this question in the affirmative, my dissertation recovers from this period an aesthetic liberal political thought that is primarily rooted in an anxiety about economic liberalism’s implications for political action. I examine this idea of “aesthetic liberalism” in the writings of three key liberal thinkers in the nineteenth century in different national settings: Alexis de Tocqueville in France, John Stuart Mill in England, and Ralph Waldo Emerson in America. The animating claim of aesthetic liberalism is that beauty has more power to generate political virtues than rational arguments, which reflects the influence of romanticism’s critique of discursive rationality and valorization of imagination in the domain of moral transformation. While being, in varying degrees, committed to modern liberal economy, aesthetic liberals also desired to promote a public-minded political life similar to their own which were dedicated to either advancing liberties within an existing liberal democracy or establishing a liberal

constitutional order itself. Opposing both political withdrawal and interest politics typical in liberal market society, all three theorists conceived beauty as a key promoter of a public-spirited political action. Each turns to historical exemplars of action such as the French revolutionaries of 1789 and the American abolitionists to educate the aesthetic sensibility of liberal citizens to embrace public-spirited action in their own lives.

Biographical Sketch

Jin Gon Park studies political theory, with a focus on the history of liberalism and issues of political action and political psychology. Jin Gon received his master's and doctorate degrees from Cornell University. Before Cornell, he completed an undergraduate bachelor's degree in history at Yale University in New Haven, CT. He was born and raised in Seoul, Republic of Korea.

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Introduction:
The Aesthetic Liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson

The recent aesthetic turn in political theory, involving diverse scholars, topics, and methodologies, is hardly a monolithic movement. Yet one generalization that can be made about the turn is that it addresses a set of modern political problems that have been largely neglected within contemporary liberal political philosophy. In *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*, Nikolas Kompridis provides a helpful list of some of these problems: "the problem of voice and voicelessness, the problem of the new . . . the problem of judgement, the problem of responsiveness and receptivity . . . "[1] These issues of modern politics can be also considered aesthetic ones once the aesthetic is conceived very broadly to involve not only artistic categories like beauty and sublimity but also things such as sense perception and its intelligibility.[2]

But the aesthetic turn, even as it serves as a valuable corrective to contemporary liberal political theory's restricted problem space, itself neglects an important political problem associated with liberal modernity. As a wide spectrum of canonical political theorists from Alexis de Tocqueville to Karl Marx observed, an enduring feature of liberal society is a widespread culture of materialistic egoism in which the individual regards promoting economic self-interest as the highest concern in life.[3] While this attitude usually takes the form of preoccupation with money-making in the private sphere, it may also manifest in a political

[1] Nikolas Kompridis, ed., *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), xix-xx.
[2] Hence Kompridis calls the problems he lists as "the *aesthetic problems of modern politics*." (Kompridis 2014, xix)
[3] Although these critics used various vocabulary to explain how this commercial culture became predominant in Western society (Tocqueville's "equality of conditions," Mill's progress in "civilization," Marx's liberal "rights of man," etc.), their analyses at least implicitly attribute the change to certain elements of economic liberalism such as the right to private property and the destruction of feudal privileges in economy. In addition, in invoking the issue of materialistic egoism through these critics, I am not suggesting that it exhausts the cultural content of liberal civil society (which is implausible). Rather, I am conveying the idea that the modern structural changes in society based on economic liberalism led to a general spread of a commercial mindset which used to be mostly limited to the professional merchant class.

activity dominated by the concern for material self-interest. To a great degree, the aesthetic turn is theoretically informed by actual – historical and contemporary – examples of revolutionaries, activists, or popular protesters. Whereas these political actors are distinguished for their dedication to the promotion of public good in terms of freedom, equality, or justice, departing from interest politics typical in liberal society, the turn offers no specific idea on how such public-spirited political agents might be formed in the first place. In this, the aesthetic turn shares a common deficiency with contemporary liberal political thought it implicitly critiques.

My dissertation addresses this shared shortcoming by providing a perspective on the political significance of the aesthetic different from that of the aesthetic turn. While finding its broad conception of the aesthetic plausible, I depart from the turn in presenting the aesthetic as a solution to – rather than a descriptive component of – a major political problem in modern society. Moreover, I do this by recovering the liberal political tradition's own "aesthetic turn" in the nineteenth century centered on the artistic category of beauty. More specifically, in the writings of Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, I identify what I call "aesthetic liberalism" which conceives beauty as a key promoter of public-spirited political action in a context of depoliticization and the economization of politics.

Meanwhile, my work on aesthetic liberalism is distinguished from the extant scholarship on the aesthetic dimension of liberalism. For instance, an important recent work in this area that may be usefully compared with my project is Amanda Anderson's *Bleak Liberalism* where she tries to provide a new perspective on liberal lived experience and aesthetics through a selection of "liberal" literary works in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a body of thought, Anderson's notion of "bleak liberalism" is mostly defined by the idea that there are always certain historical, sociological, or psychological conditions that work to frustrate liberal political

aspirations. As an ethos or character, bleak liberalism means being committed to liberal political ideals despite the awareness of such bleak social and human realities and suffering from moods of doubt, despair, or difficulty. Significantly, Anderson designates Mill as a nineteenth-century precursor to the bleak liberals in the twentieth century, and it seems to me that not only Mill but also Tocqueville and Emerson fit her notion of bleak liberals quite well. Yet it is important to note that the three liberal thinkers counted the absence of strong commitment to liberal political ideals – an essential element of bleak liberalism – itself among the bleak conditions of their time. Whereas their works raise the question of how the political subject defined by liberal political idealism might emerge within a culture of materialistic egoism, Anderson does not provide a satisfactory answer from a viewpoint of liberal aesthetics. Although it is easy to see how the literary works she discusses can chasten any overblown liberal optimism for progress by heightening the awareness of the powerful obstacles to reform, her discussions are not clear on how, through what mechanism, an individual who does not already have the spirit of political idealism might come to have it via art and literature. As I will elaborate later, the aesthetic liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson offers specific ideas on how such transformation might be facilitated by aesthetic productions.

Whereas Anderson wrote from the perspective of literary studies, others have shed light on the aesthetic dimension of liberalism by interpreting the writings of several major nineteenth-century liberal political theorists. In this literature, the aesthetic categories such as "glory" and "beauty" used by these thinkers are typically associated with either military imperialism or private aestheticism. The scholarship on Benjamin Constant, for instance, contains discussions of his liberal critique of the Napoleonic Empire's pursuit of military glory.[4] In contrast to Constant,

[4] Constant's central writing in this regard is *The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization* (1814).

Tocqueville found martial glory politically valuable for modern commercial society, which is illustrated by Jennifer Pitts' *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* where she explores the relationship between Tocqueville's core liberal democratic political concern and his preoccupation with glory that comes from imperial conquest.[5] Meanwhile, some scholars associate the aesthetic category of beauty with private aestheticism by referring to a prominent German liberal thinker in the nineteenth century: Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt, whose major work *The Limits of State Action* (1791) Mill quoted for the epigraph of *On Liberty*, explicitly aestheticized a kind of individual self-development that can be pursued apart from politics, which leads Ursula Vogel to speak of Humboldt's "unpolitical, 'unrealistic' liberalism," or simply "aesthetic liberalism."[6] In addition to private, apolitical aestheticism, beauty is sometimes related to the project of legitimizing or celebrating liberal democracy. For example, in *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought*, Nancy L. Rosenblum (mis)interprets Walt Whitman as attempting to enhance individuals' attachment to American democracy by appealing to the aesthetic quality of its "spectacle of diversity."[7]

In contrast to the scholarship mentioned above, in recovering the aesthetic liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson, my dissertation associates the aesthetic category of beauty not with enhancing the appeal of an existing political order or a mere private self-development but with the promotion of public-spirited political action in liberal society. While it is possible that such action manifest in a support for military imperialism, this is not necessarily the case, as the

[5] For a similar discussion, see Kevin Duong's "The Demands of Glory: Tocqueville and Terror in Algeria" (2018).
[6] Ursula Vogel, "Liberty is Beautiful: Von Humboldt's Gift to Liberalism," *History of Political Thought* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 77-101. By "aesthetic liberalism," Vogel clearly refers to a kind of liberalism that is inherently apolitical. In this dissertation, I apply the label to Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson who turned to the aesthetic precisely for reviving the political in modern liberal society.
[7] Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 120.

examples of the French revolutionaries of 1789 and the American abolitionists which aesthetic liberalism relies on both illustrate. In what comes in the following, I will elaborate on the three thinkers' aesthetic turn, beginning with a discussion of its motivating crisis.

As Alan S. Kahan and others have pointed out, both Tocqueville and Mill were deeply concerned about the modern rise of the commercial spirit, or the attitude of regarding one's own material well-being as the highest good in life. From their perspective, one of the most worrisome features of this spirit was political apathy, or "withdrawal from politics and into private life."[8] In "Civilization" (1836), for instance, Mill notes with concern that modern structural changes in economy and politics had a direct impact on the average individual's character; in a civilized person, one observes simultaneously an overall "relaxation of individual energy" and "the concentration of it within the narrow sphere of the individual's money-getting pursuits."[9]

The two thinkers considered apathy emanating from the modern pecuniary spirit a major political problem for a variety of reasons. In Tocqueville's mind, apathy promotes administrative despotism, of which he gives such a vivid description toward the end of the second volume of *Democracy in America* (1840).[10] In this haunting vision, a great majority of citizens are so preoccupied with pursuing "small and vulgar pleasures"[11] in private life that the regulation of much of their lives is placed in the hands of an immense centralized bureaucracy. Meanwhile, Mill's case against apathy can be inferred from *Considerations on Representative Government*

[8] Alex Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.
[9] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 18, *Essays on Politics and Society Part I* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_698.
[10] Part 4, Chapter 6 "What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear"
[11] *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la democratie en Amerique, A Bilingual French-English Edition*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 4 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 1249.

(1861) where he defends a highly participatory model of democracy with both "protective" and "educative" arguments.[12] The first relies on the idea that participation protects the interests of citizens and implies that apathy leads to either political community's total disregard of nonparticipants' interests or lack of necessary knowledge and perspectives in public deliberations where such interests are at stake. The second, educative argument holds that participation produces mentally and morally developed "active" individuals who improve the world by "[struggling] against evils"[13] as well as have better lives for themselves. Apathy, in contrast, traps individuals in an unhappy condition of underdevelopment. In addition, in "Inaugural Address, University of St. Andrews," (1867) Mill suggests that indifference to political issues means compromising one's moral integrity through passive complicity in injustice: "He is not a good man who, without a protest, allows wrong to be committed in his name, and with the means which he helps to supply, because he will not trouble himself to use his mind on the subject."[14]

But both Mill and Tocqueville also recognized that the commercial spirit can manifest in the form of politics – in one that is governed solely by the concern for material self-interest. Initially identifying this phenomenon with the bourgeoisie, Tocqueville tried, especially during the July Monarchy (1830-1848) in France, to persuade members of this new ruling class to transcend their economic self-interest and pursue public good in politics.[15] After the Revolution

[12] Dennis Thompson, *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 14.
[13] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 19, *Essays on Politics and Society Part II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_188.
[14] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 21, *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/255#Mill_0223-21_781.
[15] Sheldon S. Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 415.

of 1848, however, Tocqueville increasingly associated the politics of *homo economicus* with the proletariat as well. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill expresses a similar concern through the notion of "sinister interests."[16] Although he defines it broadly as "interests conflicting more or less with the general good of the community,"[17] his subsequent discussion makes it clear that he is mainly referring to the opposing economic class interests in modern capitalist society. But it is important to highlight that, as his "protective" argument for political participation implies, Mill thinks the parliamentary representation of class interests actually promotes the common good by providing public deliberation with a necessary scope of perspectives and information. Hence, in so far as such sectional interests exist, they must be voiced and reckoned with by participants in public deliberation. What Mill opposed in politics under capitalism, then, was not the concern for one's own material well-being as such but a selfish disregard for others' rights and interests when determining ways of collective political existence. The politics of *homo economicus* is problematic not because it is about economic well-being, which Mill considers is a legitimate topic for politics, but because it is totally indifferent to considerations of justice.

In Emerson's case, his critique of both political inaction and interest politics rooted in the modern commercial spirit is perhaps most forcefully expressed in his antislavery writings.[18] In "An Address . . . on . . . the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies" (1844), for instance, Emerson explicitly relates America's commercial culture to the establishment and maintenance of slavery: "And we are shopkeepers, and have acquired the vices and virtues that

[16] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_236.
[17] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_236.
[18] Concerning Emerson's critique of interest politics in America, it is worth noting that, in as early as 1834, he criticized the Democratic Party for "being wholly commercial," lacking "the true democratic element" which is the "spirit of love for the general good." Arthur I. Ladu, "Emerson: Whig or Democrat," *The New England Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (September 1940), 428.

belong to trade . . . It was or it seemed the dictate of trade, to keep the negro down."[19] The address also begins by depicting the kind of an individual "who would not so much as part with his ice-cream" to "save them [slaves] from rapine and manacles," and although for the sake of the cause Emerson is willing to civilly offer antislavery arguments based on economic advantage, he does express at one point his strong disgust with such an overriding concern for material self-interest in politics ("I had almost said, Creep into your grave, the universe has no need of you!").[20] Emerson believed that not only the proslavery politics but also the political inaction of New England citizens who actually held an unfavorable view of the proslavery forces was much explained by the commercial spirit reigning in America.[21] For instance, in "Antislavery Speech at Dedham," (1846) he cites the desire for maintaining the business relations as usual with the South as a major reason for the "inaction and apathy"[22] of many citizens in Massachusetts in the face of slaveholders' "vicious politics."[23] Later, after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, Emerson likewise attributes the public inaction found in the state "throughout the active classes on the subject of domestic slavery and its appalling aggressions" to "the national spirit" that is "so drowsy, preoccupied with interest, deaf to principle."[24]

Troubled by the political implications of the commercial spirit in modern liberal society, Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson all in various ways conceived *homo politicus* who is driven by the elevated concern for public good rather than the love of material self-interest defining *homo*

[19] *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, eds. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 20.
[20] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 8.
[21] This type of political inaction is characterized by not so much indifference to public affairs as the fear of suffering economic losses due to taking political action against an injustice. Tocqueville found many French people in an analogous situation during the Second Empire in France.
[22] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 41.
[23] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 42.
[24] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 86.

economicus. For the most part, Tocqueville held a civic-republican conception of public good centered on a particular political community, though he did recognize the universal significance of certain political actions including those in the French Revolution of 1789. In Mill's case, his utilitarian philosophy led him to identify public good in politics with the happiness of mankind in general. As Stefan Collini suggests, Mill considered even patriotism a form of selfishness if it was marked by disregard for the welfare of the rest of the world.[25] For Emerson, to promote general good is to work for the conditions necessary for the development of a great moral character (for instance, equal liberty for all persons in the context of abolitionist politics). For all of them, the basic liberal individual rights were key part of public good.

The three aesthetic liberals' commitment to public-spirited political participation under modern conditions distinguishes them from both Humboldt and Jacob Burckhardt, two major German liberal thinkers whose sociopolitical thoughts also incorporate the aesthetic category of beauty. As Vogel suggests, Humboldt's *The Limits of State Action* can be even said to contain "a manifesto against citizenship," for Humboldt thinks "dedication to the public good can only be fostered at the expense of one-sidedness – by reducing man to the uniform model of the citizen."[26] Hence, in Humboldt, the pursuit of beauty through many-sided self-development is intrinsically at odds with public life. Although Mill is sometimes grouped together with Humboldt under the rubric of "aesthetic individualism,"[27] Mill saw the pursuit of beauty in character as intimately related to living a genuinely political life. Also, whereas Kahan places Burckhardt, Tocqueville, and Mill together under "aristocratic liberalism," the latter two must be

[25] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 72. This seems to be a reason why Mill cared more than Tocqueville about justifying European imperialism on the ground of colonial populations' welfare.
[26] Vogel, "Liberty is Beautiful," 93.
[27] K. J. Melhuish and E. K. Bramsted, eds., *Western Liberalism: A History in Documents from Locke to Croce* (London and New York: Longman, 1978), 25.

distinguished from Burckhardt in terms of their philosophy of political participation. Unlike Burckhardt, neither Tocqueville nor Mill had a penchant for political quietism even under nonideal social conditions.[28] Similarly, though he did sometimes sound notes of apolitical individuality, Emerson also vigorously exhorted New England citizens to defeat proslavery forces through political action.

The three thinkers' interest in beauty, I argue, is inseparable from their desire to promote the political in the modern world. Opposing both depoliticization and the economization of politics, they conceived beauty as a key promoter of a public-minded political action as exemplified by actual historical political actors such as the French revolutionaries of 1789 and the American abolitionists. More specifically, they believed that the beauty of a heroic political actor's character can help liberal citizens take a public-spirited political action by evoking in them an aesthetic desire to live up to their own latent ethical ideal. Concerning the generation of political virtues like the love of public good, they also believed that such "heroic beauty" is more effective than rational arguments, which reflects a romantic influence on aesthetic liberalism.

Commitment to liberal public goods which aesthetic liberals demanded from ordinary citizens presupposes strong liberal normative convictions. As the previous discussions suggest, aesthetic liberals believed this was necessary for liberal political goals ranging from the founding or preservation of the basic liberal constitutional order to protecting or expanding liberties within a liberal democracy. Nevertheless, given that such strong liberal convictions also potentially threaten the core liberal value of toleration or respect for the basic rights of all individuals (including those who are hostile to liberalism itself), a question may be raised as to what, if any, safeguards for such danger aesthetic liberalism includes.

[28] On Burkhardt's negative attitude toward political participation under modern conditions, see Richard Sigurdson's *Jacob Burckhardt's Social and Political Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

Though all aesthetic liberals had a broad commitment to the liberal value of toleration or respect, their specific relations to the principle varied considerably. Tocqueville's call for respect for the minority with a different opinion is perhaps most forcefully expressed through his critique of the tyranny of the majority in *Democracy*. But probably because in his country France liberalism was in many ways very much a fighting creed, desperately struggling for survival, Tocqueville's career arguably illustrates the illiberalism of liberalism when its existence is most vulnerable to a greater extent than the other two aesthetic liberals'; during the Second Republic in France, for instance, Tocqueville willingly cooperated with Louis Napoleon on the repression of socialists.[29] Meanwhile, Mill justified the freedom of thought and discussion in *On Liberty* partly based on human cognitive fallibility and promoted a conception of conviction that is rationally grounded and imbued with fallibilistic open-mindedness. As for Emerson, though his conception of conviction is not as rationalistic and fallibilistic as Mill's, it is one that alternates with a phase of contemplative openness to the world which allows everything to be as it is and provides an opportunity for self-revision. Also, as his elision of John Brown's violence suggests, Emerson would require respect for the moral rights of all persons as a constant throughout the different phases of democratic citizenship.

As suggested previously, the European romantic movement between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had major impact on aesthetic liberals in various ways. Yet, their critique of the commercial spirit notwithstanding, aesthetic liberals did not share most romantics' tendency to take a premodern past like the Middle Ages, highly idealized, as a model for the

[29] Sharon B. Watkins, *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Second Republic, 1848-1852* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003), 559.

future.[30] When it came to political economy, aesthetic liberals were far from backward-looking (though not necessarily forward-looking, either), and considering how each of them theoretically related to modern liberal economy leads to a more precise understanding of both their departure from romanticism and the role of heroic beauty in their political thoughts.

Among the three, Tocqueville was by far least receptive to socialist perspectives on the economic and political status-quo of his time. His strong hostility to socialist thought is especially clear in his writings on the Revolution of 1848 where socialism is at one point denounced as "a new form of slavery."[31] Although he was, as he called himself, "a liberal of a new kind"[32] in certain aspects, his view on political economy was little different from classical liberalism, especially in terms of absolute commitment to the right of private property and laissez-faire doctrine. Whereas Tocqueville saw a debased, materialistic spirit in socialism, Emerson appreciated its high idealism or aspiration concerning more equitable material prosperity in society.[33] But this is not to say that Emerson advocated any specific socialist alternative to America's laissez-faire economy at the time. In fact, as Neal Dolan points out, Emerson felt the appeal of "the moral logic of laissez-faire liberal capitalism"[34] and saw the possession of property as "evidence of obedience to nature's laws, which is the basis of moral virtue."[35] Hence, although both Tocqueville and Emerson opposed their elevated civic ideals to acquisitive individualism or the commercial spirit, neither of them envisioned eliminating the latter as a dominant cultural phenomenon through a radical reorganization of the modern

[30] This is not to say, however, that aesthetic liberals did not derive any theoretical inspiration from certain premodern political communities. What is being emphasized here is that, as it will be elaborated in the next chapter, they were committed to the basic modern liberal system of individual rights.
[31] *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life in Letters and Politics*, eds. Oliver Zunz and Alan S. Kahan (Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 250.
[32] Zunz and Kahan, *The Tocqueville Reader*, 153.
[33] The relevant comments by Emerson can be found in "Wealth" (1860) and "Fortune of the Republic" (1863).
[34] Neal Dolan, *Emerson's Liberalism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 102.
[35] Dolan, *Emerson's Liberalism*, 103.

economic sphere itself. In other words, in their political visions, the "egoistic man" whom Marx critiqued in "On the Jewish Question" (1843) forever remains as a major feature of liberal civil society, and accordingly, heroic beauty assumes a permanent role of facilitating an always temporary shift from *homo economicus* to *homo politicus* in one and the same individual.

In contrast to most other liberal thinkers of the nineteenth century, Mill was highly sympathetic to the socialist arguments. Understanding the defining feature of socialism to be "the joint ownership by all the members of the community of the instruments and means of production" which entails "the division of the produce among the body of owners" "according to rules laid down by the community,"[36] Mill welcomed the *possibility* of eventually replacing the system of private property under capitalism with a form of decentralized socialism.[37] His ideal in this regard can be summed up as a society of workers' cooperatives where workers "collectively [own] the capital" and "work under managers they have elected."[38] Significantly, Mill thought that this radical reorganization of the economic sphere would also change the nature of democratic politics. Because in this ideal state no separate privileged class of capitalists exists but all are laborers, "a conflict of classes struggling for opposite interests" is replaced by "a friendly rivalry in the pursuit of a common good to all."[39] In other words, the basic structure of society would guarantee that Mill's ideal politics, instead of the selfish and unjust politics of the commercial spirit, become a common political reality. But because Mill was never certain about the long-term feasibility of such society, it can be said that he was always at least conditionally committed to the basic liberal economic structure. Throughout much of his life, Mill was not any

[36] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 5, *Essays on Economics and Society Part II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/232#Mill_0223-05_1358.
[37] John Skorupski, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 393.
[38] Skorupski, *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, 385-6.
[39] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 3, *Principles of Political Economy Part I* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 792.

less concerned with the problem of how to promote public-spirited politics in an essentially commercial society than Tocqueville and Emerson, and like them, Mill saw beauty as part of the solution.

As Mill's reflection on workers' cooperatives illustrates, some aesthetic liberals such as Mill and Tocqueville clearly recognized the role of institutions in promoting a desirable civic character. Both thinkers, for instance, justified democratic political institutions on the ground that they are necessary for generating public-minded citizenry.[40] Such recognition, however, did not lead to a trivialization of the role of heroic beauty in their minds. This was partly because often a morally transformative institution itself had to be generated through reform or even revolutionary politics, which was a situation, for example, Tocqueville faced in France with respect to democratic institutions. Moreover, Mill believed that aesthetics was more likely than rational arguments to induce the individual to avail from the moralizing effect of political participation through democratic institutions.

In the rest of this introduction, I will provide a brief outline of each of the subsequent chapters in the dissertation.

In Chapter 1, I discuss romanticism's role in the formation of aesthetic liberalism, thereby also assessing the former's significance in the history of liberal political thought. Whereas some scholars, including Isaiah Berlin and Rosenblum, present romanticism as ultimately having provided new rationales for the basic liberal norms and institutions, I emphasize its role in transforming the liberal valuation of rationales as such. More specifically, highlighting a romantic criticism of liberal modernity that finds resonance within liberalism itself, I articulate the romantic critique of discursive reason and valorization of imagination in the

[40] The relevant writings are Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*.

domain of moral transformation, which influenced aesthetic liberalism's emphasis on aesthetic elevation over rational persuasion in the formation of a public-minded political agent.

In Chapter 2, I recover a neglected aspect of Tocqueville's political aesthetics. As mentioned previously, the scholarship on the aesthetic dimension of his political thought tends to highlight his understanding of the political role of military glory as revealed through his writings on European imperialism. By focusing on his notion of beauty instead, I demonstrate that Tocqueville's turn to the aesthetic as a response to the crisis of the political need not be discussed solely in connection to his involvement in the French military imperialism; his aesthetic turn can just as much inform a democratic project of establishing or expanding institutions of political liberty. A closer look at Tocqueville's discussion of the doctrine of interest well understood shows his awareness of the limitation of utilitarian moral arguments in promoting public-spirited political action. I claim that he found an aesthetic alternative in the power of a heroic political actor's beauty to inspire political virtues in the spectator and illustrate this point by exploring Tocqueville's role as a "democratic-aristocratic" poet during the Second Empire in France.

In Chapter 3, while noting Mill's affinity with Tocqueville, I focus on the former's unique contribution to political aesthetics. At the center of this chapter's analysis are Mill's commentaries on Plato's mimetic pedagogy involving the figure of Socrates. Through these writings Mill, like Tocqueville, implies that a heroic political actor's beauty in character is more effective than utilitarian moral arguments in generating political virtues such as the love of public good. But Mill also suggests beauty's contribution to deliberative democracy, which is not a point clearly made by even the scholars who have written in detail about the aesthetic dimension of his political thought. Furthermore, not only did Mill find arguments like the

doctrine of interest well understood philosophically defective (as did Tocqueville) but he also took a further step by examining in detail the moral psychological efficacy of what he considered to be valid utilitarian arguments on behalf of virtue. In this regard, I highlight Mill's problematization of ordinary liberal citizens' weak attachment to the ends to which a sound utilitarian moral philosophy must appeal.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores the distinctive relationship between beauty and political action in Emerson's political thought. Among political theorists, George Kateb stands out for trying to articulate Emerson's perspective on the political significance of beauty for democratic politics. According to Kateb, in Emerson we see beauty, as an element of "democratic aestheticism,"[41] serving democratic politics by checking our urge to reform the existing society. Kateb overlooks, however, Emerson's suggestion that beauty also *promotes* reform politics by inducing the cultivation of political virtues which ethically constitute a reformer. Concerning this kind of moral transformation, Emerson, like the other two aesthetic liberals, privileged the beauty of a heroic political agent such as the abolitionist over discursive reason, though he did this specifically on the basis of the Coleridgean epistemology and theory of imagination. In the end, Emerson's uniqueness within aesthetic liberalism partly lies in that he conceives beauty to be *both* restraining *and* promoting political reform activity in the life of a citizen without finally trying to theoretically resolve this apparent tension.

In the concluding chapter, I briefly consider the aesthetic liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson from a contemporary perspective. What are the relevance and limitations of this

[41] George Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility," *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (February 2000): 5-37. Kateb argues that it is possible to derive what he calls "democratic aestheticism" from Emerson's writings. Democratic aestheticism requires indiscriminately giving contemplative attention to as much of the existing world as possible for the purpose of curbing our impulse to change it which often results in immoralities.

thought with respect to contemporary political problems? As a way of approaching this question, I discuss aesthetic liberalism's bearing on the still present issue of *homo economicus* as well as the broader concern for bridging the gap between actual and ideal citizens in liberal democracy. In addition, I will address several potential criticisms against aesthetic liberalism and discuss its significance for contemporary liberal political thought.

Chapter One:
Aesthetic Liberalism in the Age of Romanticism

Introduction

Privileging the aesthetic force of beauty over the power of rational arguments in the matter of cultivating political virtues, the aesthetic liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson marks a major development in the liberal political tradition. But one may wonder why aesthetic liberalism emerged specifically in the early nineteenth century; the history of liberalism, after all, extends for roughly two centuries in either direction from this period. Accordingly, one of this chapter's purposes is to provide an intellectual context for the texts of the three major liberal thinkers that ground aesthetic liberalism by discussing a dominant cultural and intellectual force in Europe between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: romanticism.

In doing so, the chapter also aims to bring a new perspective to the contemporary debate about the relationship between romanticism and liberalism. In political theory, one of the most prominent commentators on romanticism and its relation to liberal political thought is Isaiah Berlin. On this topic, especially important among his works are his 1965 Mellon lectures, which were later published under the title *The Roots of Romanticism*. In the lectures, Berlin suggests several ways in which romanticism is in tension with liberalism. For example, unlike the "[restrained]"[42] romantics such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, the "unbridled"[43] romantics like Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, in their commitment to "the free untrammeled will and the denial of the fact that there is a nature of

[42] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 79.
[43] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 107.

things," represented a radical antinomianism ("Rules must be blown up as such.")[44] which can destabilize liberal norms and institutions. Additionally, Berlin points out the romantics' strong contempt for the bourgeoisie[45] as well as their challenge to the liberal faith in historical progress.[46] But at the same time, he concludes the lectures with a discussion on romanticism's unintended contribution to liberalism. He argues that, regardless of the romantics' actual intentions, their belief in "the incompatibility of human ideals"[47] ended up justifying and promoting "liberalism, toleration, decency [,] and the appreciation of the imperfections of life."[48] Hence, in Berlin's account, romanticism simultaneously figures as a threat and an important source of justification for certain basic liberal norms.

More recently, a similar thought can be found in Nancy L. Rosenblum's *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (1987). With a view toward justifying liberal society before people with romantic attitudes and feelings – which "make liberalism appear unbearably arid and cold, impersonal and unexpressive"[49] – and thereby reconciling them to it,[50] Rosenblum investigates how such romantic dispositions have historically interacted with certain core liberal concepts to give rise to what she calls "[romantic] liberalism."[51] Her study suggests that romanticism had led to the articulation of new, romantic justifications for the basic liberal political arrangement. The book, for instance, highlights Mill's

[44] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 136.
[45] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 15.
[46] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 158.
[47] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 170. Berlin also believed this was one of the ideas that separated romanticism from the Enlightenment. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 31.
[48] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 170.
[49] Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 2.
[50] "If political theory is to effectively justify political life and reconcile men and women to it, then it must address felt needs. Romantic liberalism does. The needs it speaks to are historically contingent and not universal; even where they arise they are not felt by everyone. Nonetheless they exist and exert a powerful hold on men and women in liberal society, and political theory must try to speak to them." Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism*, 190.
[51] Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism*, 190.

development of a romantic rationale – self-cultivation – for the liberal separation between public and private spheres. Though her account is different from Berlin's in specific terms, Rosenblum, too, conceives romanticism as both a challenge and a new source of justification for liberalism.

While acknowledging certain fundamental points of conflict between romanticism and liberalism, this chapter focuses on a romantic critique of liberal modernity which finds resonance within liberalism itself. The chapter also articulates a mostly overlooked aspect of romanticism that served as a key theoretical resource for the liberal response to this shared concern about the modern world. Concerning romanticism's impact on liberalism, both Berlin and Rosenblum present the former, however understood, as a significant new source of justification for liberal public goods (basic liberal political values and institutions); in other words, their focus is on how romantic rationales or reasons (e.g. self-development) might enhance liberalism's capacity to justify itself. In this chapter, however, I am interested in liberalism's absorption of the romantic critique of rationales or reasons as such, romantic or otherwise; I conceive romanticism as a key source of liberalism's self-critique of its *practice of justification* for values that it deems important. More than any other intellectual tradition, romanticism led liberalism to confront the problematic nature of discursive rationality (which the latter helped unleash in the world) for liberalism itself. Following the romantics, aesthetic liberals came to realize that, far from developing the individual's social self for promoting, preserving, and reforming liberal society, discursive reason tends to even weaken whatever communal side the individual already has.

In the following sections, I begin by describing the romantic critique of modernity with emphasis on the negative cultural and political implications of liberal market society which also drew the attention of several major liberal thinkers including Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson. In the rest of the chapter, I reconstruct romanticism's criticism of discursive reason and valorization

of imagination in the domain of moral transformation,[52] a theme which, as I will illustrate in the subsequent chapters, aesthetic liberals creatively assimilated in various ways in their attempt to bridge the chasm between *homo economicus* and *homo politicus* in the modern world.

Meanwhile, it is notoriously difficult to define romanticism,[53] a term which has been used in a most wide range of contexts, so much so that the intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy once even suggested that the task as such was impossible.[54] Accordingly, I do not claim that the conception I will provide in this chapter in terms of modernity, reason, and imagination represents any definitive and complete answer to the perennial question of what romanticism is. Instead, it will be shown that my conception meets several standards which I consider to be important from the perspective of scholarship on romanticism or my dissertation.

I. The Romantic Critique of Modernity

Roughly speaking, as H. S. Reiss points out, romanticism "refers to two different phenomena."[55] Sometimes, it means "the Romantic attitude of mind, a feature of thinking which can be found in all ages and in most thinkers, but which is more preponderant in some than in others."[56] This case seems to apply to Rosenblum who discusses romanticism as certain psychological traits that are closely associated with, but not restricted to, a particular historical

[52] Although, given the purposes of this chapter, I focus on this particular theme, aesthetic liberals were both individually and collectively influenced by romanticism in various other ways. The notion of taking oneself as a work of art, for instance, is strongly present in both Mill and Emerson. Meanwhile, Tocqueville's conception of democratic poetry was very much formed by his knowledge of the French romantic literature of his time.
[53] H. S. Reiss observes: "The term 'Romantic' or 'Romanticism' eludes definition, although many attempts at definition have been made." H. S. Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics: 1793-1815* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 1.
[54] Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2.
[55] Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, 1.
[56] Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, 1.

period.[57] Perhaps more frequently in the field of intellectual history, romanticism also refers to "the European Romantic movement" which was "[primarily] a literary movement" that "swept at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century across the whole of Europe."[58] In discussing romanticism in this dissertation as a way of explaining aesthetic liberalism, I roughly follow the second usage of the term.[59]

Contra Carl Schmitt, romanticism was not entirely open-ended from moral and political perspectives. In *Political Romanticism*, Schmitt advanced the idea that the romantics "subordinated everything, whether morality, religion, history, or politics, to aesthetic ends"; a romantic "would always shirk moral and political commitment because it limited his creativity."[60] Yet the romantics were consistently committed against several defining features of the modern world whose major contours were becoming increasingly apparent during the period between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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[57] Accordingly, in *Another Liberalism*, Rosenblum says, "I do not identify romanticism with a particular artistic period or movement." Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism*, 2.

[58] Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, 1.

[59] Any plausible characterization of romanticism used in this sense obviously must apply across national boundaries in Europe. Berlin's conception of the movement, however, does not quite meet this standard. Taking Fichte as romanticism's most representative figure – calling him "the true father of Romanticism" – Berlin tended to stress the romantics' rejection of the notion of objectivity and universality in nearly all domains of life including ethics. Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 569. According to Berlin, the romantics, in anticipation of Friedrich Nietzsche, thought values are invented rather than discovered, which is also why existentialism should be regarded as "the true heir of Romanticism." Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 160. But whatever validity it has for German romanticism, Berlin's characterization does not apply to British one at all. As Timothy Michael points out, the British romantics were not "thoroughgoing idealists" in that they held that "knowledge and value are *not* simply thought into existence [emphasis added]." Timothy Michael, *British Romanticism and the Critique of Political Reason* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 20. For example, as I will illustrate later, neither William Wordsworth nor Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the two major representatives of British romanticism, rejected the notion of epistemic objectivity as such. Some might wonder whether M. H. Abrams' influential discussion in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* about the romantic emphasis on the active mind which shapes perception weakens the point I make here. I am inclined to interpret Abrams to mean more precisely that the British romantics considered some of our intellectual faculties such as "Reason" and imagination to play a necessary role in adding certain (especially, aesthetic) qualities to external objects. But regardless of his exact opinion, there is much evidence that major British romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge were not radically subjectivist in ethics and aesthetics.

[60] Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 225.

An illuminating work on this topic is *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (2001) by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre where they define romanticism as "a critique of modernity, that is, of modern capitalist civilization, in the name of values and ideals drawn from the past (the precapitalist, premodern past)."[61] As suggested by the definition, central to Löwy & Sayre's conception of modernity as the object of romantic criticism is capitalism: "As mode and relations of production, capitalism is the principle that generates and unifies the overall phenomenon, rich in ramifications, that we know as 'modernity.'"[62] More specifically, it is around the key aspects of capitalism ("industrialization, the rapid and correlated development of science and technology . . . the hegemony of the market, the private ownership of means of production, the enlarged reproduction of capital, 'free' labor, and an intensified division of labor") that "integrally related aspects of modern civilization" such as "rationalization, bureaucratization," "urbanization, secularization, [and] reification" have emerged.[63]

Hence, the advent of capitalism, "which was under way well before the [French] Revolution,"[64] occupies a central place in Löwy & Sayre's account of the genesis of romanticism in the second half of the eighteenth century.[65] I think that in this account much of what is designated as the rise of capitalism is captured by the notion of the emergence of market society, the historical unfolding of what is commonly referred to as economic liberalism.[66] Among other

[61] Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Duke University Press Books, 2002), 17.
[62] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 19.
[63] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 19.
[64] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 17.
[65] Löwy & Sayre explains their chronological focus on the eighteenth century in the following terms: "The origins of modernity and capitalism go back of course to the Renaissance and the Reformation (thus the term 'modern period' used in history textbooks to designate the period that begins at the end of the fifteenth century); however, these phenomena began to become hegemonic in the West only in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the 'primitive accumulation' was completed (Marx), when large-scale industry started to take off and the market broke free of social controls (Karl Polanyi)." Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 18.
[66] By "economic liberalism," I broadly refer to a doctrine that insists on creating a free market society where a mass of individuals compete for material goods mostly unhindered or unaided by feudal privileges and regulations.

sources, Löwy & Sayre uses Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944) to provide a description of this process:

> For him [Polanyi], what is happening is the "metamorphosis of the caterpillar" in which, for the first time in human history, the economic realm, in the form of the self-regulating market, becomes autonomous and dominant with respect to the entire set of social institutions; at the same time, at the level of social psychology, one of the multiple motives (custom, law, magic, religion, and so on) that determined action in earlier societies acquires primacy: the profit motive. In a triple process of unification, extension, and emancipation of the market economy, we reach a total reversal of the principles governing all past societies: the new principle consists in subordinating "the substance of society itself to the laws of the market."[67]

By citing this passage, I am not suggesting that the development of liberal market society was uniform throughout Europe or that any such actual society during the romantic period was not usually encrusted with certain feudal vestiges. Nevertheless, during the period from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, market society and its culture represented by the bourgeoisie middle class loomed sufficiently large in the minds of the romantics to occupy a prominent place in their social criticism.

In my opinion, it is somewhat misleading to describe romanticism as "anticapitalist"[68] as Löwy & Sayre does because, unlike the later socialists, most romantics did not in fact designate the private ownership of capital as their main target of criticism. The early German romantics, for instance, "did not explicitly criticize private ownership of the means of production."[69] Rather, "[the] special object of their wrath was the cultural and social consequences of modern forms of production and exchange."[70]

[67] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 47.
[68] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 15.
[69] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 233.
[70] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 233.

In particular, the romantics were highly critical of liberal market society's culture of materialistic egoism – the "[reduction of] human aspirations to egoistic calculations"[71] – which was at odds with the romantic conception of human flourishing (the development of a full range of human faculties and feelings, especially with emphasis on the power of imagination and the communal spirit of love for others[72]) which included ethical requirements for necessary change in society. The German romantics "employed a redolent word for someone who is devoted to the materialistic ethic of modern society: the philistine (*der Philister*)."[73] For the early German romantics, materialism contravened "the ideal of *Bildung*," or "the harmonious development of all human powers,"[74] which they considered to be the most important "precondition of social and political change"[75] in Germany. In addition, some German romantics like Novalis saw materialistic egoism as a poor basis for social cohesion and the state's survival.[76]

Meanwhile, the British romantics, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Thomas Carlyle, were not any less critical of liberal society's commercial culture. For instance, as Löwy & Sayre points out, Coleridge considered self-interest, "the very principle of the modern world," as "the chief enemy" throughout his life, and his corresponding commitment to the moral ideal of disinterestedness is a significant ground for his "never [having] ceased to be Romantic" despite radical changes in his political beliefs and attitudes over time.[77]

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[71] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 49.
[72] This idea is also implied in Löwy & Sayre's claim that, in opposition to the culture of commercial society, the romantics advanced the value of "the *individual subjectivity*," or "the development of the self in all the depth, breadth and complexity of its affectivity, and also in the free play of its imaginative capacities," as well as the value of "*unity*, or *totality*," the unity of the self with nature and community. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique*, no. 32 (Spring – Summer 1984), 58.
[73] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 234.
[74] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 233.
[75] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 229.
[76] One of the places where Novalis expresses this idea is "Faith and Love or The King and Queen" published in 1798.
[77] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 118.

In "Two Concepts of Freedom: Romantic and Liberal," (1958) concerning the romantic conception of heroism, Berlin highlights the romantics' unprecedented valorization of disinterested dedication to a cause:

> The new romantic hero of the nineteenth century is someone – anyone – who is sufficiently disinterested, pure-hearted, incorruptible to be able to lay down his life for the sake of his own inner ideal. The truth or falsity of the ideal becomes comparatively irrelevant. What is admired is not the truth but the heroism, the dedication, the integrity of a life devoted to and, if need be, sacrificed on the altar of an end pursued for its own sake, for the sake of its beauty or sanctity to the individual whose ideal it is.[78]

Although Coleridge's concern for objective truth or validity was greater than what this passage would suggest, a comment he makes on his youthful enthusiasm for the French Revolution in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) illustrates Berlin's point to some extent: "Oh never can I remember those days with either shame or regret. For I was most sincere, most disinterested. My opinions were, indeed, in many and most important points erroneous; but my heart was single."[79]

As Coleridge's reference to disinterestedness and the "heart" suggest, in seeking to displace the commercial culture, the romantics were concerned with moral transformation at the level of character, motives, and feelings. That is to say, for them, virtue was not simply a matter of outward behavior; as Coleridge would put it, they were deeply interested in "[moralizing] the affections."[80] For example, in "Essay on Morals," which I will analyze in detail later, Wordsworth distinguishes the act of giving coming from "the affectionate & benevolent man" from one done by "the avaricious man" which is merely "accidental," lacking the regularity of the former.[81]

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[78] Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in a Romantic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 194.
[79] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 118.
[80] Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English writers and the reception of German Thought: 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 46.
[81] *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, vol. 1 (Humanities-Ebooks, LLP, 2009), 125. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cornell/detail.action?docID=3306065. Created from cornell on 2019-12-23 14:21:56.

The romantics' ultimate response to the various problems they associated with modernity often (but not always) took the form of anti-modernism, the comprehensive rejection of the modern present for a sociopolitical ideal for the future derived from a premodern past. Given their tendency to look back to a premodern past for a look into the future, it can be said that within romanticism "the 'restitutionist' vision occupies a privileged place."[82] "Restitutionist" romanticism is "both qualitatively and quantitatively the most significant"; quantitatively because "by far the largest number of important Romantic writers and thinkers are to be situated principally in this category."[83]

In fact, all of the British romantics who had most influenced Mill and Emerson belong to this type in varying degrees. After their disillusionment with the French Revolution, both Wordsworth and Coleridge "turned – especially Coleridge – to medieval restitutionism,"[84] a theme which also appears in the writings of Carlyle and John Ruskin. Another major location of the restitutionist romantic vision in the nineteenth century was Germany. In "its early formative years (1797-1800)," German romanticism "attempted to be a middle path between liberalism and conservatism," trying to avoid "an insistence on individual liberty that destroyed all social bonds on the one hand [and] an emphasis on community that suppressed all individual liberty on the other hand."[85] The early German romantics "were definitely not reactionaries" in the sense that "they were fervent champions of the ideals, if not the methods, of the [French] Revolution."[86] But disillusioned by the later stage of the Revolution as well as the subsequent Napoleonic period, most German romantics, too, ultimately "turned toward the ideal of a medieval

[82] Löwy and Sayre, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," 63.
[83] Löwy and Sayre, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," 63.
[84] Löwy and Sayre, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," 65.
[85] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 223.
[86] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 224.

restoration, its primary values being the hierarchical order of the *Stande*, person-to-person feudal bonds, and the communion of the whole social body in religious faith and love for the monarch."[87]

Unlike many romantics, Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson were critics of modernity without being antimodern. Although all of them were certainly concerned about the political implications of market society, none of them advocated a return to a premodern socioeconomic organization. Yet at the same time, committed as they were to modern market economy (in varying degrees), the three liberal thinkers were not strict believers in the economic determination of culture[88] (unlike the conventionally-interpreted Karl Marx) and therefore considered it meaningful to develop a noneconomic or nonstructural response to the political challenge posed by the predominance of materialistic egoism in liberal society. In fact, they specifically developed an aesthetic response, which I have been referring to as their aesthetic liberalism, and in this process one finds traces of another key aspect of romanticism: a critique of discursive reason and a corresponding valorization of imagination concerning moral transformation.

II. The Romantic Critique of Discursive Reason

It seems reasonable to expect any plausible characterization of the romantic movement to include a statement about the significance of reason relative to other human faculties. This is because romanticism is widely understood among scholars to be an important reaction to the

[87] Löwy and Sayre, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," 64.
[88] One illustration of this is Tocqueville's sociological analysis in the introduction to *Democracy in America* (1835). Mill, meanwhile, believed in the independent power of ideas to bring about change in the world.

eighteenth-century Enlightenment which had faith in the authority and power of reason as no other movement did.[89] Moreover, there is a general sense in which romanticism in some way elevated imagination over reason.

In discussing Enlightenment reason in relation to romanticism, scholars often specifically focus on scientific reason, neoclassical reason in art and literature, or utilitarian reason.[90] But in consideration of the multiplicity and capaciousness of the Enlightenment, which is also frequently pointed out,[91] it must be recognized that the ultimate disagreement between romanticism and the Enlightenment concerning reason was about discursive reason more broadly rather than one particular version of it.

By "discursive reason," I broadly refer to a faculty for logical reasoning which, in romanticism, is frequently contrasted with the power of intuition (sometimes called "intuitive reason") or the ability to apprehend revealed truths. The distinction between discursive and intuitive reasons as such is not new with romanticism but can be also found in some thinkers in English rationalism such as Richard Price.[92] Among poets, John Milton gave expression to the distinction in book 5 of *Paradise Lost* (1667) by having archangel Raphael mostly attribute intuition to angels and "discourse" to humans ("Fancy and understanding, whence the soul //

[89] For instance, even a scholar like Laurence S. Lockridge who identifies some important continuity between the Enlightenment and romanticism writes, "The partial truth of oversimplication must be granted to the conventional view that the Romantics are hostile to Enlightenment reason." Laurence S. Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 69.
[90] For instance, in the first chapter of *The Romantic Revolution: A History* ("The Crisis of the Age of Reason"), T. C. W. Blanning for the most part identifies Enlightenment reason with the scientific method (mathematics and empiricism) and neoclassical reason in the fine arts.
[91] Blanning says, "When charting the progress of the romantic revolution, there is a natural tendency to follow the example set by its supporters of oversimplifying the opposition. In reality, the Enlightenment was a house with many mansions, with some members occupying more than one simultaneously." T. C. W. Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution: A History* (Random House, 2011), 50. Löwy & Sayre also points out that, despite "the undeniable connections between the spirit of Enlightenment and the bourgeoisie," the Enlightenment was more than "the ideological reflection of the capitalist system or its dominant class." Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 55.
[92] Alan Grob, "Wordsworth and Godwin: A Reassessment," *Studies in Romanticism* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1967), 104.

Reason receives, and reason is her being, // Discursive or intuitive; discourse // Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours . . .").[93]

The implied dichotomy between "seeing things with immediacy and quickness" (intuition) and "ratiocinative processes of piecemeal, logical intellection" (discursive reason) appears under a different guise in Coleridge who was much influenced by Milton's passage.[94] Coleridge distinguished "Reason" from both discursive reason (possessed by humans and higher beings only) and "understanding" (shared with animals) and closely associated the former with the notion of religious revelation: "'Reason is *subjective* Revelation, Revelation *objective* Reason.'"[95] In doing so, Coleridge in fact radically transformed Kant's original distinction between reason and understanding.[96] Significantly, Coleridge's Reason as revelation completely lacks the kind of discursivity embedded in Kant's notion of practical reason, a faculty of rational procedure or reasoning by which one constructs one's own moral laws in accordance with the principle of the Categorical Imperative.[97]

Although logical reasoning as such need not be utilitarian, it is true that the romantics' conception of discursive reason was often informed by utilitarianism, another dominant intellectual current of the period that was a major philosophical successor to the Enlightenment. Among the British romantics, for example, understanding, with which discursive reason was so closely associated,[98] was largely described in utilitarian terms.[99] In Wordsworth's "Essay on

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[93] Patrick J. Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic "Light of All Our Day"* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 48.
[94] Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, 48.
[95] Ashton, *The German Idea*, 48.
[96] Ashton, *The German Idea*, 46.
[97] John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 235-252.
[98] "The Romantics and Transcendentalists, privileging that all-important 'intuitive' Reason, found the merely 'discursive' faculty too close for comfort to 'mere' understanding." Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, 67.
[99] E.g. Carlyle: "'Should Understanding . . . speculate of Virtue, it ends in *Utility*, making Prudence and a sufficiently cunning love of Self the highest good.'" Ashton, *The German Idea*, 95.

Morals," too, which will be subsequently analyzed, it is William Godwin, "one of the most thoroughgoing radical thinkers found in the English Enlightenment"[100] who was an early exponent of utilitarianism, and William Paley, whose moral philosophy is "thoroughly hedonistic and utilitarian,"[101] whom Wordsworth cites as representatives of moral reform based on discursive reason.

On the topic of romanticism's stance on discursive reason, scholars have mostly focused on explaining the faculty's place within the romantic epistemology (Thilly 1913, Reiss 1955, Lougee 1959, Smith 1973, Eichner 1982). In other words, the typical issue for debate is to what degree the romantics regarded discursive reason as a way to truth and knowledge, and often intuition or imagination is discussed as the romantics' epistemic alternative. Sometimes, the same debate revolves around the issue of whether the romantics were "irrationalists" or not.[102]

This focus on the romantics' view on the epistemic authority of discursive reason, however, does not lead to a conception of romanticism that can serve as an explanation for the shared aesthetic liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson. In terms of epistemology, Emerson and Mill were arguably on the opposite sides (transcendentalism vs. empiricist rationalism) while Tocqueville's exact stance is largely a matter of speculation. As far as explaining the emergence of aesthetic liberalism is concerned, I suggest that it is more

[100] *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 473.
[101] Grob, "Wordsworth and Godwin," 114.
[102] According to Frederick C. Beiser, "[the] irrationalist interpretation of the romantics is commonplace." Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 404. Among others, Reiss holds such an interpretation ("Following Herder, German Romanticism became largely a revolt against reason."). Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, 3. Beiser, in contrast, argues that the German romantics were in fact committed to the Enlightenment's "two fundamental principles: rational criticism and scientific naturalism." Karl Ameriks, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

illuminating to consider a romantic contrast between reason and imagination in terms of their more general effect on the individual's social self rather than epistemology.[103]

To a great degree, the romantic critique of discursive reason in the domain of moral transformation consists in the belief that rational arguments on behalf of virtue[104] generated by the faculty are powerless to form a virtuous character. For some romantics, this was primarily due to discursive reason's inability to establish moral truths. In their view, these truths simply did not have discursive reason's sanction; the rational faculty either contradicts them or could offer only philosophically weak and unconvincing arguments for them.[105] But apart from the issue of discursive reason's epistemic authority in moral matters, other romantics attributed the impotence of the arguments (whether they are philosophically strong or not) to their abstract nature; unlike imagination, discursive reason does not engage our passions or desires through concrete images in the mind, thereby failing to motivate behavior that promotes the formation of a virtuous character.

This particular criticism of discursive reason is rather reflective of the literary or aesthetic characteristic of the romantic movement; after all, its most representative figures were poets or

[103] The issues are related but not identical (though they are quite inseparable in Emerson's case). One can acknowledge discursive reason as the most reliable way to moral knowledge and still maintain that its rational arguments on behalf of virtue are powerless to generate virtue in the individual and even destructive to the existing social self. Mill, as I will explain in this and later chapters, belonged to this category.

[104] By "virtue" in this chapter, I primarily refer to a morally desirable inner character (e.g. disinterestedness) and secondarily any outward conduct that results from such a disposition. To clarify, in "rational arguments on behalf of virtue," I include both (1) an argument for a virtuous inner character (e.g. on why one must be disinterested rather than selfish) and by implication all the outward conducts that stem from it and (2) one that argues only for an outward action that a virtuous person would typically do without making any explicit reference to the actor's inner disposition (e.g. on why one must "give alms" to those in need). When using the phrase to describe the romantic critique of discursive reason, I am suggesting that the romantics as well as aesthetic liberals considered neither type of moral argument to be an effective way to promote virtue (understood in the sense indicated above), though their specific reasons for this belief varied. In addition, throughout the dissertation, I treat "moral" virtue (or simply "virtue") as a broad category that includes both private and public/political virtues, though aesthetic liberalism is directly concerned with the latter kind only (e.g. disinterestedness).

[105] In this regard, consider Carlyle's comment on understanding: "'Should Understanding . . . speculate of Virtue, it ends in *Utility*, making Prudence and a sufficiently cunning love of Self the highest good.'" Ashton, *The German Idea*, 95. Emerson, as it will be illustrated in a subsequent chapter, also shared this view.

poet-philosophers, whether in England (e.g. Wordsworth and Coleridge) or Germany (e.g. Schiller, the Schlegel brothers, and Novalis). It seems that such leadership composition was both a cause and an effect of the influential idea within romanticism that the poet had special authority in philosophical, moral, and spiritual matters in society. In Germany, by the late eighteenth century, the romantics believed that "[to] be a poet was to be sanctified," for "[it] was above all the poet himself, not the cleric or the philosopher, who could hold all three functions within the unity of his soul."[106] The poet was described by Schiller as "'the only true *human being*'"[107] and by Novalis the "transcendental physician."[108] In England, Wordsworth was depicted by Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a "[poet-priest]."[109]

In "Essay on Morals," an unpublished essay which was probably "written in Germany in the last quarter of 1798,"[110] Wordsworth provides a highly explicit and illuminating account of the impotence of discursive reason's moral arguments over a person's character. At the very beginning of the essay, he writes: "I shall scarcely express myself too strongly when I say that I consider such books as Mr Godwyn's, Mr. Paley's, & those of the whole tribe of authors of that class as impotent [? in *or* ? to] all their intended good purposes."[111] Among the books that Wordsworth has in mind here are Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), the two prominent examples of systemic moral philosophy generated by discursive reason. But with respect to what moral goal does Wordsworth call such works "impotent"? Later in the piece, he writes: "these bald & naked

[106] James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 238.
[107] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 237.
[108] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 243.
[109] Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution*, 36.
[110] *Prose Works*, 1: 123.
[111] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.

reasonings are impotent over our habits, they cannot form them."[112] In thus invoking the notion of habit, Wordsworth is far from being concerned with unreflective tendency to do a certain act as such. After all, he considers only "the act of giving" done by "the affectionate & benevolent man" rather than "[the] vain man, the proud man, [and] the avaricious man" a result of a habit:[113]

> In a [? Strict] sense all our actions are the result of our habits – but I mean here to exclude those accidental & indefinite actions, which do not regularly & in common flow from this or that particular habit. As, for example: a tale of distress is related in *a mixed company,* relief for the sufferers proposed. The vain man, the proud man, the avaricious man & c., all contribute, but from very different feelings. Now in all the cases except in that of the affectionate & benevolent man, I would call the act of giving more or less accidental . . .[114]

Hence, by discussing the generation of habits, Wordsworth is in fact engaging the topic of forming a person's settled character or moral disposition at the level of "feelings"[115] like benevolence.

The nature of rational persuasion's impotence with regard to this kind of moral reform according to Wordsworth becomes clearer when his thought is compared with Godwin's. As Alan Grob points out, Wordsworth, especially in *The Old Cumberland Beggar* (1798), suggests a pathway from "[the] vain man, the proud man, [and] the avaricious man" to "the affectionate & benevolent man."[116] His idea is that, even when a person initially does a good work (e.g. giving alms) ultimately out of some self-interest, as the act *repeats,* the person eventually becomes what he or she has pretended to be: someone who is truly good and virtuous in the sense of caring for others rather than oneself.[117] A similar thought, in fact, is found in Godwin's *Enquiry*:

> The moment we become attached to a particular source of pleasure, beyond any idea of the rank it holds in the catalogue of sources, it must be admitted that it is loved for its

[112] *Prose Works*, 1: 126.
[113] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.
[114] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.
[115] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.
[116] Grob, "Wordsworth and Godwin," 101-2.
[117] This idea of becoming virtuous by trying to act like the virtuous informs both Tocqueville's and Mill's emphasis on the role of political participation through local institutions in cultivating public virtue.

> own sake . . . If this be the case in the passion of avarice or the love of fame, it must also be true in the instance of beneficence, that *after having habituated ourselves to promote the happiness of our child, our family, our country or our species, we are at length brought to approve and desire their happiness without retrospect to ourselves* [emphasis added].[118]

In the hope of triggering and sustaining such process of moral transformation, in Chapter 9 of *Enquiry* ("Of the Tendency of Virtue"), Godwin offers arguments on behalf of virtue (which he mostly equates with "disinterestedness"[119]) that appeal to the individual's self-interest ("there appears to be sufficient reason to believe, that the practice of virtue is the true road to individual happiness"[120]). Wordsworth, however, as "Essay on Morals" implies, did not believe that a rational argument of any kind was potent enough to make a person undergo the kind of a period of morally transformative practices that both he and Godwin believed could bridge selfishness and virtue. In the essay, Wordsworth attributes this moral impotence of "a series of propositions"[121] to their abstractness ("these bald & naked reasonings are impotent"; "lifeless words, & abstract propositions"[122]); these products of much celebrated "reason" present "no image" and therefore convey "no feeling."[123]

Wordsworth's belief "that moral philosophy and discursive reason have no influence on a person's behavior"[124] was not only representative of British romanticism but also shared by many German romantics. According to Frederick C. Beiser, in addition to "[assuming] that reason could justify their moral and political principles," "the German *philosophes,* or *Aufklärer*," furthermore "supposed that reason by itself could provide a sufficient motive for

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[118] Grob, "Wordsworth and Godwin," 102.
[119] William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, vol. 1 (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/90#Godwin_0164-01_657.
[120] Godwin, *An Enquiry*, 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/90#Godwin_0164-01_661.
[121] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.
[122] *Prose Works*, 1: 126.
[123] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.
[124] Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 13.

human action"; "[it] is only necessary to show that a principle or policy is rational, they believed, for someone to accept and then act upon it."[125] Though much less optimistic (or naïve) than the *philosophes* and highly influential on the development of German romanticism, Kant also offers a conception of human freedom that suggests both the possibility and desirability of moral action motivated by reason alone. According to him, "[an] action that springs from desire, emotion, or interest" is "'heteronomous,'" and we act morally and freely only when we follow moral laws that we construct out of our practical reason without being driven by any of our inclinations.[126] In contrast, the German romantics, while not "[denying] that the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity are sanctioned by reason," "did not believe that reason by itself has the power to motivate people to act according to them."[127]

Furthermore, many romantics thought that, far from developing the individual's social self by leading him or her to form a virtuous character, discursive reason stimulated by moral discourse in fact potentially corrodes the social self by inducing moral skepticism. Rather than rationally motivating one to live up to one's existing but latent ethical principle, discursive reason can make it explicit only to weaken one's sense of its validity. Among others, Wordsworth reached this conclusion after an agonizing personal experience of being lost in the conflicting theories and conclusions of moral philosophy in his time,[128] an episode which he describes in *The Prelude*:

> So I fared,
> Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,
> Like culprits to the bar; calling the mind,
> Suspiciously, to establish in plain day
> Her titles and her honours; now believing,

[125] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 5.
[126] Roger Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[127] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 229.
[128] It seems that such an experience also tended to increase some romantics' distrust of the epistemic authority of discursive reason.

> Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed
> With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
> Of obligation, what the rule and whence
> The sanction; till, demanding formal *proof,*
> And seeking it in every thing, *I lost*
> *All feelings of conviction,* and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair [the second emphasis added].
> (*The Prelude,* XI, 293-305)[129]

The German romantics, too, while "[recognizing] the critical value of reason," "never ignored its destructive consequences" including moral and political skepticism.[130] Within aesthetic liberalism, the issue of skepticism or doubt associated with discursive reason is very much pronounced in Tocqueville and Emerson.[131]

Compared with premodern political ideologies, liberalism has greater respect for the individual's freedom of thought and action. Yet as each person is allowed to freely use one's own reason to determine one's way of life, traditional communal beliefs are frequently put in doubt and moral beliefs in general become less fixed and uniform across society even as materialistic egoism gains predominance under the modern structural conditions generated by economic liberalism. In sum, liberal society tends to be marked by the coexistence of increased moral skepticism and widespread commercial culture.

As suggested earlier, most romantics responded to the issue of discursive reason's corrosion of the social self along with other problems associated with liberal modernity by calling for a return to some premodern society that can institutionally safeguard the individual's communal being. On this topic, aesthetic liberals, being liberals, remained committed to the modern liberal system of individual rights, though their responses contained certain restitutionist

[129] Grob, "Wordsworth and Godwin," 111.
[130] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 223.
[131] Although Mill also thought discursive reason can be destructive to the social self, as I will explain in a later chapter on him, this had less to do with moral skepticism than a crisis of associationist psychology.

elements as well. His critique of the tyranny of the majority in *Democracy in America* and opposition to the classical republican idea of state religion notwithstanding, Tocqueville affirmed the cultural hegemony of certain traditional religions, such as Christianity, in liberal democracy, which reflected his desire for shielding certain moral values – especially those he deemed essential for promoting and preserving liberty – from rational scrutiny. Unlike Tocqueville, Emerson was critical of the grip of traditional Christianity over American life from the perspective of self-reliance. But the exercise of discursive reason understood as conscious reasoning does not have a privileged position in his account of openness and self-revision; in fact, he considered this way of thinking as contrived and conducive to skepticism and moral errors. Rather, for Emerson it is receptivity as indiscriminate attention to the world (openness to one's experiences of the world) that is most likely to lead to a new insight whose origin is not entirely transparent to one's consciousness. Whereas Tocqueville and Emerson thus can be said to have discouraged the use of discursive rationality in moral matters in certain ways, Mill seems to have believed that a strong commitment to deliberative/Socratic life can be sufficiently balanced by the cultivation of social feelings through aesthetics, and he would look to ancient Athens as a model for seamlessly combining virtue, aesthetic sensibilities, and rational inquiry. Meanwhile, though their specific opinions on the role of discursive reason in moral life varied, all of them conceived imagination as its substitute for developing the individual's social self, which is, as I will suggest in the next section, another key influence of romanticism on aesthetic liberalism.

III. The Romantic Valorization of Imagination

The counterpart to the romantics' emphasis on the moral impotence of discursive reason which equally shaped aesthetic liberalism was their faith in the power of imagination to move the individual toward virtue. As many would agree, the faculty of imagination has "a central place in Romantic poetological and philosophical theory."[132] As James Engell points out, in constructing their views on imagination, the romantics in fact drew heavily upon key works on the subject belonging to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Kant, for instance, had a major influence on the romantics on the topic in Germany and beyond.

Yet it is also true that the romantics elevated imagination above other human faculties to a degree rarely found among Enlightenment thinkers; to use Engell's words, the idea of imagination, which was "developed in the Enlightenment," became "triumphant in Romanticism."[133] As I have been suggesting in this chapter, one of the ways this had occurred was conceiving imagination as a superior alternative to discursive reason in the domain of moral transformation. In addition, the romantics did not lay as much emphasis on the potential mischief or danger of imagination in moral life as previous theorists of the faculty, such as David Hume and Samuel Johnson, had done.[134] Exemplifying this spirit, Novalis boldly claimed that "'[the] greatest good rests in the imagination.'"[135]

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[132] Dennis F. Mahony, ed., *The Literature of German Romanticism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 149.
[133] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 6. Similarly, Jane Kneller points out that, whereas Kant considered imagination as "a central, mediating faculty," the early German romantics elevated it to being "the *primary* faculty." Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.
[134] According to James Engell, "one of Hume's central themes" was that "the imagination is very easily deceptive." Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 54. Johnson, who was for the most part neither a romantic nor an Enlightenment thinker, also "[brought] to its highest pitch the rationalist suspicion of the imagination, the feeling of many writers in the earlier part of the Enlightenment that there were 'dangers of imagination' in contrast to its pleasures." Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 60.
[135] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 243.

From Schelling to Coleridge, imagination was broadly understood to be a "[pictorial]"[136] or an "image-making"[137] power which takes sense data as its materials. But the romantics also conceived it as a faculty that unites the sensuous with the intellectual (ideas, concepts, etc.).[138] Imagination, for instance, cooperates with intellect to enable cognition. More importantly from this chapter's perspective, beyond its cognitive and reproductive (involving memory) roles, imagination creatively embodies, or makes sensuous, abstract ideas including freedom and the moral law.

Both of these ideas about imagination find expression in some of Kant's major works that greatly influenced the romantics in general. According to Kant, imagination not only plays a crucial role in cognition by giving order to the sensory manifold in accordance with the concepts of understanding but also, when in "a free play," freed from the rules of understanding, creates an "aesthetic idea," a symbolic presentation of an abstract "rational idea" (e.g. moral freedom) which, strictly speaking, cannot be exemplified.[139] The notion of imagination as a power that unifies or bridges the sensuous and the intellectual also appears later in a different guise in Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), his "study of the education of man's imagination."[140] According to Engell, Schiller's *Spieltrieb*, "usually translated as 'play-drive,'" actually "parallels the idea of imagination in other major figures" and "can be taken to stand for the imagination when it operates in an aesthetic context that includes not only art but perception and the conduct of life."[141] Significantly, *Spieltrieb* is essentially "the mediating and unifying

[136] Mahony, ed., *The Literature of German Romanticism*, 149.
[137] Vivian C. Hopkins, *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 32.
[138] This pair of opposites is closely related to several others that the romantics hoped imagination would bridge – subjective vs. objective, particular vs. universal, man vs. nature, etc.
[139] Andrew Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste: The role of aesthetic ideas," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85, no. 3 (2007), 415-433.
[140] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 231.
[141] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 231.

drive" that "brings sense impressions, feelings, and passions (*Gefühle*) into harmony with the ideas of reason."[142] A little after Schiller's work, reworking the philosophical notions of both Kant and Schiller in various ways, Coleridge would achieve the distinction of "[stating] more about the imagination than any other Romantic."[143] Along with its others aspects, Coleridge emphasized imagination's role in creating symbolic/sensuous expressions for Reason's ideas; imagination is "'that reconciling and mediatory power'" which "'[incorporates] the Reason in Images of the Sense.'"[144] The poetic imagination, especially, "combines 'thoughts and passions,' with 'color, form, motion, and sound,'" "'[stamping] them into unity in the mould of a moral idea.'"[145]

That imagination unites the abstract (including normative ideas) with the concrete/sensuous, thereby connecting the former to desires and passions that serve as motives of conduct, is one of the reasons why the romantics considered imagination to be so important for moral education.[146] Crucially, one way in which imagination joins the abstract and the concrete/sensuous is creating elevating images or ideals in the mind, and implicit in the writings of several major romantics, such as Wordsworth and Novalis, is the idea of moral transformation through this idealizing power of imagination.[147] As Grob points out, in "Essay on Morals,"

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[142] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 232.
[143] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 328.
[144] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 338.
[145] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 360.
[146] A similar thought is implied in a view Reiss attributes to Adam Müller: "A true political science requires us to appreciate images and examples. Since an abstract theory is always limited in scope it can never arouse human loyalty and enthusiasms such as can be kindled by a living idea." Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, 28.
[147] This is not to say that the romantics (and aesthetic liberals) conceived the process of idealization as the only way through which imagination can improve a person's moral life. For instance, most romantics would agree with Mill's point that imagination can also make a key contribution simply by allowing us to access the lives of different others (whether they are morally admirable or not), which tends to enhance our understanding of human nature. The same point applies to the romantics' view on the role of art and literature in moral education. Yet in this chapter I highlight the idealizing function of imagination because my purpose is to relate romanticism specifically to aesthetic liberalism.

Wordsworth implicitly contrasts "the power of the poet and the power of the philosopher to move men to virtue."[148] Whereas the philosopher uses and appeals to discursive reason to no avail, the poet shapes the reader's character by inducing his or her imagination to form an "image" that conveys a virtuous "feeling" like the benevolent affection for others.[149]

Another key romantic text that illustrates the idea of moral transformation through the idealizing power of imagination is Novalis' "Faith and Love or the King and Queen" which was "published in the *Yearbooks of the Prussian Monarchy*, Berlin, in July 1798," the same year Wordsworth's "Essay on Morals" is thought to have been written in Germany.[150] In the characteristic spirit of romanticism, in this writing Novalis expresses his moral and political concern about the predominance of materialistic egoism in liberal society:

> The principle of the famous old system is to bind everyone to the state through self-interest . . . A great deal of effort has been expended on this political squaring of the circle: but raw self-interest seems to be totally imponderable, antisystematic. It has not proved possible to confine it at all, something which the nature of every state arrangement necessarily requires. Still this formal acceptance of common egoism as a principle has caused enormous harm, and the germ of the revolution of our time lies nowhere but here . . . Sensuality had too quickly gained enormous ground . . . coarse self-interest became a passion . . . Selfless love in one's heart and its principle in one's head, that is the sole, eternal basis of all true, indissoluble bonds . . .[151]

The passage suggests that Novalis was in alignment with most German romantics in thinking that "[the] state as community was based on affective, other-regarding values such as love, not on legal arrangements that were designed to protect individual interest."[152] "Faith and Love or the King and Queen" takes as its subject matter King Frederick William III and Queen Luise of

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[148] Grob, "Wordsworth and Godwin," 116.
[149] *Prose Works*, 1: 125.
[150] *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 175. As mentioned previously, Wordsworth's essay is believed to have been "written in Germany in the last quarter of 1798." But in suggesting the chronological synchronicity, I am not claiming any direct influence of Novalis' text on Wordsworth's.
[151] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 93.
[152] Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys, eds., *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 53.

Prussia who "ascended the throne at the end of 1797,"[153] and Novalis emphasizes that the royal couple can play an essential role in promoting "selfless love" as well as other public and private virtues in Prussia as a moral exemplar whom people can "imaginatively appropriate."[154] He suggests that encountering, or "[beholding],"[155] the king or queen in person or through some cultural media (e.g. "the queen's picture"[156]) would make people resemble the royal person by forming an elevating image or ideal in their minds.[157]

Significantly, Novalis understands this process to consist in awakening the individual's *own* latent ethical ideal, thereby associating it with individual autonomy rather than heteronomy. For instance, he describes the queen's picture, which he wishes to be placed in every Prussian woman's living room, as "a beautiful, strong *reminder* of the original image which each of us has set ourselves to reach [emphasis added]."[158] Also, "every person" has "sprung from an ancient royal house," and what the visibility of the royal couple does is to assist every citizen to "bear the stamp of his descent" by "[becoming] worthy of the throne."[159] Thus conceived, Novalis' mimetic pedagogy based on the imaginative faculty is reconciled to his demand in the same writing that "[a] person should only obey his own laws."[160] This quoted line is a clear echo of Kant's notion of freedom as autonomy which is about following self-legislated moral laws. But

[153] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 16.
[154] Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, 26.
[155] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 87.
[156] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 92.
[157] Carlyle's influential *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) attributes a similarly transformative role to a heroic individual: "I said, the Great Man was always as lightning out of Heaven; the rest of men waited for him like fuel, and then they too would flame." Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 76.
[158] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 92.
[159] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 98.
[160] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 98. Concerning Novalis on autonomy, Kristin Gjesdal makes an interesting point that Novalis hoped "the royal couple would turn the monarchy into a symbol of the democratic state itself" "by setting an example of autonomous thinking while, all the same, representing a continuity with the past." Kristin Gjesdal, "Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis]," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014).

Novalis' conception of autonomy embedded in his mimetic pedagogy is more "sensuous" in that it replaces practical reason, abstract moral laws, and the force of reason in Kant's conception with imagination, normative image ("ideal"), and the aesthetic force of beauty.[161]

Concerning the last item, it is important to note how Novalis explicitly or implicitly employs artistic aesthetic categories in describing the effects of the visibility of the royal couple. For Novalis, the queen's picture is, as mentioned earlier, a "beautiful" reminder of our original image, and the royal court will be like "the gathering place of the best and most beautiful [as] it should be according to the original idea."[162] "A natural, exemplary person" like the king or queen is "a poet's dream."[163] Through these references, Novalis suggests that the ideal-forming function of imagination brings into life the aesthetic force of beauty, which, as explained in the introductory chapter, aesthetic liberals conceived as a key alternative to the force of reason in generating public-spirited political agency in liberal society.

Aesthetic categories such as imagination and beauty built into Novalis' conception of autonomy is also an example of the romantic tendency to aestheticize moral life. In Novalis' hands, moral freedom and transformation turns into a process of romantic art,[164] which pursues self-expression rather than conformity to rules external to oneself.[165] The moral artist achieves

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[161] This is not to suggest that Kant did not see a significant connection between beauty and morality. In fact, in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) he describes beauty as "a symbol of morality." María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey L. Powell, eds., *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2018), 155. According to Jeffrey L. Powell, by this phrase Kant is indicating an "analogous structure of reflection" between "aesthetic judgments and moral judgments": "[Just] as the reflective judgment in judgments of taste gives rise to the feeling of pleasure, moral judgments give rise to the feeling of respect or reverence, *Achtung*." López and Powell, eds., *Aesthetic Reason,* 158. Still, it seems that Kant's conception of moral autonomy as such does not have a legitimate place for the force of beauty.

[162] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 92-3.

[163] Stoljar, ed., *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, 99.

[164] In "Two Concepts of Freedom: Romantic and Liberal," Berlin makes a similar point about the romantics in general: "I am free not merely when no one is preventing me, but when I am acting, altering things, imposing a pattern, impressing my personality upon persons or objects." Berlin, *Political Ideas,* 193.

[165] Blanning: "This was the essence of the romantic revolution: from now on artistic creativity was to be *from the inside out*." Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution,* 15.

self-expression by molding himself or herself as malleable medium in accordance with his or her own moral-aesthetic vision.

As both Wordsworth's and Novalis' writings suggest, the romantics considered exposure to art to be a key trigger for moral transformation through imagination.[166] In Germany, Schiller argued that a beautiful object, by representing the human ideal of the harmony of the faculties in a concrete form,[167] elevates the spectator to a state of freedom; "[the] beautiful in art" "is not to be mistaken for reality itself but is a calling on reality to attain a higher state."[168] Schiller also believed that this achievement of the inner state of harmony and freedom had a great political significance: "Man has relied on his intellect only and neglected the cultivation of the heart, to the effect that there has been no balance that could have enabled him to act politically wiser."[169] Heavily influenced by Schiller, the early German romantics were especially convinced of "the social and political significance of the artist," even believing that "[art], and art alone, can unify the divided powers of the people, provide them with a model of virtue, and inspire them to action."[170] Similarly, in Britain, Carlyle among many others shared Schiller's "moralist view of literature."[171]

Among the subcategories of art, poetry held a particularly important place in the romantic project of moral reform in society. The British romantics (many of whom were greatly

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[166] Although the idea that art can morally educate is not new with romanticism, it seems that its substitution for rational arguments in moral psychology and transformation as described in this chapter is.
[167] Leonard P. Wessell, Jr., "Schiller and the Genesis of German Romanticism," *Studies in Romanticism* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1971), 176-198.
[168] Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 237.
[169] López and Powell, eds., *Aesthetic Reason,* 15.
[170] Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 229.
[171] Ashton, *The German Idea*, 92. There is actually a section in Godwin's *Enquiry* where he designates "literature" as a principal cause of moral improvement. But there, using the term "literature" in a very broad sense (so that natural scientific works, such as Newton's, are also included), he clearly places his hope for the spread of virtue on the operation of discursive reason. For instance, at one point in the section he writes: "In proportion as one reasoner compares his deductions with those of another, the weak places of his argument will be detected, the principles he too hastily adopted will be overthrown, and the judgments, in which his mind was exposed to no sinister influence, will be confirmed." Godwin, *An Enquiry*, 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/90#Godwin_0164-01_104.

influenced by German romanticism's aesthetics and philosophy) were "literary moralists"[172] who "[held] to the moral improvement of audience as a primary end of poetry and [developed] a poetics closely aligned with ethics."[173] They also believed that poetry should aim to "cultivate the affective elements of human nature" rather than imparting propositional knowledge.[174] According to Wordsworth and his followers, "[by] placing the reader in his [the poet's] own affective state of mind, the poet, without inculcating doctrine, directly forms character."[175] Percy Bysshe Shelley, too, "wanted intensely to unite the functions of poet and reformer," and in "Defence of Poetry," written in 1821 and "the most elaborately reasoned and most impressive of all romantic statements of the moral value of poetry," he argues that poetry can promote moral reform without being didactic by allowing an imaginative "identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own."[176]

Meanwhile, in addition to being deeply involved with the existing genre of poetry, the German romantics in the late eighteenth century developed the notions of "myth" and "mythology" as another literary response to what they saw as the moral and political problems of modern society.[177] Among others, Johann Gottfried Herder, whom Berlin counted as one of "the true founders of Romanticism,"[178] "developed a concept of myth as a distinctive fusion of poetry and religion that expressed the essential spirit of a nation."[179] Taking Herder's notion into

[172] Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 41.
[173] Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 16.
[174] Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 103.
[175] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 329.
[176] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 331.
[177] I introduce this example not because it finds an exact match in the thoughts of other romantics or aesthetic liberals but because it illustrates the general romantic emphasis on the role of imaginative cultural products (which express normative values and principles) in people's moral and political lives.
[178] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 66.
[179] George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1.

account, in *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche*, George S. Williamson conceives "myth" in the period he studies as generally denoting "a sacred narrative of gods, heroes, or cosmogony that reflects the fundamental values and beliefs of a community or nation" and "mythology" "a system of sacred images, narratives, and rituals that reflects the values of a community or nation."[180]

Conclusion

This chapter presented romanticism, conceived as the Europe-wide movement between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that both criticized liberal modernity and offered a significant theoretical perspective on reason relative to other human faculties, as the most important intellectual source of the aesthetic liberalism of Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson. The specific aspect of romanticism which shaped aesthetic liberalism most was its critique of discursive reason and valorization of imagination on the topic of individual moral transformation. Apart from deflating the Enlightenment's confidence in the epistemic authority of discursive reason, the romantics suggested that rational arguments on behalf of virtue which are generated by, and appealing to, discursive reason are powerless to actually form a virtuous character. They also thought, worse still, discursive reason is often corrosive to the existing social self that can be cultivated toward virtue. Instead, the romantics believed in the power of imagination and especially its ideal-constructing function, which explains their emphasis on the moral and political significance of art, such as poetry. In the hands of aesthetic liberals, this romantic contrast between the two faculties on the issue of generating virtue developed into

[180] Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, 6.

aesthetic liberalism's emphasis on aesthetic elevation over rational persuasion in the formation of a public-spirited political agent. Hence, in addition to, as both Berlin and Rosenblum imply, contributing to the justification of liberal public goods against illiberal ones, romanticism had also served as a key resource for liberalism's coming to terms with the limitation and danger of discursive justification itself in moral and political life.

In the subsequent chapters, I will explore the various ways in which aesthetic liberals creatively assimilated the romantic critique of discursive reason and valorization of imagination in the domain of moral transformation, often significantly modifying it by finding new political applications or rationales for its main idea.

Chapter Two:
The Crisis of the Political and Tocqueville's Poetry of the Revolution

Introduction

In *Democracy in America* and elsewhere, Tocqueville designates a widespread culture of materialism, or the love of material comfort and pleasure, as one of the most politically troubling features of a democratic society where the old aristocratic distinctions are destroyed.[181] Especially concerned about materialism's replacement of authentic politics characterized by, among others, disinterested devotion to a public good, Tocqueville throughout his career invested much effort in identifying those factors that could promote such politics under democratic conditions. On this topic, within Tocqueville scholarship, his commitment to promoting the hegemony of certain mores (especially religious ones), associational life, and local participatory institutions has been given special attention.[182] Many have pointed out his belief that religious and republican notions of the good life as well as local political participation foster civic virtues like public spirit. This chapter, however, reconstructs Tocqueville's aesthetic liberalism, according to which the heroic beauty of revolutionary political actors conveyed through cultural works can play a significant role in generating political virtue in liberal citizens. As will be explained later in the chapter, this aesthetic focus and an attention to the romantic roots of his thought offer a new perspective on the nature of Tocqueville's civic education

[181] Other sociopolitical ills born of equality discussed in *Democracy* include the tyranny of the majority, conformity, individualism, and fatalism. While materialism was far from the only source of political concern for Tocqueville, in many ways it has great significance for his political aesthetics as well as his political thought as a whole. For example, materialism informs his conception of authentic politics, or the political, and serves as a key category for his analysis of the predicament of French politics in and before his time.

[182] Nearly all scholarly works that discuss Tocqueville's attempt to revive the political stress at least one of the three approaches. The ones that I consulted for this chapter include Wolin 2001, Danoff 2010, and Villa 2017 among many others.

project for democratic society especially in relation to concepts such as discursive reason and individual moral autonomy.

Meanwhile, several scholars have discussed the aesthetic dimension of Tocqueville's political thought by focusing on the notion of "glory" that appears in his writings on French military imperialism. Both Jennifer Pitts and Kevin Duong, for instance, highlight Tocqueville's faith that the pursuit of glory through colonial conquest could result in a morally regenerated and politically involved citizenry in France. Although these and similar works are much valuable for understanding Tocqueville as well as the history of liberalism, they also represent the nearly exclusive association of the aesthetic with military violence in the study of his political aesthetics.[183] By focusing instead on the notion of "beauty" as it appears in *Democracy* and his writings on the French Revolution of 1789, I aim to recover a branch of his political aesthetics that responds to the crisis of the political without being based upon a militaristic agenda while informing a democratic project of establishing or expanding institutions of political participation. In addition, my approach is intended to enhance our understanding of the aesthetic dimensions of notions such as "glory" and "grandeur" which are frequently found across Tocqueville's writings. Although there is a general sense in political theory that these are aesthetic categories, little has been said about what makes them particularly "aesthetic."[184] I am going to suggest that

[183] An exception in this regard is Jason Frank's recent work on Tocqueville ("Tocqueville's Religious Dread," in *The Democratic Sublime: On Aesthetics and Popular Assembly* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming)). Among other things, Frank's suggestion that for Tocqueville the "grandeur" of democratic political action counteracts apathy and low-minded politics in liberal society has a broad resonance with my arguments in this chapter. But I believe the chapter can further illuminate the aesthetic dimension of the meaning of "grandeur" as well as its psychological workings by exploring its connection to the notion of beauty. Also, this chapter gives special attention to Tocqueville's romantic substitution of aesthetics for rational persuasion in the domain of civic moral education in democratic society.

[184] Consider, for instance, that Tocqueville himself sometimes uses the word "glory" to mean simply being in others' good opinion.

in Tocqueville's case these notions, though not identical to "beauty," contain in their meanings a particular type of the latter.[185]

In the sections that follow, I start by introducing Tocqueville's conception of authentic politics as well as his political critique of the predominance of materialism in democratic societies such as America and France. I then illustrate how his turn to aesthetics as a response to the political challenges of materialism in the French national context of his time reflected nineteenth-century romanticism's critique of discursive reason and valorization of imagination in the domain of moral education. In the final section, I explore a much overlooked yet theoretically significant aspect of his political aesthetics by considering his own role as a "democratic-aristocratic poet" who tried to promote authentic politics among the French people under the Second Empire through idealizing depictions of the French revolutionaries of 1789.

I. The Crisis of the Political in Materialistic Democracy

As Sheldon S. Wolin points out, "[the] abiding concern of Tocqueville's thinking, the referent point by which he tried to define his life as well as the task before his generation, was the revival of the political," or, "in his phrase, *la chose publique* [the public thing]."[186] In Tocqueville's view, a key aspect of authentic politics is the concern for public good, or what he often calls "disinterestedness."[187] For instance, in an 1847 letter to Louis de Kergolay, comparing

[185] Similarly, in "The Crisis of Culture," Hannah Arendt at one point conceives glory as a kind of beauty belonging to great words and deeds in the public realm. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 215.
[186] Sheldon S. Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.
[187] Although Tocqueville nowhere explicitly defines disinterestedness, its broad meaning can be grasped somewhat by considering what it is *not* from his perspective; especially, being a disinterested political actor requires transcending material self-interest (including one's economic class interest). As the present paragraph suggests, the public interest Tocqueville most closely associates with disinterestedness is civil and political liberties. Despite this

political and religious passions, Tocqueville notes that both share "'concern for general and to some degree immaterial interests'" and that "'political passion and the passion for [private] well being cannot exist in the same soul.'"[188] As Wolin suggests, "[the] elevation of the political and the making of a public self were conscious gestures of opposition to the privatizing tendencies for which he, as much as any writer of this time, provided the authoritative critique."[189] In addition, as it will be illustrated later, the public interest to which Tocqueville was most passionately devoted for much of his career was the establishment and preservation of institutions of political liberty at both national and local levels in France. Apart from himself, Tocqueville often considered the French revolutionaries just before the first meeting of the Estates-General in 1789 as exemplifying an authentic politics characterized by heroic self-sacrifice for the sake of liberty. Furthermore, in a sense he considered such politics dedicated to the political cause of liberty to be itself an inspiring manifestation of liberty.[190]

At the same time, Tocqueville felt deeply concerned about the actual or potential replacement of authentic politics by several manifestations of materialism rooted in the democratic social state: Interest politics, indifference to public affairs due to preoccupation with money-making, and political inaction against despotism out of the overriding concern for one's own material well-being.

In *Democracy,* especially in the second volume, Tocqueville highlights the presence of widespread materialism in America and analyzes at length its nature, cause, and effects. He

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emphasis on an "immaterial" public good, his notion of having public spirit does not seem to exclude being concerned for the general economic welfare of one's own society.

[188] Jason Frank, *The Democratic Sublime: On Aesthetics and Popular Assembly* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[189] Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 5.

[190] His multi-faceted notion of liberty will be discussed later in the third section of this chapter.

observes that in America "everyone feels" "the passion for material well-being."[191] The love of bodily comfort and pleasure, though it had been present throughout human history, never existed in society in such a generalized fashion.

In aristocracy, Tocqueville explains, the upper classes mostly take wealth for granted while the lower ones hope only for the riches of afterlife. But the situation changes as social conditions become more equal. When "ranks are mingled," "privileges destroyed," "patrimonies divide," and "enlightenment and liberty spread," social mobility increases dramatically, and all classes become concerned with either gaining or protecting material wealth and comfort.[192] Simultaneously, there also occurs a great expansion in the size and influence of the middle class whose particularly intense love of material prosperity[193] begins to infect all the rest of society.[194]

In *Democracy,* Tocqueville clearly indicates that materialism has negative political implications, one of which is political apathy, or indifference to public affairs due to preoccupation with economic activity.[195] Although materialism in democracy can be compatible with the "regularity of morals" and "public tranquility," even such "honest materialism" would lead citizens to be absorbed in the pursuit of (morally permissible) material pleasures and "soften

[191] *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la democratie en Amerique, A Bilingual French-English Edition*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 3 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 931.
[192] *Democracy in America*, 3: 933.
[193] In *Democracy*, Tocqueville suggests that people in the middle class tend to be especially materialistic because they "have enough material enjoyments to conceive the taste for these enjoyments [and] not enough to be content with them." *Democracy in America*, 3: 933.
[194] Perhaps due to Tocqueville's reliance on the category of "equality of conditions" (sometimes simply referred to as "democracy") in explaining materialism's modern predominance, his commentators rarely point out that the account given in *Democracy* actually describes a certain historical development of "liberalism." But if economic liberalism can be broadly understood as a doctrine that insists on creating a free market society where a mass of individuals compete for material goods unhindered or unaided by feudal privileges and regulations, then the transition Tocqueville depicts is very much a historical unfolding of that liberal doctrine. This is not to suggest, however, that he derived such a depiction from a study of liberal economic philosophy.
[195] By "political apathy" in this chapter, I specifically refer to withdrawal from politics due to materialism, whereas it seems that, strictly speaking, "individualism" as Tocqueville defines it can be based on an immaterial self-interest as well.

them" and "silently [relax] all their springs of action."[196] The danger of political apathy stemming from materialism is much greater in a democratic nation lacking many of the unique cultural and institutional advantages of America (e.g. France). When in such society citizens from all classes regard the "exercise of their political rights" as "a tiresome inconvenience that distracts them from their industry," "the place of government is as though empty" and would be soon occupied by either one man or one faction.[197] Toward the end of the second volume, Tocqueville also conceives apathy as promoting administrative despotism. In this possible future democratic society, a great majority of citizens are so preoccupied with pursuing "small and vulgar pleasures" in private life that the regulation of much of their lives is placed in the hands of an immense centralized bureaucracy.[198]

Another negative political consequence of materialism Tocqueville suggests in *Democracy* and elsewhere is politics driven by material self-interest.[199] In the first volume of *Democracy,* for instance, he observes that both northern and southern political parties in America in the 1830s "rest [not] on principles [but] on material interests."[200] In the second volume, he also implies that a widespread materialism tends to prevent great revolutions based on ideas because "nothing [is] more contrary to revolutionary passions" than "an ardent and constant desire to augment his well-being" and commercial and industrial activities inspired by this desire.[201]

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[196] *Democracy in America*, 3: 938.
[197] *Democracy in America*, 3: 951.
[198] *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la democratie en Amerique, A Bilingual French-English Edition*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 4 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 1249.
[199] This is another point suggesting the conceptual distinction between materialism and individualism, which presupposes a lack of participation in public affairs; there is, after all, such a thing as materialistic politics.
[200] *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la democratie en Amerique, A Bilingual French-English Edition*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 2 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 284.
[201] *Democracy in America*, 4: 1137.

Throughout his career, Tocqueville was also keenly aware of materialism's harmful presence in his own country. For example, in an 1841 letter to Mill, Tocqueville expressed his concern about "the all-consuming obsession with money, the increasing commercialization of life, and the general abasement of mind and taste brought forth by the rise of the middle class"[202] in France. During the July Monarchy (1830-1848), his chief target of criticism was the interest politics of the bourgeoisie who formed the country's governing class. In *Recollections,* written after this regime ended, he remembers the period as when "every matter was settled by the members of one class [the bourgeoisie], in accordance with their interests and point of view."[203]

After the establishment of the Second Empire in 1852, Tocqueville shifted his attention to the role of materialism in the French people's political inaction against Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's despotic government. In an 1852 letter to Christophe Léon Louis Juchault de Lamoricière, Tocqueville claimed that most people in the country, throughout the different classes, "asked only 'to serve under whoever would assure its material well-being.'"[204] While "'the farmers, the bourgeoisie, [and] the shopowners'" were all "'happy to sacrifice the freedom, the dignity, [and] the honor of their country'" "'so long as they [were] assured tranquility and the sale of their produce or merchandise,'" the salons of Paris were replete with "'so-called gentlemen'" who "'trembled so much for their incomes'" that the new despotism "'[filled] them with joy.'"[205]

Meanwhile, there are several mitigating factors of materialism that are given serious attention by Tocqueville in *Democracy*. One of them, perhaps most significant,[206] is what

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[202] Aurelian Craiutu, "Tocqueville's Paradoxical Moderation," *The Review of Politics* 67, no. 4 (2005), 610.
[203] *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848,* eds. J.P. Mayer and A.P. Kerr (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 10.
[204] Andre Jardin, *Tocqueville* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 475.
[205] Jardin, *Tocqueville,* 475.
[206] In *Democracy*, Tocqueville says, "The importance of mores is a common truth to which study and experience constantly lead. It seems to me that I find it placed in my mind like a central point; I see it at the end of all my

Tocqueville refers to as "mores" (*moeurs*).[207] In *Democracy*, he defines mores very broadly, applying it not only to ancient "habits of the heart" but also "to the different notions that men possess, to the diverse opinions that are current among them, and to the ensemble of ideas from which the habits of the mind are formed"[208]; it is, in short, "the whole moral and intellectual state of a people."[209] Based on this definition and his usage of the term across different writings, one may conclude that his conception of mores includes a variety of socially pervasive beliefs and mental habits as well as the related sentiments and informal practices. Tocqueville also distinguishes mores from written laws promulgated by the state (and hence from formal political institutions).

Among various types of mores, religion clearly holds an important place in Tocqueville's political thought, which is suggested by the fact that in the first volume of *Democracy* "three out of the five subchapters on mores and their contribution to the success of the democratic republic examine the influence of religion."[210] He believed that, in addition to other services it can perform for democracy, religion "is supposed to purify and regulate the love of wealth and materialism predominant in democratic societies."[211] For this reason, he had a largely favorable view of Christianity's strong presence in America.

Though entirely missing from the first volume's chapter on mores, what Tocqueville discusses as "the doctrine of interest well understood" in the second volume can be also considered a kind of mores that mitigates materialism, albeit in interaction with other factors.[212]

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ideas." *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la democratie en Amerique, A Bilingual French-English Edition*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 499.
[207] *Democracy in America*, 1: 466.
[208] *Democracy in America*, 1: 466.
[209] *Democracy in America*, 1: 467.
[210] Donald J. Maletz, "Tocqueville on Mores and the Preservation of Republics," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (January 2005), 5.
[211] Craiutu, "Tocqueville's Paradoxical Moderation," 625.
[212] *Democracy in America*, 3: 918.

In *Democracy*, he presents this doctrine as the favorite of American moralists who grasp that they must speak in the language of self-interest in order to have a hearing among their fellow citizens. The doctrine teaches that "man, by serving his fellows, serves himself, and that his particular interest is to do good."[213] Tocqueville notes the immense popularity of the doctrine in America; it has been so "universally admitted" that it is found "no less in the mouths of the poor than in those of the rich."[214] Importantly for Tocqueville, the doctrine of interest well understood counteracts "individualism,"[215] or indifference to public affairs, by promoting service to others through political participation. As Brian Danoff points out, "Tocqueville makes it clear that 'self-interest properly understood' not only teaches us to be good in our private lives, but it also leads us to be good citizens insofar as it induces us to participate in communal life."[216]

Tocqueville's promotion of a liberal conception of citizenship based on the doctrine of interest well understood in *Democracy* indicates that he cannot be unambiguously classed as a civic-republican thinker. But it is to go too far, as Jessica L. Kimpell seems to do, to hold that Tocqueville considered enlightened self-interest to be sufficient for protecting liberty or at any rate the most that could be aspired to in liberal democracy.[217] As Danoff argues, Tocqueville regarded the doctrine of interest well understood as necessary but insufficient for safeguarding freedom in society.[218] Furthermore, Tocqueville did not conceive any citizenship that is ultimately based on self-interest to be suitable for the revolutionary task of establishing liberal democratic political institutions against despotism.

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[213] *Democracy in America*, 3: 919.
[214] *Democracy in America*, 3: 920.
[215] *Democracy in America*, 3: 918.
[216] Brian Danoff, *Educating Democracy: Alexis de Tocqueville and Leadership in America* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2010), 13.
[217] Jessica L. Kimpell, "Republican civic virtue, enlightened self-interest and Tocqueville," *European Journal of Political Theory* 14, no. 3 (2015), 345-367.
[218] Danoff, *Educating Democracy*.

Although the doctrine of interest well understood teaches that "the interest of each man is to be honest"[219] – or virtuous more generally – the doctrine by itself "cannot make a man virtuous."[220] Comparing America with France, Tocqueville says "egoism" in America is not any less in degree but just more "enlightened" in the sense that "[each] American knows how to sacrifice a portion of his particular interests in order to save the rest."[221] Similarly, what the American utilitarian[222] doctrine in fact does is making a self-interested individual merely smarter about pursuing his or her self-interest rather than fostering genuine public spirit in the person. Hence, despite the near unanimous acceptance of the doctrine, which insists that "virtue and interest are in agreement,"[223] in America, as early as 1831 Tocqueville observes in a notebook entry that "enlightened" Americans still contrast with citizens of ancient republics who were indeed "virtuous" in the sense of being willing to "sacrifice private interests to the general good."[224]

Rather than by itself, the doctrine of interest well understood generates public-spiritedness in interaction with local political institutions and associations, which Tocqueville considered to be "both manifestations of political freedom and a pedagogical tool."[225] In *Democracy*, Tocqueville suggests that local political participation eventually fosters genuine public spirit in an initially self-interested individual: "You first get involved in the general interest by necessity, and then by choice; what was calculation becomes instinct; and by working

[219] *Democracy in America*, 3: 920.
[220] *Democracy in America*, 3: 922.
[221] *Democracy in America*, 3: 922.
[222] Scholars commonly refer to the doctrine of interest well-understood as "utilitarian" (e.g. Danoff 2007 and Welch 2012). I think this is because Tocqueville himself equates interest with "usefulness" in his discussion of the doctrine in *Democracy* (e.g. Vol. 2, pt. 2, ch. 8).
[223] *Democracy in America*, 3: 920.
[224] Danoff, *Educating Democracy*, 13-4.
[225] Nicholas Toloudis, "Tocqueville's Guizot Moment," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 28, no. 3 (2010), 11.

for the good of your fellow citizens, you finally acquire the habit and taste of serving them."[226] Similarly, Tocqueville indicates that in American democracy "[sentiments] and ideas are renewed, *the heart grows larger* [,] and the human mind develops [emphasis added]"[227] through life in associations.

As *Democracy* makes clear, Tocqueville's conception of mores, local political institutions, and associational life as remedies for materialism born of the democratic social state was inspired by the example of American democracy. France in his time, however, was deficient in all of these mitigating factors. Toward the end of the first volume's chapter on mores, he points out that in Europe, in contrast to America, "religion has lost its dominion over souls."[228] Also, as mentioned earlier, he did not think that the doctrine of interest well understood had nearly as much presence in France as in America. Moreover, "[long] before the French Revolution, administrative centralization had destroyed autonomous townships,"[229] "leading citizens to a dull administrative obedience rather than active participatory citizenship."[230] "The spirit of association was similarly moribund"[231]; "[the] French government had rendered associations illegal during the Revolution and had suppressed them since then."[232]

Even as France was much disadvantaged compared with America in counteracting materialism, from Tocqueville's perspective the former had a greater need for authentic politics transcending private material interest. This was because, while many of the free institutions Americans took for granted at local and national levels had yet to be established or reinvigorated

[226] *Democracy in America*, 3: 893.
[227] *Democracy in America*, 3: 900.
[228] *Democracy in America*, 2: 507.
[229] Toloudis, "Tocqueville's Guizot Moment," 16.
[230] Kevin Duong, "The Demands of Glory: Tocqueville and Terror in Algeria," *The Review of Politics* 80 (2018), 43.
[231] Toloudis, "Tocqueville's Guizot Moment," 16.
[232] Toloudis, "Tocqueville's Guizot Moment," 12.

in France, a "bold"[233] enterprise of pursuing liberty through such fundamental political reorganization of the country (in short, a political revolution) required a genuine concern for public good that is absent in interest politics. It is within this national historical context of France described above that Tocqueville turned to an aesthetic remedy for materialism based on the idealizing power of human imagination.[234]

II. Romanticism and Tocqueville's Politics of Imagination

As suggested in the previous chapters, romanticism, one of the dominant intellectual currents of the early nineteenth century in both Europe and America, played a major role in the formation of Tocqueville's political aesthetics. In *Democracy*, Tocqueville describes several prominent romantic works – Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, François-René de Chateaubriand's *René*, and Alphonse de Lamartine's *Jocelyn* – as being representative of democratic literature.[235] Also, like Emerson, Tocqueville read, met, and admired William Ellery Channing who was deeply influenced by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[236] Although Tocqueville did not frequently cite a specific romantic author in his writing, he certainly "lived amid the swirl of ideas occasioned by the poetry of Coleridge, Byron, and Wordsworth both in England and on the Continent."[237]

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[233] *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life in Letters and Politics*, eds. Oliver Zunz and Alan S. Kahan (Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 340.
[234] Unlike Mill in England and Emerson in America who were mostly concerned with promoting public-spirited politics within the institutions of representative government, Tocqueville during the Second Empire in France developed his political aesthetics in response to the need for the founding of a liberal constitutional order itself.
[235] *Democracy in America*, 3: 841.
[236] Reino Virtanen, "Tocqueville and William Ellery Channing," *American Literature* 22, no. 1 (March 1950), 21-28.
[237] Paul A. Lombardo, "Historic Echoes: Romantic Emphasis in Tocqueville's 'Democracy in America,'" *Journal of Thought* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 68.

Among the scholars who discuss romanticism's influence on Tocqueville, most focus on how romantic literature formed his conception of democratic poetry as described in *Democracy* while some highlight his sharing of certain broad anthropological and historical themes with the romantics like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Coleridge, Byron, and Wordsworth.[238]

In this section, however, I trace in Tocqueville's thought two key elements of the romantic theory of moral education: Its critique of discursive reason as a source of moral transformation and valorization of imagination as the alternative. To the extent that they inform his reflection on the cultivation of political virtue, these two strands of romantic thinking play a formative role in his idea of political cultivation and agency in democratic society.

Meanwhile, in *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville*, Roger Boesche provides a brief discussion of the relationship between romanticism and Tocqueville that has some resonance with my view on the topic. Boesche writes, "Like a good Romantic, Tocqueville argued that passion leads to action, reason to political paralysis."[239] Whereas reason discourages political action by inducing a sense of uncertainty about one's political opinion, a great passion "triumphs over uncertainty and pushes people toward great political effort."[240] Although Boesche is right to see the theme of reason's generation of uncertainty and doubt as a romantic element in Tocqueville's thinking, his account of romanticism's influence on Tocqueville concerning the role of reason in politics needs significant expansion. Implicit in Boesche's discussion is a contrast between a passionate, bold, convinced, romantic individual making a great political effort and a cold, calculating, vacillating, utilitarian, liberal individual who for the most part has no political life. There is no doubt that Tocqueville preferred the former type of the individual to

[238] The examples Paul A. Lombardo cites in this regard are: "the eventual perfectibility of man, the inevitability of equality, and the progress apparent in human history." Lombardo, "Historic Echoes," 68.
[239] Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 209.
[240] Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism*, 209.

the latter as Boesche suggests. But Tocqueville also importantly raised the question of whether the latter could be reasoned into becoming the former, and Boesche shows no awareness of Tocqueville's essentially romantic position on this issue of reason's role in forming a heroic political individual.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, one of the key aspects of romanticism is its skepticism about the power of rational persuasion to effect moral transformation in the individual. In this regard, it was also mentioned in the chapter that Wordsworth criticized William Godwin who was one of the early exponents of utilitarian philosophy. Another dominant intellectual trend of the nineteenth century, utilitarianism informed many romantics' conception of discursive reason and served as a foil for their various philosophical positions. Although Tocqueville envisioned a more positive employment of utilitarian moral argument in the form of the doctrine of interest well understood,[241] he also clearly recognized the limitation of this utilitarian doctrine in the domain of moral transformation. As mentioned in the previous section, he did not deny the *possibility* of the Godwinian process of moral transformation based on a utilitarian moral argument in that he saw a potential for synergy between the doctrine and local participatory institutions/associations in generating public virtue in the individual; unlike Wordsworth, Tocqueville acknowledged that moral arguments which appeal to self-interest can motivate a self-interested individual to perform public duties. But at the same time Tocqueville did not think that this pathway to virtue was applicable to most people, which is suggested by not only his observation of materialistic politics in America but also his explicit comment at one

[241] Cheryl B. Welch also notes Tocqueville's relatively positive assessment of utilitarianism (in the form of the doctrine of interest well understood) within the intellectual context of nineteenth-century France. Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt, eds., *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

point that only "[great] souls" [242] move beyond the doctrine of interest well understood to become truly virtuous. For "ordinary"[243] people, what the doctrine in fact does is making them merely smarter about pursuing their self-interest rather than fostering genuine public spirit in them.

Concerning Tocqueville's estimation of the power of discursive reason to effect moral change, what he chose not to do given his awareness of the philosophical unsoundness of the doctrine is likewise telling. In an 1831 notebook entry, he betrays his belief that the doctrine is only "*in part*" true; Americans' claim notwithstanding, it is simply not true that "public virtue" is always "useful" to the individual.[244] In fact, a utilitarian moral philosopher like Mill would readily point out that any sound utilitarian argument on behalf of virtue must refer to a different kind of utility than the individual agent's narrow self-interest. But although Tocqueville took a wide range of theoretical approaches to what he perceived to be the crisis of the political in democratic society, devising or introducing a better moral argument – utilitarian or not – on behalf of virtue was not one of them. Also, even though Tocqueville gave attention to several metaphysical systems (Platonism, Descartes' philosophy, Christianity, etc.) across his writings, it is clear that he engaged with them not as a moral philosopher interested in providing firm grounds for moral truths but as a cultural and political theorist.

Tocqueville's indifference to a search for the best moral argument on behalf of virtue may be partly due to the fact that he, like many romantics,[245] associated the stimulation of

[242] *Democracy in America*, 3: 922.
[243] *Democracy in America*, 3: 922.
[244] Danoff, *Educating Democracy*, 14.
[245] Many romantics were aware that one's discursive reason stimulated by moral discourse could in fact lead one to moral errors or doubt. Contrary to the Enlightenment, romanticism did not place much trust in the epistemic authority of discursive reason especially in moral and political matters. An illustration of this point is Coleridge's influential "Kantian" distinction between "Reason" (transcendental, intuitive) and "understanding" (empirical, deductive) and designation of the former as a faculty for providing the highest truths. Similarly, in *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), Wordsworth contrasts "the dictate of paramount and infallible Conscience" (supporting "the

discursive reason with epistemic errors or doubt in the spheres of not only metaphysics but also morality and politics. In a letter to Ernest de Chabrol in 1831, for instance, Tocqueville says: "There is no subject that does not grow larger as you pursue it, no fact or observation at the bottom of which you do not find a doubt . . . I would like to hold political and moral truths as I hold my pen, and doubt besieges me."[246] While moral arguments are mostly powerless to foster virtue in the individual, discursive reason they stimulate can only weaken the person's existing conviction about virtue.

The counterpart to the romantics' belief in discursive reason's impotence and counter-productiveness in moral education is their valorization of imagination in the same domain, which is the other major aspect of romanticism that can be traced in Tocqueville's thought. As discussed in the previous chapter, conceiving imagination as an "image-making"[247] power, many romantics, such as Wordsworth, suggested that imagination can promote moral transformation by creating elevating images or ideals in the mind, especially through the cultural medium of poetry.[248]

As the chapter "Of Some Sources of Poetry among Democratic Nations" in the second volume of *Democracy* implies, for Tocqueville, too, imagination is "the faculty by which we

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graceful negligence and unsuspicious dignity of virtue") with "calculations of presumptuous Expediency" (supporting "lifeless and circumspect Decencies"). Michael Timothy, *British Romanticism and the Critique of Political Reason* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 166. In "Essays on Morals," too, Wordsworth points out that, whereas arguments on behalf of virtuous action do not add to the person's correct moral conviction, it is possible that discursive reason be used to justify wrong conduct and silence the conscience.

[246] *Democracy in America*, 3: 841.

[247] Vivian C. Hopkins, *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 32.

[248] In nineteenth-century literary criticism, "poetry" did not exclusively mean verse, or a "poem." Although the specific definition of poetry varied between neoclassical and romantic writers and among the romantics themselves, it was broadly understood as a cultural medium that is primarily generated by, and achieves its effect through, the human faculty of imagination, which forms some kind of "image" in the mind that is perhaps derived from, but never absolutely identical to, the sense data. Because of this imaginative quality of poetry, the romantics often contrasted it with science, or "Matter of Fact." Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 101.

construct and contemplate the ideal,"[249] for the depiction of which poetry exists. Notably, in the same chapter, he also attests to the power of certain poetic images conceived by imagination to shape the individual's ethical life with an example drawn from America. He notes that, while some Europeans find the American wilderness itself very interesting, Americans are only beholden to *an image of themselves* as its conqueror or master:

> Their sight is filled with another spectacle. The American people see themselves marching across this wilderness, draining swamps, straightening rivers, populating empty areas, and subduing nature . . . This magnificent image of themselves does not only present itself now and then to the imagination of the Americans; you can say that it follows each one of them in the least as well as in the principal of his actions, and that it remains always hovering in his mind.
>
> You cannot imagine anything so small, so colorless, so full of miserable interests, so anti-poetical, in a word, than the life of a man in the United States; but among the thoughts that direct him one is always found that is full of poetry, and that one is like a hidden nerve which gives vigor to all the rest.[250]

In short, despite their materialistic utilitarianism ("so full of miserable interests") that is so "anti-poetical" from an aristocratic point of view,[251] Americans are in fact always trying to conform to a "magnificent image of themselves" that is "full of poetry."

On this self-image of the American people, Tocqueville had a somewhat mixed moral and aesthetic assessment. On the one hand, the idea of nature-subduing entrepreneurship represented by the image did contain certain admirable human qualities such as physical strength and courage, which seems to account for the fact that in the book's manuscript Tocqueville refers to Americans described in the passage as people doing "great things" following "great ideas."[252] Hence, to some extent the American self-image was indeed a morally elevating ideal. On the

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[249] Dana Jalbert Stauffer, "Tocqueville on the Modern Situation: Democracy and the Decline of Devotion," *The American Political Science Review* 108, no. 4 (November 2014), 776.
[250] *Democracy in America*, 3: 836-7.
[251] American materialism was "anti-poetical" from an aristocratic point of view because, as I will discuss in the next section, Tocqueville understood poetry as a depiction of an ideal (something better than the prosaic reality), and aristocratic society considered not selfish materialism but freedom from it as a beautiful virtue worthy of poetic description.
[252] *Democracy in America*, 3: 837.

other hand, the heroism of the image was still that of *homo economicus* pursuing material self-interest rather than public good. Given the close association of "grandeur" with disinterestedness in his mind, Tocqueville could not quite apply the label to the American poetic image, which is reflected in his comment in the draft of the second volume: "I am afraid that this [democratic] poetry aims for the gigantesque rather than for grandeur."[253]

Whereas, as suggested previously, his awareness of the limitation of American moralists' utilitarian doctrine in promoting public virtue did not prompt Tocqueville to introduce or devise any superior moral argument himself under any circumstance, his response to the political inadequacy of American democratic self-image and poetry was somewhat different; during the 1840s and '50s, he would repeatedly engage in what may be called "politics of imagination" by attempting to create a heroic collective self-image characterized by public-spiritedness in the minds of his French contemporaries.

The first of these attempts, I suggest, occurred during the July Monarchy in the form of Tocqueville's involvement in the French military conquest of Algeria on the basis of notions such as greatness and glory. As mentioned earlier, some scholars like Pitts and Duong point out an intimate connection between Tocqueville's interest in achieving these values through colonial conquest and his concern about the dearth of authentic politics in France during the July Monarchy. In "The Demands of Glory: Tocqueville and Terror in Algeria," Duong offers an especially detailed account of the significance of glory for Tocqueville's political thought. Duong shows that Tocqueville's passion for "[raising] a great monument to [his] country's glory on the African coast"[254] through the violent conquest of Algeria during the 1830s and '40s was rooted in his desire to "encourage [French] citizens' utilitarian self-interest to grow into a

[253] *Democracy in America*, 3: 837.
[254] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 35.

voluntarist self, capable of great public acts."[255] Tocqueville, in short, wanted to "seize glory to attach citizens to the public interest."[256]

But in reality, the Armée d′ Afrique's brutal total war in Algeria was far from glorious, and Duong's account of how Tocqueville "came to square the realities of colonial terror with the demands of glory" actually contains an implicit description of his first attempt at politics of imagination. Whereas "[premodern] glory was often associated with the legislator, statesman, or God," "modern glory,"[257] or "the glory celebrated in revolutionary republicanism and elaborated by Bonapartist militarism," was conceived as "the property of citizens defending the *patrie en danger*."[258] As the analogies between ancient Sparta and imperial France contained in Jacques Louis David's 1814 painting illustrates, "Bonapartist militarism idealized glory, not only in leaders, but also in *volontaires*, the willing conscripts of the wars of liberty," who "did not fight wars of aggression motivated by chauvinistic self-interest" but "defensive wars as citizens called to protect the most public interest of all."[259]

But the major obstacle for someone like Tocqueville who hoped that the glory of the Armée d′ Afrique would serve as an "antidote to bourgeois society's materialism and mediocrity"[260] in France by inspiring "civic voluntarism and public-spiritedness"[261] was that "colonial warfare was anything but glorious"[262] from the perspective of modern glory based on citizen soldiers' selfless participation in the war of national defense. Given that "the number of Algerians killed, often directly through massacres such as those at *Dahra*, exceeded tens of

[255] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 45.
[256] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 45.
[257] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 34.
[258] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 44.
[259] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 49.
[260] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 33.
[261] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 49.
[262] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 49.

thousands," "[the] sheer mismatch in violence was so indisputable that even the label of a 'war' seemed farcical."[263] Furthermore, the Armée d′ Afrique had problems with suicide partly due to its "normalization of slaughter, rape, and looting."[264]

Confronted with this ugly, far-from-ideal reality, Tocqueville sought to bring it closer to the normative image of *volontaires* inherited from Bonapartist militarism by "blurring the lines between colonial aggression and national defense"; more specifically, "he shifted culpability for the war onto the indigenous population by fundamentally revising his characterization of native society from the late 1830s."[265] For instance, in his 1841 "Essay on Algeria," designating the Arab population in Africa as '"half-savages,'"[266] Tocqueville wrote: "[The] Arab tribes' passions of religion and depredation always lead them to *wage war on us* [emphasis added]."[267] Through vilifying the natives' culture and character and framing the total war of indigenous extermination as a patriotic duty of national defense, Tocqueville tried to create and maintain a heroic self-image of the French people in the form of soldiers fighting unfamiliar and vicious enemies. The hope was that the soldiers' (imagined and largely imaginary) heroic self-sacrifice for the supreme public interest of national security would inspire a similar public spirit in France's domestic citizens.

Effective or not,[268] clearly such effort by Tocqueville to shape the collective imagination of the French people during the July Monarchy was deeply problematic in that it involved his idealization of the country's colonial violence. As I will illustrate in the next section, however,

[263] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 49.
[264] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 49.
[265] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 50.
[266] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 52.
[267] Duong, "The Demands of Glory," 53.
[268] Tocqueville's own assessment in this regard is difficult to know. But if he did not find his first attempt at the politics of imagination involving Algeria effective, this would seem to suggest a somewhat tragic nature of his second turn to aesthetics during the Second Empire.

later during the Second Empire he tried another way of enlisting the idealizing power of imagination for the sake of the political by playing the role of what I call "a democratic-aristocratic poet," focusing this time on the beauty and grandeur of the French revolutionaries of 1789.

III. Tocqueville: A Democratic-Aristocratic Poet of the Revolution

The Second Republic, which succeeded the July Monarchy with the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution, proved to be short-lived when its president Louis Napoleon staged a coup in 1851 which led to the establishment of the Second Empire in 1852. With the beginning of Louis Napoleon's reign as Napoleon III, what little amount of liberty France used to have diminished even more; "papers no longer printed any objective news" and "[people] talked about nothing but their private affairs."[269] Although Tocqueville, now without any public office and in an "internal exile,"[270] was "struck by the difference in mentality between the men of his generation, with their aspirations to justice, and those of the generation that followed, with its hunger for material well-being," he rejected his friend Jean-Jacques Ampère's analogy between the Second Empire and the Byzantine Empire, a symbol of "an irremediable decadence"[271]: "Your Romans were dead, while we are asleep."[272]

Though there is little doubt about Tocqueville's desire and hope for a political revolution that would overthrow the government of the Second Empire, his ambivalence toward the notion of revolution must be duly acknowledged. From his writings, it is clear that he was critical of

[269] Jardin, *Tocqueville*, 478.
[270] Jardin, *Tocqueville*, 463.
[271] Jardin, *Tocqueville*, 473.
[272] Jardin, *Tocqueville*, 473.

several different kinds of revolution in French history. One of them is administrative centralization in France prior to 1789. Closely tracing its development in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856), Tocqueville highlights administrative centralization as evidence of significant continuity between the Old Regime and post-Revolution society (which led François Furet, among others, to interpret Tocqueville as deflating the revolutionaries' immense sense of their capacity to make the world anew.). Tocqueville's main issue with administrative centralization was that in his view it had sapped the life out of local political institutions in France, greatly detracting from the civic education of the French people. Tocqueville also held a critical perspective on much of the original French Revolution that started in 1789. Especially its class struggle and Terror led him to often view "revolutionary behavior as a series of unnatural acts in which people overstep the boundaries that make them human and enter an alternate mental universe in which the rules of human logic are suspended."[273] He certainly had this sense of being revolutionary in mind when he wrote to Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard in 1841: "The liberal but not revolutionary party, which alone suits me, does not exist."[274] Finally, Tocqueville was famously hostile to the 1848 Revolution in which the working class played a major role. Although he was "happy to see France rid of the July Monarchy in February of 1848," "he quickly came to view 1848 as a grotesque extension of the debased interest-oriented politics of the July Monarchy, a 'slave's war' now threatening the privilege of property itself."[275]

All of this, however, does not mean that Tocqueville attached no sense of political redemption to the notion of revolution at all. As Jason Frank points out, "[despite] Tocqueville's critique of the 'revolutionary catechism,' he remained intermittently enthralled by the

[273] Cheryl B. Welch, *De Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 160.
[274] Craiutu, "Tocqueville's Paradoxical Moderation," 603.
[275] Frank, *The Democratic Sublime*.

revolutionary promise of political and moral regeneration."[276] This can be also seen from the fact that Tocqueville, regardless of his horror at the Terror, "[defended] 1789 and the Declaration of the Rights of Man to the last," emphasizing that the Declaration "'had as object *liberty* much more than equality.'"[277]

As the previous line suggests, liberty, which Tocqueville at one point called "the first of [his] passions,"[278] is the key to understanding his varying attitudes toward different revolutions. Although he never precisely defined liberty, a broad description of his notion of it is still possible.[279] Freedom for Tocqueville certainly includes negative liberty but it also implies self-government through political participation,[280] which explains his strong commitment to the establishment of democratic political institutions in France throughout his career. Despite his tendency to use the term "revolution" with a negative connation connected to the violation of liberty, it seems accurate to say that during the Second Empire he did wish for a broadly liberal revolution which would achieve his political vision of robust national and local participatory institutions with a legal guarantee for civil and political liberties.[281]

Moreover, Tocqueville sometimes associated liberty more exclusively with disinterested politics freed from selfish materialism (rather than political participation as such), which is illustrated by his moral use of the term "slave." For instance, he would write that "'[a] nation that asks no more of its government than the maintenance of order,'" "'is already a slave at the bottom of its heart,'" "'*a slave to its well-being*, ready for the man who will put it in chains

[276] Frank, *The Democratic Sublime*.
[277] Alan Kahan, "Tocqueville's Two Revolutions," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 4 (October - December 1985), 596.
[278] Zunz and Kahan, *The Tocqueville Reader*, 220.
[279] Welch, *De Tocqueville*, 51.
[280] Welch, *De Tocqueville*, 51.
[281] On Tocqueville's ultimate political vision, see Jardin 1988 and Watkins 2003.

[emphasis added].'"[282] Also, as mentioned earlier, he would describe the June uprising of the working class in Paris in 1848 as "a 'slave's war'" because he saw it as "a grotesque extension of the debased interest-oriented politics of the July Monarchy."[283] While understanding the politics of both bourgeoisie and proletariat to be essentially driven by material self-interest, he would present the revolutionaries of 1789 as the paradigmatic example of a life lived in liberty in pursuit of the supreme public good of civil and political liberties.

During the period between the coup of 1851 and his death in 1859, Tocqueville occupied himself with a series of research on modern French history close to his own time. With the purpose of comprehending "the march of the Second Republic towards the Empire by analogy," "[in] the beginning of the year 1852, he plunged himself into memoirs of the Convention and the Directory in order to understand the spirit of the times."[284] But after writing two chapters on 18 Brumaire ("How the Republic Was Ready to Accept a Master" and "How the Nation, While No Longer Republican, Had Remained Revolutionary"), around the late 1852 he "turned towards the study of the old regime" in order to gain a deeper understanding of the country's weak attachment to political freedom.[285] This new line of research led to the publication of *The Old Regime* in 1856 which, as discussed previously, focuses on the development of administrative centralization during the Old Regime, though the book also contains descriptions of the revolutionaries of 1789. After *The Old Regime* was published, Tocqueville in the same year embarked on what proved to be his last major project of writing "a history of revolutionary ideology"[286]; in a letter to G. C. Lewis, he stated that his aim was "much more to paint the

[282] Frank, *The Democratic Sublime*.
[283] Frank, *The Democratic Sublime*.
[284] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2: Notes on the French Revolution and Napoleon*, eds. François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.
[285] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 3.
[286] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 5.

movement of the feelings and ideas which successively produced the events of the [1789] Revolution than to recount the events themselves."[287] As a result, roughly between December 1857 and January 1858, he wrote seven chapters covering the period from 1787 to 5 May 1789 (the first meeting of the Estates-General). Immediately afterwards, he began working on what "was to lead from the meeting of the Estates-General to the end of the Constituent Assembly [1791]"[288] but for this work "he did not have time to do more than accumulate notes and broadly trace a plan."[289]

While it is typical to describe Tocqueville's work in the 1850s as that of a historian, I suggest that in a sense he was simultaneously being a poet during this period. In "Tocqueville and Nietzsche on the Problem of Human Greatness in Democracy," Paul Franco counts "democratic poetry" among the remedies (the others are religion and "the pursuit of ambitious political goals") that Tocqueville considered for the absence of greatness in democracy.[290] Yet

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[287] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 5.
[288] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 9.
[289] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 9-10. Tocqueville's final project of writing "a history of revolutionary ideology" was interrupted by his death from tuberculosis in 1859. Although the drafts from this research were thus unpublished in his lifetime, it is clear from his preface for *The Old Regime* (1856) that he wrote them with an intention to publish a sequel to the publication in 1856. In the preface, he writes:

My view is that the work I have undertaken should not stop there [at describing the Old Regime on the eve of the revolution]. If time and strength do not fail me, I intend to follow, through the twists and turns of this long revolution, those very French men with whom I have recently lived on such familiar terms under the Ancien Régime and who were shaped by that same régime . . . My first task will be to range with these men over the opening years after 1789 – a time when the love of equality and freedom had an equal share of their hearts; a time when they wished to found not only democratic but also free institutions; not only to destroy privileges but to acknowledge and sanctify rights. *These were times of youth, enthusiasm, pride, generous and sincere passions, the memory of which, despite mistakes, men will preserve forever and which, for years to come, will disturb the sleep of all those wishing to corrupt or enslave them* [emphasis added]. *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution*, ed. & trans. Gerald Bevan (New York: The Penguin Group, 2008), 10.

The last three lines in the passage also anticipate the kind of poetic idealization of the French revolutionaries of 1789 found in the later unpublished portion (which will be discussed shortly in this section).
[290] Paul Franco, "Tocqueville and Nietzsche on the Problem of Human Greatness in Democracy," *The Review of Politics* 76, no. 3 (Summer 2014), 449. Although Tocqueville does not precisely define greatness, political greatness in his mind is certainly associated with disinterested concern for public good. As previously pointed out, he did not believe that free institutions can either be newly established or long endure without truly public-minded politics.

Franco also asserts, without elaboration, that Tocqueville "[did] not develop" the poetic response implied in *Democracy's* chapter on the sources of poetry.[291] Contra Franco, in this section I intend to show that Tocqueville did develop a poetic response to the problem of political greatness beyond what is contained in *Democracy* by playing the role of a poet himself with regard to the French revolutionaries of 1789.

In making this claim, I am not suggesting what Furet and Françoise Mélonio indicate in their introduction to the collection (2001) of Tocqueville's unpublished chapters and notes on the 1789 Revolution and Napoleon. For Furet & Mélonio, Tocqueville can be said to have pursued "a new poetics" through his description of the Revolution in the sense that he aimed for a "shortened narrative" to convey "the furious haste of the Revolution."[292] His depiction can be also seen as "a work of tragedy" "whose characters imagine that they are masters of their destiny when they succumb to that modern form of fatalism which is historical determinism."[293] Finally, his history of the Revolution can be likened to "a sort of national autobiography" that is "infinitely [dark]" and descriptive of "a primitive savagery" which the French were uniquely capable of.[294]

Rather, my claim about Tocqueville's poetic status rests on his own definition of poetry and poet in the second volume of *Democracy*. In the chapter "Of Some Sources of Poetry among Democratic Nations," he defines poetry as "the search for and the portrayal of the ideal" that aims to "embellish" rather than accurately describe what actually exists and thereby "offer a higher image to the mind."[295] With this broad definition of poetry, he includes not only Homer

[291] Franco, "Tocqueville and Nietzsche," 453.
[292] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 9.
[293] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 18.
[294] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 18.
[295] *Democracy in America*, 3: 832.

but also the painter Raphael in the category of poet whom he defines in the draft of the second volume as anyone "who [undertakes] to offer images to men" that represent "something superior to what is."[296] Although Tocqueville is not known to have written any verse during the 1850s, he certainly fits into his own definition of poet in *Democracy* concerning his depictions of the French revolutionaries of 1789; for example, in *The Old Regime* as well as his aforementioned unpublished history of the Revolution, he highly idealizes or "embellishes" the character and conduct of the revolutionaries on the eve of the first meeting of the Estates-General. In fact, the level of idealization carried out by Tocqueville in this regard is such that Wolin even calls the resulting portrayal a "myth."[297]

Given his status as a poet, what can be said about his poetic style? On this topic, Dana Jalbert Stauffer describes Tocqueville as a "democratic poet" based on his similarity with the romantic poets he cites in *Democracy*.[298] Like "Byron, Lamartine, and Chateaubriand" who "sought to 'illuminate and enlarge certain still obscure aspects of the human heart,'" Tocqueville "[highlighted] the continued presence of devotion in a world that sees only interest."[299] Meanwhile, Peter Augustine Lawler conversely emphasizes Tocqueville's emulation of "the classical or Greek and Roman aristocratic philosopher poets" who were always "'seeking an ideal beauty.'"[300] In my opinion, while Stauffer by designating Tocqueville as a "democratic poet" overlooks the aristocratic and classical elements of his poetic style as evidenced by his description of the French Revolution of 1789, Lawler makes an opposite mistake by unduly

[296] *Democracy in America*, 3: 832.
[297] Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 416.
[298] Stauffer, "Tocqueville on the Modern Situation," 781.
[299] Stauffer, "Tocqueville on the Modern Situation," 781.
[300] Peter Augustine Lawler, *The Restless Mind: Alexis de Tocqueville on the Origin and Perpetuation of Human Liberty* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), 96.

elevating those elements; I believe that Tocqueville is most aptly described as a "democratic-aristocratic" poet.

This is perhaps best illustrated by that portion of his unpublished history of the Revolution covering the period between 1787 and 1789. The manuscript "ends at the sublime moment of the meeting of the Estates-General on 5 May 1789,"[301] and in this last chapter he paints the following portrait of the revolutionaries:

> I do not believe that at any moment in history, at any place on earth, a similar multitude of men has ever been seen so sincerely impassioned for public affairs, so truly forgetful of their interests, so absorbed in contemplation of a great plan, so determined to risk everything that men hold most dear in their lives, to strive to lift themselves above the petty passions of their hearts. This is the common basis for the passions, the courage, and the devotion from which came forth all the great actions which were going to fill the French Revolution.
>
> This first spectacle was short, but it had incomparable beauty . . .[302]

According to *Democracy*, because "[language], dress and the daily actions of men in democracies are resistant to the imagination of the ideal," poets in democracy are motivated to "penetrate below the external surface that the senses reveal to them, in order to glimpse the soul itself."[303] Similarly, Tocqueville in the passage focuses on depicting the revolutionaries' inner being or character ("so sincerely impassioned for public affairs, so truly forgetful of their interests . . .").

Yet Tocqueville's poetic style as illustrated by the passage is characterized by certain aristocratic features as well. One is its temporal orientation. In *Democracy*, Tocqueville claims that, whereas "[aristocracy] naturally leads the human mind to the contemplation of the past," "[democratic] peoples hardly worry about what has been" but "readily dream about what will be"

[301] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 9.
[302] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 68.
[303] *Democracy in America*, 3: 839.

to the effect that "[democracy], which closes the past to poetry, opens the future."[304] But Tocqueville, from the standpoint of the 1850s, idealizes a past (1789) – albeit a relatively recent and revolutionary one. More importantly, the passage shows his broadly aristocratic poetic aim of representing public virtue, or liberty in the sense of being free from the selfish materialistic desire; he presents the revolutionaries as heroic political actors whose political virtue and heroism rival those of citizens of ancient republics. As mentioned earlier, he was concerned about democratic poetry's tendency to portray the mere "gigantesque," or even the "ridiculous," rather than things that had true "grandeur,"[305] which for him was closely associated with the political.

Meanwhile, Tocqueville's revolutionary poetry also contains an element that is neither purely democratic nor aristocratic but situated between the two opposites. In *Democracy*, where Tocqueville discusses several new sources of poetry for democracy, he points out that "democratic peoples" "get really excited only by the sight of themselves."[306] Whereas poetry in aristocracy frequently takes a particular individual as its subject matter, because democratic individuals are "nearly equal and similar," poetry in democracy focuses on "the nation" or "the people" as the "great figure [that] lends itself marvelously to the portrayal of the ideal."[307] In the passage above, Tocqueville departs from what he understood to be typical aristocratic poetry by taking a "multitude of men" rather than any named revolutionary figure for his poetic idealization. [308] Yet though in the section containing the passage Tocqueville refers to these men

[304] *Democracy in America*, 3: 836.
[305] *Democracy in America*, 3: 837.
[306] *Democracy in America*, 3: 835.
[307] *Democracy in America*, 3: 836.
[308] Meanwhile, Tocqueville's corpus on the history of the Revolution and Napoleon written during the 1850s contains his several remarks about the personal qualities of the first emperor who had been, up to his nephew's time, worshipped by many as a hero both in and outside of France. Tocqueville, however, had mixed feelings about this first Napoleon; while acknowledging that he had a certain genius in governing, Tocqueville's ultimate verdict was that he was "more extraordinary than great." *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 27. This seems to reflect

simply as "people,"[309] the historical moment under description suggests that he is idealizing not literally the entire French people but the much smaller set of their political representatives who he presumably believed represented the nation's noblest self or character as well.[310]

Because it offers a revolutionary image, Tocqueville's poetry has a point of comparison with Georges Sorel's notion of "myth" in *Reflections on Violence* (1908). But unlike myths which Sorel defines as "images of battle" "men who are participating in great social movements" "[form] for themselves before the action,"[311] the image Tocqueville offers does not contain the idea of a Satan-like enemy, which seems to presuppose a deep class enmity in the hearts of would-be political actors. Instead, what Tocqueville's descriptions highlight most is the revolutionaries' "classless" virtue of disinterestedness ("so sincerely impassioned for public affairs," "so truly forgetful of their interests," "so determined to risk everything that men hold most dear in their lives").[312]

Meanwhile, as mentioned previously, Wolin calls Tocqueville's portrayal of the Revolution a "myth"[313] in a sense different from Sorel's. According to Wolin, Tocqueville aimed to establish the Revolution as "a unifying myth of the nation," which "required a particular and highly idealized construction of events," for the purpose of "[elevating] the political above the ideology of a class."[314] But a remaining question is: what type of force or power did Tocqueville

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Tocqueville's conception of liberty previously described; as a man of selfish ambition (though far from representing bourgeoisie materialism), Napoleon lacked the public virtue of disinterestedness required for freedom and greatness unlike the revolutionaries of 1789.

[309] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2,* 68.

[310] I thank Jason Frank for pointing out this distinction.

[311] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20.

[312] In *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, Wolin notes that "there is an interesting similarity between Tocqueville's hope that the threat of the workers would energize the bourgeoisie and Georges Sorel's conception of myth." Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds,* 625. Wolin's point may well be true, but the difference between Tocqueville's poetry of revolution and Sorel's notion of myth indicated above remains. Also, even at the dawn of the 1848 Revolution, it seems that Tocqueville wanted the bourgeoisie to fight against the working classes for public interest rather than their narrow materialistic class interest.

[313] Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds,* 416.

[314] Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds,* 416.

associate with such an idealized depiction of the Revolution that could induce moral elevation toward the political? In other words, from Tocqueville's perspective, what kind of uplifting force was involved in his poetry or myth that could counteract the structural force of the democratic social state which tended to make citizens preoccupied with material self-interest?

I suggest that Tocqueville conceived poetry to effect moral transformation through the force of beauty. In *Democracy* and elsewhere, his idea of poetry is intimately connected to the notions such as imagination, ideal, and beauty. Poetry is generated by, and appeals to, the faculty of imagination which is used for contemplating an ideal, and beauty is one of the aesthetic excellences that such a higher image in the mind can have.

In Tocqueville's writing, the notion of beauty appears in various contexts and kinds. Generally speaking, by beauty he seems to refer to that aesthetic quality which affirms and makes attractive what is good, just, or great. In *Democracy*, he sometimes discusses beauty from God's perspective; for instance, he notes how equality, which promotes "the greatest well-being of all" rather than "the singular prosperity of a few," must be in God's eyes not lacking in "grandeur" and "beauty" because it is "more just," though "less elevated."[315] In other writings, Tocqueville frequently refers to the beauty of a great enterprise or task from a political actor's point of view. In his unpublished work on the history of the Revolution and Napoleon, he describes the revolutionaries of 1789 anticipating the Estates-General's first meeting as being "delighted" by the "beauty" of their great revolutionary task.[316] In a letter to Gustave de Beaumont in 1858, he also calls "the enterprise of making France a free nation" to which they both have dedicated their lives "bold and beautiful."[317]

[315] *Democracy in America*, 3: 113.
[316] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 67.
[317] Zunz and Kahan, *The Tocqueville Reader*, 340.

But there is in Tocqueville's thought another type of beauty which is *of* a heroic political actor but experienced by a *spectator* of the political action. In fact, Tocqueville explicitly mentions this sort of what I call "heroic beauty" in his account of the revolutionaries of 1789. Referring to their heroic character and conduct, he writes:

> This first spectacle was short, but it had incomparable beauty [*beautés incomparables*]. It will never depart from human memory. All foreign nations saw it, applauded it, were moved by it. Don't try to find a place in Europe so out of the way that it wasn't seen and where it didn't give rise to hope and admiration. There was none. Among the immense crowd of individual memoirs which contemporaries of the Revolution have left us, I have never seen one where the sight of these first days of 1789 did not leave an indelible trace. Everywhere it communicated the clarity, the intensity, the freshness of the emotions of the youth.[318]

"Incomparable beauty" in this passage applies especially to the disinterestedness, or public-spiritedness, of the revolutionaries ("so sincerely impassioned for public affairs," "so truly forgetful of their interests," etc.). Accordingly, the phrase corresponds quite closely to the reference to "grandeur" that appears in an analogous paragraph in *The Old Regime*: "It was '89, a time of inexperience certainly, but also of generosity, enthusiasm, manliness and grandeur [*grandeur*], a time to be remembered forever, which the eyes of men will turn towards with wonderment when those who saw it and we ourselves have long since disappeared" (note especially the parallelism between ". . . grandeur, a time to be remembered forever . . ." in *The Old Regime* and ". . . incomparable beauty. It will never depart from human memory . . ." in the passage above).[319]

There is reason to believe that Tocqueville hoped the "incomparable beauty" of the revolutionary self-image of the French people would have a similar degree of potency over their

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[318] *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 68. In a later note on the revolution, too, Tocqueville describes it as "one of the greatest and most noble spectacles which humanity has ever presented." *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 170.

[319] Gerald Bevan, ed. & trans., *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution*, 204. This illustration suggests that grandeur contains in its meaning those kinds of beauty that are associated with moral greatness.

character and conduct as the "magnificence" of the entrepreneurial self-image of the American people had over those of Americans, for whom the "magnificent image of themselves" "[remained] always hovering in [their] [minds]." This is to some extent suggested by the reactions of the foreign spectators of the Revolution Tocqueville describes in the passage.[320] Though these spectators, being foreigners, perhaps had less reason to identify with the heroic image of the people formed in their imagination through the reports of the Revolution, they were nevertheless "moved" and filled with "admiration" as the revolutionary sight "communicated" to them "the clarity, the intensity, [and] the freshness of the emotions of the youth."[321] As a result, the spectacle of the Revolution also left "an indelible trace" in their minds.

Tocqueville's aesthetics relies on the force of beauty to effect moral "elevation," or the experience of an attraction or a pull toward an ethical ideal formed in one's imagination. An illustration of this idea in Tocqueville's own life can be found in a letter written by him to Count Louis de Kergorlay in 1838. In the letter, Tocqueville says Plato's "high and spiritual aspiration" "excites and elevates" him.[322] Notably, it seems that none of the philosophical arguments on behalf of virtue that are presented in Plato's writings (mostly through the figure of Socrates) had any comparable effect on him; rather, it was Plato's poetically imagined inner character that gave

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[320] That his last work on the Revolution (from which the passage is quoted) was written primarily for his French contemporaries is made obvious by the fact that immediately after the passage he strongly appeals to the French pride in the following terms: "I dare say that there is only one people on earth which could present such a spectacle . . . There are enterprises which only the French nation is able to conceive, magnanimous resolutions which only it dare take. Only France could one day wish to embrace the common cause of humanity and *want* to fight for it." *The Old Regime and the Revolution Volume 2*, 68-9. At first, these lines seem to imply that from Tocqueville's perspective the kind of revolutionary poetry that might draw the French people toward the political does not have any similar political significance for other national groups. But I think the lines should be interpreted as representing his rhetorical strategy vis-à-vis a particular readership rather than his considered opinion on the topic. Consider, for instance, his essay on the British emancipation of slaves where he counts the actions by the British as one of the "great spectacles" of his time worthy of emulation. *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. & trans. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 199.

[321] In *The Old Regime*, Tocqueville includes in "the leading quality of youth" "generosity," or a "selfless attitude." Gerald Bevan, ed. & trans., *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution*, 157.

[322] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Memoir, Letters, and Remains of Alexis de Tocqueville*, vol. 1, (London: Macamillan, 1861). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2435#de-Tocqueville_1601-01_856.

Tocqueville such a powerful moral uplift. As I will illustrate in the subsequent chapter, Mill, too, had a similar psychological relationship with Plato.

Although Tocqueville did not posit any necessary transition from aesthetic elevation to revolutionary political agency, he also recognized the power of one's aesthetic taste to influence one's action. In one of the drafts of *Democracy*, for instance, describing "taste" as "the instinctive, almost physical sensation," he says, "If you examine the conduct of men, you easily discover that tastes direct them much more than opinions or ideas."[323] Furthermore, the significance of taste for conduct was something he could testify to from his own personal experience; in a letter to Mill in 1835, Tocqueville stated that he loved liberty – his supreme moral and political value – "[by] taste."[324] Hence, from Tocqueville's point of view, finding "incomparable beauty" in the character and conduct of the revolutionaries, which, as previously mentioned, exemplified for him a life lived in liberty, had no little meaning for political action. Even if such an experience did not immediately transform the spectator into a heroic political actor, it tended to inspire the former's love for the political life represented by the latter.[325]

As a clarification, it should be pointed out that the force of beauty in aesthetics is distinct from the force of reason in rational persuasion that merely refers to the notion of beauty. In *Democracy*, Tocqueville observes that, given their materialism, Americans are much more drawn to the notion of utility than that of beauty. Knowing this, American moralists "almost never say that virtue is beautiful" but "maintain that it is useful," which contributes to the dominance of the doctrine of interest well understood as the public philosophy of America.[326] But the impotence of

[323] *Democracy in America*, 3: 840.
[324] Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 157.
[325] In light of this, Matthew William Maguire's description of Tocqueville as "a passive spectator who finds a certain enjoyment in the disordering of the new order for its own sake" does not seem to reflect the latter's interest in the transformative power of revolutionary spectatorship. Matthew William Maguire, *The Conversion of Imagination: From Pascal through Rousseau to Tocqueville* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
[326] *Democracy in America*, 3: 918.

beauty as an abstract term in moral arguments does not imply that it has no power over Americans when they *feel* it as part of their aesthetic experience. For instance, as it was discussed earlier in this section, Tocqueville in the same book suggests that Americans' life of materialistic utilitarianism itself is heavily shaped by certain poetic ideas with an aesthetic quality such as their "magnificent image of themselves" taming the American wilderness, "a hidden nerve which gives vigor to all the rest" of their thoughts.

Tocqueville's aesthetic response to the crisis of the political under democratic social conditions that has been discussed so far sheds an important new light on the nature of his civic education project for democracy. As discussed earlier, on this topic many scholars have highlighted his faith in the moral and political promise of certain kinds of mores. For example, Danoff, among others, points out that for Tocqueville religion "combats individualism by inculcating a sense of duty to one's fellows"[327] while republicanism supports the love of public freedom for its intrinsic value.[328] In order to be great, "people need to be guided by authoritative notions of the good life," which mostly can be supplied by religious and republican traditions.[329] In sum, Tocqueville believed that the religious and republican conceptions of the good and the right play a significant role in promoting public-spirited political life in liberal democracy. Such interpretation, though plausible, has led many scholars to highlight Tocqueville's commitment to the project of promoting the hegemony or "tyranny" of certain moral belief systems. Dana Villa, for instance, who notes Tocqueville's emphasis on religion as an antidote for materialistic individualism, portrays him very much as a supporter of "the tyranny of belief."[330]

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[327] Brian Danoff, "Asking of Freedom Something Other than Itself: Tocqueville, Putnam, and the Vocation of the Democratic Moralist," *Politics & Policy* 35, no. 2 (2007), 180.
[328] Danoff, "Asking of Freedom Something Other than Itself," 181.
[329] Danoff, *Educating Democracy*, 35.
[330] Dana Villa, *Teachers of the People: Political Education in Rousseau, Hegel, Tocqueville, and Mill* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 211.

What I have focused on in this chapter instead was Tocqueville's response to the issue of how to assist democratic citizens in living up to their own latent ethical ideals which are presumably drawn from their society's existing mores. He was aware that in any human society there is an irrepressible demand for, and attachment to, non-utilitarian, non-materialistic beliefs[331] including the authoritative notions of the good life that emphasize devotion and public-spirited communal involvement. In democratic societies, too, he found a coexistence of heterogenous mores; even in France, which he considered to be deficient in the kinds of mores that politically benefited America, certain forms of republicanism existed alongside with materialistic egoism. Yet what he also discovered was that the more morally elevated or virtuous types of mores were often socially pervasive but psychologically latent; though not without thoughts of the "angel" deep down, the democratic individual mostly lived closer to the "beast"[332] due to the structural force of "equality of condition." Under such circumstance, what Tocqueville thought was needed was to help democratic people *aestheticize* their existing moral beliefs through conceiving the image of their best self in their imagination and feel its elevating aesthetic force, and "poetry" for him was the name for any cultural medium that could induce this process. In this sense, aesthetics represents that part of Tocqueville's civic education project that promotes rather than inhibits a citizen's moral autonomy.

Conclusion

[331] "For, after all, men in every age like to hear about their souls, though they seem to care only for their bodies." Tocqueville, *Memoir, Letters, and Remains*, 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2435#de-Tocqueville_1601-01_856.
[332] For Tocqueville's adoption of this Pascalian, dualistic account of human nature, see Lawler 1993.

This chapter explored Tocqueville's political thought as an important case of aesthetic liberalism. Deeply worried about the replacement of authentic politics by the various manifestations of materialism of modern democratic society, he gave a unique variation to the romantic critique of discursive reason and its valorization of imagination on the subject of moral transformation to represent an aesthetic liberal idea that the heroic beauty of revolutionary political actors has more power to generate political virtues than rational arguments. Moreover, based on this assumption, Tocqueville himself assumed the role of a "democratic-aristocratic poet" by trying to offer idealizing depictions of the French revolutionaries of 1789 to the French people during the Second Empire.

On the whole, the chapter provides an important new perspective on Tocqueville's civic education project for democratic society. Whereas the extant scholarship on his response to the problem of the political in modern materialistic culture typically emphasizes his interest in inculcating certain moral belief systems (e.g. Christianity and republicanism) and establishing local political institutions, this chapter focused on his turn to aesthetics under the influence of romanticism as a way to assist the people in living up to their own latent ethical ideal or best self. At the same time, in this chapter I reconstructed his aesthetic turn primarily based on his interest in the heroic beauty of the revolutionaries of 1789, thereby balancing the current scholarship's fixation on his aesthetics of imperial military glory and suggesting a more democratic and liberating potential of aesthetics in politics.

In the chapter that follows, I turn to Mill in order to pursue further a line of thinking that is implicit in Tocqueville. As mentioned previously, although he found the utilitarian doctrine of interest well understood only partially true and hence philosophically unsound, Tocqueville sought a poetic solution to the problem of political virtue without developing an explicit account

of why even the best moral argument would be impotent in this matter. Similarly influenced by romanticism but simultaneously having deep roots in utilitarian rationalism, Mill was somewhat better positioned to supply such an account.

Chapter Three:
Mill's Aesthetic Model of Deliberative Democracy

Introduction

As an aesthetic liberal, Mill shared with Tocqueville both a deep anxiety about the political implications of materialistic culture in liberal society and the idea that beauty might serve as a valuable corrective to the problem by promoting a public-spirited political action. But as I will illustrate in this chapter, Mill also provides a distinctive view on the limitation of utilitarian moral arguments in generating political virtues and strongly implies connection between beauty and deliberative politics.

Within Mill scholarship, several scholars, including Sharpless (1967), Robson (1968), Heydt (2006, 2011), and Donner (2011), have drawn attention to Mill's affirmation of the role of aesthetics in promoting the individual's moral improvement. But although they have variously contributed to the study of the aesthetic dimension of Mill's political thought, I think several criticisms apply to their works on this topic taken a whole. First, most of these works are vague about *how* the relevant aesthetic experience (most often that of beauty) facilitates character reform in the individual. The extant literature is also short on the significance of aesthetic factors *in relation to* other means to moral transformation contemplated by Mill such as rational persuasion and social institutions. Finally, there has been little effort to theorize about the relationship between aesthetics and Mill's *deliberative* ideal of citizenship.

As suggested by the previous line, in exploring the aesthetic liberalism of Mill, this chapter also seeks to refine the current understanding of Mill as a theorist of deliberative democracy. Understandably, his explicit commitment to "government by discussion" as well as

"examined life" led political theorists to typically identify him with deliberative politics which, broadly speaking, takes rational argumentation as a normatively privileged and motivationally efficacious mode of influencing behaviors of other citizens (and oneself – in the form of inner dialogue). For instance, in *Why Deliberative Democracy* (2004), Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson mention that Mill is "rightly considered one of the sources of deliberative democracy."[333] Terence Ball also compares Mill to Jürgen Habermas for having strong faith in "the forceless force of the better argument."[334] This chapter indicates, however, that Mill was rather a unique sort of deliberative theorist who recognized both the limitation of rational persuasion and the efficacy and moral legitimacy of an aesthetic force in generating deliberative citizenship.

In the subsequent sections, I first establish Mill as a political thinker who, being primarily concerned about both apathy and interest politics rooted in the modern liberal culture of materialistic egoism, tried to promote a civic ideal defined by public-minded participation in deliberative politics. I then reconstruct Mill's aesthetic turn for this purpose by tracing his engagement with romanticism and Plato. More specifically, I argue that the combined influences of romantic poetry and poetic theory as well as Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the *Gorgias* led Mill to conclude that the beauty of a heroic individual is more effective in giving birth to political virtues, such as the love of public good, than even the best utilitarian moral arguments. Based on this conclusion, Mill furthermore advanced a distinctive vision of liberal aesthetics that involves an aestheticization of philosophy as well as a politicization of art.

[333] Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9.
[334] Georgios Varouxakis and Paul Kelly, eds., *John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence: The saint of rationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 54.

I. Commercial Society and the Crisis of Deliberative Liberal Democracy

Like his contemporary Tocqueville, Mill was deeply worried about the political effects of materialistic egoism, or the attitude of regarding one's own material well-being as the highest good in life. Although this form of selfishness as such was nothing new, what was disconcerting to Mill and many other nineteenth-century British intellectuals was its widespread nature in modern liberal society. As early as in 1829, Mill complained in a letter to his friend in Paris (Gustave d'Eichthal) about "the disposition to sacrifice every thing to accumulation" that constituted "the very worst point" in the English people's "national character."[335] Roughly a decade later, in his second review of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Mill also endorsed the French author's depiction of America as essentially a society of acquisitive individualism.

Mill, however, disagreed with Tocqueville on the specific cause of the commercial culture's predominance in his time. As explained in the previous chapter, Tocqueville attributed the phenomenon to democratization, which in his case includes certain elements of economic liberalization (e.g. the leveling of the economic playing field through the destruction of feudal privileges). Tocqueville also more specifically emphasized several democratic factors, such as a relatively even distribution of wealth and greater social mobility, which Mill did not consider to be important for the explanation. Instead, Mill argued that the key explanatory factor for the widespread culture of materialistic egoism was progress in what he called "civilization."[336]

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[335] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Francis E. Mineka, vol. 7, *The Earlier Letters: 1812 to 1848* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 31.
[336] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 18, *Essays on Politics and Society Part I* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_744.

Whereas in his second review of Tocqueville's book Mill associates progress in civilization simply with "the rapid growth of industry and wealth,"[337] in "Civilization" (1836) he supplies a much fuller picture of the process, part of which is the emergence of a modern state in alignment with political and economic liberalism.[338] By providing personal security, the administration of justice, and the protection of private property (i.e. legal guarantees for the rights to life, liberty, and property), the liberal modern state creates an environment where "individual energy" is mostly channeled into the acquisition of wealth ("the concentration of it within the narrow sphere of the individual's money-getting pursuits"), which not only remains one of the few goods that require the individual's exertion but also serves as a means for obtaining nearly all the other goods not provided by the state.[339] Meanwhile, in the 1829 letter, Mill suggests that a prolonged preoccupation with the pursuit of wealth transforms the individual's settled character into that of a materialistic egoist: "when the pursuit of wealth . . . becomes the main object of his life, it almost invariably happens that his sympathies & his feelings of interest become incapable of going much beyond himself & his family."[340]

For Mill, one of the most worrisome features of materialistic egoism was political apathy, or "withdrawal from politics and into private life."[341] Mill's case against apathy can be inferred from *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) where he defends a highly

[337] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_850.
[338] Although Mill does not use the words such as "liberal" or "liberalism" in this essay, a crucial aspect of the development of civilization he describes is the emergence of a specifically *liberal* modern state grounded in the Lockean principle of protecting the rights to life, liberty, and property. Ultimately, then, Mill attributes the dominance of the commercial culture to progress in liberalism, which is a point not often clearly made within Mill scholarship.
[339] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_698.
[340] *Collected Works,* 7: 31-2
[341] Alex Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.

participatory model of democracy with both "protective" and "educative" arguments.[342] The first relies on the idea that participation protects the interests of citizens and implies that apathy leads to either political community's total disregard of nonparticipants' interests or lack of necessary knowledge and perspectives in public deliberations where such interests are at stake. The second, educative argument holds that participation produces mentally and morally developed "active" individuals who improve the world by "[struggling] against evils"[343] as well as have better lives for themselves. Apathy, in contrast, traps individuals in an unhappy condition of underdevelopment. In addition, in "Inaugural Address, University of St. Andrews," (1867) Mill suggests that indifference to political issues means compromising one's moral integrity through passive complicity in injustice: "He is not a good man who, without a protest, allows wrong to be committed in his name, and with the means which he helps to supply, because he will not trouble himself to use his mind on the subject."[344]

But Mill also recognized that the pecuniary spirit can manifest in the form of politics – in one that is governed solely by the concern for material self-interest. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1831), prior to the Reform Act of 1832 and when political power was still monopolized by the upper classes, Mill "described the attitude of the ruling aristocracy towards their country and its people as being one of possessive self-interest."[345] Likewise, many years later in his autobiography, Mill characterized this period of rule by "the noble and the rich" as one of "the

[342] Dennis Thompson, *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 14.
[343] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 19, *Essays on Politics and Society Part II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_188.
[344] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 21, *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/255#Mill_0223-21_781.
[345] John Edward Broadbent, "The Importance of Class in the Political Theory of John Stuart Mill," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 3 (September 1968): 277.

predominance of private over public interests in the State" and "the abuse of the powers of legislation for the advantage of [the aristocratic] classes."[346] By the time Mill wrote *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), his conception of the politics of *homo economicus* had broadened to reflect England's greater industrial development and the increased sociopolitical power of its middle and lower classes. Although in *Considerations on Representative Government* he defines "sinister interests" broadly as "interests conflicting more or less with the general good of the community,"[347] his subsequent discussion makes it clear that he is mainly referring to the opposing economic class interests in modern capitalist society. But it is important to highlight that, as his "protective" argument for political participation implies, Mill thinks the parliamentary representation of class interests actually promotes the common good by providing public deliberation with a necessary scope of perspectives and information.[348] Hence, in so far as such sectional interests exist, they must be voiced and reckoned with by participants in public deliberation. What Mill opposed in politics under capitalism, then, was not the concern for one's own material well-being as such but a selfish disregard for others' rights and interests when determining ways of collective political existence.[349] The politics of *homo economicus* is problematic not because it is about economic well-being, which Mill considers is a legitimate topic for politics, but because it is totally indifferent to considerations of justice (and thereby detrimental to the happiness of mankind, the *summum bonum* of utilitarianism).

[346] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, vol. 1, *Autobiography and Literary Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_402.
[347] *Collected Works*, 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_236.
[348] *Considerations on Representative Government* indicates that this was one major reason why Mill was interested in expanding suffrage to the working class.
[349] This aspect of Mill's political thinking is closely related to his universalistic conception of public good, which I will elaborate on later in this section.

In response to the problem of political apathy and interest politics generated by the modern liberal culture of materialistic egoism, Mill for much of his life reflected on ways to promote a public-minded political action in liberal societies. Broadly speaking, public-spiritedness means to be passionately concerned about – to love – public good, but how does Mill conceive such a good? Dale E. Miller suggests that public good in Mill simply means the good of one's own country and as such has no conceptual link to the overall happiness of mankind. Accordingly, Miller sharply distinguishes the "civic" from the "humanistic" in Mill.[350] But as Stefan Collini suggests, Mill would think a patriotism that disregards the welfare of the rest of the world a form of selfishness.[351] Considering this along with Mill's strong association of public-spiritedness with altruism, I think it is more accurate to say that by public good he means the good of one's own political community that adds to the overall happiness of mankind and is mainly constituted by common interests such as civil and political liberties.[352]

Along with public-mindedness, another key element of Mill's conception of ideal citizenship is the active use of deliberative rationality. Deliberation, understood broadly as examination of grounds of different beliefs, is premised on willingness to listen to others and be open to the influence of their arguments.[353] This deliberative ethos is very much pronounced in many of Mill's own works including *On Liberty*, which gives credence to his title as "a British Socrates" occasionally given by his commentators.[354] For Mill, being a deliberative citizen

[350] Dale E. Miller, "John Stuart Mill's Civic Liberalism," *History of Political Thought* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 103.
[351] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 72.
[352] These are, of course, liberal public goods that inform Tocqueville's conception of citizenship as well.
[353] Deliberative democrats "tend to highlight virtues that enable free and respectful dialogue – virtues such as tolerance, 'broad-mindedness,' fairness, reflectiveness, and rationality." Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 10.
[354] For instance, there is *John Stuart Mill: A British Socrates* (2013) whose contributors, among others, include Antis Loizides and Nadia Urbinati. In addition, in *Socratic Citizenship* (2001), Dana Villa says: "[Compared with Nietzsche, Weber, Arendt, and Strauss] It is only in Mill . . . that we find a real commitment to the Socratic ideal in

additionally requires giving more weight to common interests as justifying grounds when comparing two or more political alternatives, which means that his notion of deliberative citizenship presupposes public-spiritedness. Accordingly, *Considerations on Representative Government*, a canonical source of deliberative democratic theory, is very much a reflection on how public spirit can be fostered among citizens. In requiring this civic orientation, too, he certainly foreshadowed contemporary deliberative democrats who wish to "replace a politics of interest with a politics guided by shared concern for a common good."[355] Hence, for both Mill and his contemporary successors, the predominance of materialistic egoism in liberal democracy also means the crisis of the deliberative. But because unlike contemporary deliberative theorists, as I will illustrate in a subsequent section, Mill thought beauty a key promoter of public-spiritedness, for him beauty participated in creating an essential element of deliberative politics.

II. Romanticism and Mill's Aesthetic Turn

As much of scholarship on Mill and nineteenth-century British intellectual history suggests, Mill's encounter with romantic poetry and poetic theory during his mental crisis between 1826 and 1830 led him to realize the importance of imagination and sympathy in the generation of affective virtues, or feelings that constitute and animate a person's moral and political life. From the British romantics, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mill adopted the notion that poetry is an expression of the individual poet's feelings

anything like its original fullness." Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 59.

[355] Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 10.

rather than a representation of some truth about the external world.[356] Mill also agreed with them on the social value of poetry. Especially, Wordsworth's poetry and poetic theory played a major role in convincing him that poetry assists in the individual's moral transformation by communicating affective states that constitute human happiness and virtue. Because this process was thought to involve imagination and sympathetic identification, Mill, while never abandoning his core empiricist metaphysical and epistemological commitments, engaged especially with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and John Ruskin to construct his own theory of imagination and aesthetics.

But the existing literature on romanticism's influence on Mill either never or only inadequately answers several questions about his thinking on individual moral transformation through aesthetics. Some of them concern the chasm between a mere imagination of another individual's affective state (for instance, a poet's feelings expressed in poetry) and an actual possession of it as part of one's settled character. Though this is rarely pointed out within the literature, the two stages are not identical; for instance, my imagining of someone else's love of public good is not the same as my being public-minded myself. At the minimum, one must be able to sympathize with the affective state being imagined, which then raises the question of what enables this sympathetic identification. After all, Mill clearly indicates that the reader does not always sympathize with the feeling being expressed by the poet. In this regard, Michele Green discusses Mill's requirement that the poet represent a feeling truthfully and accurately based on his or her own personal experience.[357] While Green is correct in making this point about Mill, the fact remains that the artist's expressive capacity has no direct correlation with

[356] Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
[357] Michele Green, "Sympathy and the Social Value of Poetry: J.S. Mill's Literary Essays," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 60, no. 40, (Summer 1991).

one's sympathetic identification with another's feeling; an accurate representation of, say, a person's ugly emotion is more likely to inspire a sense of disgust than a state of sympathy. This example seems to suggest that some sort of moral or aesthetic judgement serves as a mediator between imagination and sympathetic identification. But even if one decides to interpret Mill as saying that imagination is inherently sympathetic, one is still confronted with the distance between a momentary identification with another's feeling and a deep moral transformation at the level of character. Whereas Mill suggests that this chasm can be bridged by some sort of moral "cultivation," the extant literature on his romantic or aesthetic thinking is short on what specific moral psychology and action this process involves from his perspective.

Meanwhile, another question that needs to be better addressed can be derived from Mill's account of his mental crisis in his autobiography. There he highlights not only the role of poetry and other forms of art in the "cultivation of the feelings"[358] but also the impotence of utilitarian moral reasoning in generating the same affective virtues.[359] He notes how, although he was convinced by the utilitarian argument that the love of public good is for an individual "the greatest and surest source of happiness," "to know that a feeling would make [him] happy if [he] had it" "did not create the feeling."[360] As I will illustrate later, Mill similarly privileges art over rational arguments as an instrument of affective moral transformation in his other writings as

[358] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_258.
[359] In this way, Mill shared with the romantics, such as Wordsworth, the theme of discursive reason's powerlessness over the formation of a virtuous character, which was discussed at length in the previous chapter about romanticism. But as I will illustrate later in this chapter, Mill developed a somewhat different philosophical account of rational persuasion's impotence in the domain of moral transformation. Furthermore, Mill describes his mental crisis as an example of how discursive reason can in fact corrode one's existing social self. But whereas in Tocqueville and Emerson this theme is represented by the issue of moral skepticism, Mill points out the way in which discursive reason can inhibit a social feeling by dissolving its association with pleasure in the reasoner's mind without putting the validity of the affective virtue in question.
[360] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_254.

well. Considering his reputation as "the saint of rationalism,"[361] this at first seems odd. What are his grounds for such pessimism about rational persuasion?

I suggest that romanticism's influence on Mill's interpretation of Plato is a much-understudied topic that has a significant bearing on the questions raised above. In the following section, I will closely analyze Mill's romantic commentary on Plato's *Gorgias* (1834) in order to recover the specific contents of his aesthetic liberalism which provide some answers to these questions.

III. Mill's Romantic Plato: Moral Transformation through Aesthetic Elevation

Plato's *Gorgias*, named after a famous ancient teacher of oratory, begins with Socrates' seeking clarification from Gorgias on the nature of the latter's craft, rhetoric. After Gorgias' responses to Socrates have been found inadequate, Polus enters the discussion and ends up espousing the life of the tyrant as the best life to live. Against this position, Socrates insists that it is in fact better to suffer injustice than to do it. When Polus fails to consistently deny this claim, Callicles succeeds him to promote the unjust life of the tyrant, and in response, in much of the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates unwaveringly champions the deliberate life in pursuit of virtue. In addition, toward the end of the dialogue, Socrates offers a forceful criticism of the eminent Athenian political figures, such as Pericles, whose political careers, according to Socrates, had made Athenians more unjust than before.

[361] Varouxakis and Kelly, *John Stuart Mill*.

Having first read the *Gorgias* at the age of twelve in 1817, Mill composed an abridged English translation and commentary on the dialogue sometime between 1826 and 1834.[362] In 1834, he published this work in the *Monthly Repository*, a literary magazine that was "a leading forum for radical politics and religion and for romantic philosophy and literature."[363] After a brief introduction explaining the significance of the *Gorgias*, Mill provides an abstract of the dialogue which is "fuller than usual"[364] (that is, compared with the previously published ones on the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedrus*) on account of its excellent dramatic quality. He then ends with his own reflection on the generation of "the love of virtue," which he finds is so amply possessed by Socrates in the dialogue, as well as "every other noble feeling."[365]

Notably, in his commentary[366] Mill treats Plato's *Gorgias* as if it were a piece of romantic poetry. Even though the *Gorgias* is a lengthy text of dialectics, Mill shows no interest in assessing the validity of the moral arguments presented in the dialogue in detail; he judges most of them weak without discussion[367] and explains the shortcoming of having to present an abstract (rather than the full text) only from an aesthetic perspective.[368] Instead, in a way that is reminiscent of his discussion of Wordsworth's poetry, Mill only highlights the dialogue's role as a conveyer of morally desirable feelings.

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[362] Karen E. Whedbee, "An English Plato: J.S. Mill's Gorgias," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2007), 21. Considering its content, at least the final form of Mill's "Gorgias" seems to have been written after his first reading of Wordsworth in 1828.
[363] Whedbee, "An English Plato," 21.
[364] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 11, *Essays on Philosophy and the Classics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 97.
[365] *Collected Works*, 11:150.
[366] By "commentary," I refer to Mill's comments on the *Gorgias* in the beginning and concluding sections of the publication. His abstract also contains a small amount of his comments on the dialogue.
[367] Mill: "His [Socrates'] arguments, like those of moralists in general, are not of a nature to convince many, except those who do not need conviction; there are few of them which Polus and Callicles, had the author endowed them with dialectical skill equal to his own, might not easily have parried." *Collected Works*, 11:143-4.
[368] Mill: "And the present writer regrets that his imperfect abstract is so ill fitted to convey any idea of the degree in which this dialogue makes the feelings and course of life which it inculcates commend themselves to our inmost nature, by associating them with our most impressive conceptions of beauty and power." *Collected Works*, 11:145.

An affective state, or virtue (in the broad sense), of Socrates which Mill thinks the dialogue evidently expresses is what Mill calls "the love of virtue." In the commentary, "the love of virtue" mostly refers to an intense concern for one's own soul-justice, or moral integrity, based on not committing injustice against others (or, in Mill's more specifically utilitarian language, promoting "the *general* happiness" by respecting "the [moral] rights of other people"). Indeed, in the dialogue,[369] Socrates famously says committing injustice is "the greatest of evils"[370] for oneself worse than death. Mill contrasts "a life of obedience to duty"[371] as exemplified by Socrates with "a life of mere ambition" which completely disregards "moral obligations" toward others.[372] In the dialogue, the latter kind of life is represented by the figure of the tyrant who is willing to deprive others' "civil rights"[373] in order to gain worldly power and material pleasures.

In the Socrates of the *Gorgias*, Mill also sees an individual who would *reflect* on the justice of a particular course of action in one's life (who would "[scruple] to do that which his neighbours do without scruple"[374]) as well as the general requirements of living justly. Socrates' such a pronounced habit of ethical reflection presupposes a strong passion for his own soul-justice. Hence, Mill's discussion of Socrates in the *Gorgias* is another example of how a specific affective state serves as a necessary condition for a deliberative way of life in Mill's moral and political thinking.

[369] In this section, Mill's own translation of the dialogue is used.
[370] *Collected Works,* 11:146.
[371] *Collected Works,* 11:149.
[372] *Collected Works,* 11:97.
[373] *Collected Works,* 11:123.
[374] *Collected Works,* 11:149.

With this understanding of Socrates in the dialogue, Mill implicitly asks in his commentary: If the Socratic life presupposes an intense love of virtue, what can create such a feeling in the first place?

His reputation as "the saint of rationalism" notwithstanding, Mill stresses the limitation of the force of rational argumentation in the domain of moral transformation:

> Argument may show what general regulation of the desires, or what particular course of conduct, virtue requires: *How* to live virtuously, is a question the solution of which belongs to the understanding: but the understanding has no inducements which it can bring to the aid of one who has not yet determined whether he will endeavour to live virtuously or no.[375]

By demonstrating the general requirements of virtue, philosophical arguments can facilitate the moral progress of an individual who already intensely desires virtue. But such arguments cannot generate the love of virtue itself.

Certain arguments on behalf of virtue, Mill suggests, fail to do so simply because they are not valid:

> It is impossible, by any arguments, to prove that a life of obedience to duty is preferable, so far as respects the agent himself, to a life of circumspect and cautious selfishness. It will be answered, perhaps, that virtue is the road to happiness, and that "honesty is the best policy." Of this celebrated maxim, may we not venture to say, once for all, without hesitation or reserve, that it is not true? The whole experience of mankind runs counter to it. The life of a good man or woman is full of unpraised and unrequited sacrifices . . . To be more honest than the many, is nearly as prejudicial, in a worldly sense, as to be a greater rogue . . . how is he indemnified, who scruples to do that which his neighbours do without scruple? Where is the reward, in any worldly sense, for heroism?[376]

In short, under usual circumstances, a passionate dedication to moral integrity like that of Socrates cannot be justified with reference to any material or psychological compensation that the agent hopes to receive from society. In addition, Mill thinks most of the arguments for virtue presented in the *Gorgias* can be easily countered by anyone equally trained in dialectics.

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[375] *Collected Works,* 11:149.
[376] *Collected Works,* 11:149.

Then what are *valid* arguments for loving virtue from Mill's perspective, and why is he skeptical about their efficacy as well? In this regard, he writes:

> All valid arguments in favour of virtue, presuppose that we already desire virtue, or desire some of its ends and objects. You may prove to us that virtue tends to the happiness of mankind, or of our country; but that supposes that we already care for mankind or for our country. You may tell us that virtue will gain us the approbation of the wise and good; but this supposes that the wise and good are already more to us than other people are.[377]

According to Mill, the impotence of even valid arguments for the love of virtue can be explained by the fact that most people are only mildly interested in the ends that can be actually obtained by virtue, such as "the happiness of mankind" and "the approbation of the wise and good," compared with other, competing ends like material well-being and worldly reputation.[378] Without already loving the special ends promoted by virtue, people cannot be made by arguments to love virtue as a means to these ends.[379]

In place of rational arguments, Mill highlights in the commentary imagination and the aesthetic perception of beauty as factors for generating affective virtues, including the love of virtue. According to him, the *Gorgias* illustrates that the love of virtue is never "to be effected through the intellect [but] through the imagination and the affections."[380] Similarly, in another discussion of the dialogue later in his career, Mill observes that Socrates in the *Gorgias* "inspires heroism, because he *shows* himself a hero [emphasis added]."[381] In establishing the precise

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[377] *Collected Works,* 11:150.
[378] *Collected Works,* 11:150.
[379] In *Utilitarianism*, Mill does acknowledge that virtue can be desired by a person as an end itself as "*part* of happiness." But he also implies that this elevated state of mind comes about only after virtue has been repeatedly desired as a means to some kind of happiness: "What was once desired as an instrument for the attainment of happiness, has come to be desired for its own sake." *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 10, *Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 235-6.
[380] *Collected Works,* 11:150.
[381] *Collected Works,* 11:416.

meaning of this claim, the following passage from the earlier commentary is worth quoting in full:

> The love of virtue, and every other noble feeling, is *not communicated by reasoning, but caught by inspiration or sympathy* from those who already have it; and its nurse and foster-mother is Admiration. We acquire it from those whom we love and reverence, especially from those whom we earliest love and reverence; from our ideal of those, whether in past or in present times, whose lives and characters have been the mirror of all noble qualities; and lastly, from those who, *as poets or artists*, can clothe those feelings in *the most beautiful forms*, and breathe them into us through our imagination and our sensations [emphasis added].[382]

While it is possible to meet a figure of noble, or heroic, affective qualities (including the love of virtue and "every other noble feeling") like Socrates in person, one is more likely to encounter such a figure[383] via some cultural/artistic medium as Mill did through Plato's *Gorgias*. In either case, one may, based on the figure's words and deeds, conceive the person's affective states in one's imagination, a human faculty which Mill describes as "the power by which one human being enters into the mind and circumstances of another."[384] When this representation of a human character or affective constitution in one's mind is imbued with a sense of excellence, or even perfection, it becomes an "ideal," a moral model for oneself and others. Crucially, such an ideal inspires in the individual a sense of beauty, which accounts for a sympathetic identification with, and a feeling of "admiration"[385] toward, the heroic figure being contemplated.

The beauty of a heroic figure's affective virtues conceived in imagination in the form of an ideal motivates not only a momentary sympathy with the virtuous feelings but also a long-

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[382] *Collected Works,* 11:150.
[383] The heroic figure under discussion here can be an imaginary person, a purely literary creation, though Mill tends to focus on a real, historical person like Socrates as a source of moral inspiration.
[384] *Collected Works,* 10:92.
[385] In Mill's lexicon, "admiration" is usually associated with the human faculty of imagination and specifically indicates one's response toward the beautiful. In "Bentham" (1838), for instance, Mill describes human conduct's "*aesthetic* aspect," or "that of its *beauty*," as involving "our imagination" and determining whether "we admire or despise" the conduct. *Collected Works*, 10:112.

term moral cultivation of oneself as a work of art.[386] In "Inaugural Address," Mill says that whoever desires to "realize [beauty] in his own life" "will keep before himself a type of perfect beauty in human character [to] light his attempts at self-culture."[387] To cultivate ourselves as a work of art is "to idealize, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all, our own characters and lives" with "an ideal Beauty" in mind.[388]

In so far as it involves the influence of an exemplary figure like Socrates, this process of self-cultivation has an imitative element. To some extent, Mill's interpretation of the *Gorgias* resonates with Ruby Blondell's view on Plato's mimetic pedagogy.[389] According to Blondell, Plato can be understood as a creative successor to the ancient Greek tradition of mimetic pedagogy, which assumed that "the representation of persons, especially in 'dramatic' form, exerts an emotional effect on its consumers (actors, audience, readers or listeners) that tends to assimilate them to the characters represented."[390] By deliberately choosing a dramatic form of writing, Plato was "setting himself up as a direct rival to Homer and the dramatists in the

[386] While this notion of cultivating oneself as a work of art also has an important place in the thoughts of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, Mill's conception is quite distinctive for its connection to his vision of social progress through deliberative politics. In Mill, individual development/perfection (e.g. the cultivation of public spirit) is rather tightly linked to social development/perfection.
[387] *Collected Works,* 21. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/255#Mill_0223-21_785.
[388] *Collected Works,* 21. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/255#Mill_0223-21_785.
[389] Broadly speaking, it can be said that, like Ruby Blondell, Mill associates Plato with a mimetic pedagogy of identification, or imitation of Plato's mimetic characters (especially Socrates). In contrast, in *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's* Republic (2018), Jill Frank attributes a mimetic pedagogy of disidentification to Plato based on her novel interpretation of the *Republic*. She writes, "By prompting identification not with the being of Socrates and Glaucon (or any other mimetic character) but with their possibility, the *Republic* invites and cultivates mimetic identification as a practice of *disidentification*." Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 44. One of the things at stake in this debate is Plato's relationship to the moral/political value of individual autonomy: "On my account, the *Republic's* mimetic pedagogy of disidentification makes reading . . . a practice of self-creation, transformation, exploration, and renewal that, as such, promotes capacities for self-authorization and self-constitution as well." Frank, *Poetic Justice,* 45. I think Frank's and other contemporary readers' interpretations of Plato do reveal the incompleteness of Mill's understanding of Plato on the topic of mimetic pedagogy. But as I will try to illustrate subsequently in this chapter, Mill's reading of Plato is valuable for thinking about whether there can be a kind of non-heteronomic identification with a heroic figure that actually prepares the ground for a life of critical reflexivity.
[390] Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 80.

provision of ethically influential characters as models for emulation."[391] But at the same time, Plato is distinguished from other ancient writers in this tradition by his strong concern for the active learning and intellectual autonomy of his dialogues' consumers. Hence, although Socrates can be plausibly viewed as "Plato's heroic ideal," Plato could not have intended that Socrates be imitated in some slavish, superficial way,[392] which is illustrated by the fact that in his dialogues Apollodoros and Aristodemos who "parrot [Socrates'] words and copy such idiosyncrasies as his shoelessness" are presented as insignificant and even comic figures.[393] The kind of imitation that Plato wanted to encourage, then, must have been something more fundamental, or "structural."[394]

In line with Blondell's recognition of Plato's place in the ancient epic tradition, Mill, as previously illustrated, believed that Plato presents Socrates as a heroic figure for emulation in some of his dialogues and most clearly in the *Gorgias*. Mill would also agree that from Plato's perspective Apollodoros and Aristodemos represent a wrong way of imitating Socrates. But perhaps the specific psychological process which Mill associates with Plato's mimetic pedagogy in his commentary on the *Gorgias* is different from Blondell's notion of structural imitation. By describing this type of imitation as "imitating the basic principles exemplified by the characters' behavior," Blondell leaves room for thinking that what is at stake in Plato's mimetic pedagogy is learning new ethical standards which one did not have before.

What I detect in Mill's discussion of the *Gorgias*, however, is a somewhat different concern: a need for the *aestheticization* of one's existing principles and values in the form of an ideal via one's imaginative faculty.[395] When Mill relates in his autobiography that he gained the

[391] Blondell, *Play of Character*, 84.
[392] Blondell, *Play of Character*, 85.
[393] Blondell, *Play of Character*, 108.
[394] Blondell, *Play of Character*, 102.
[395] As I will explain later, Mill also valued the critical examination of one's existing values. What I highlight in the present discussion is the perspective that, whatever value a person holds (even if it is correct), it needs to be

most valuable kind of cultivation of feelings through "Plato's pictures of Socrates,"[396] Mill is not suggesting that he had no belief at all in the value of such feelings as the love of virtue each time prior to reading Plato's account of Socrates. In fact, without some sort of prior valuation, Mill would not have recognized his imaginative representation of Socrates' character in his mind as an *ideal* – a model possibility for himself and others – in the first place.

In Mill's account of Plato's mimetic pedagogy, then, what is to be imitated by the reader is a certain affective constitution of Socrates – his heroic *feelings* – and this sort of imitation is enabled by the aestheticization of some of the reader's own principles and values in the form of an ideal. Hence, in emulating Socrates in this way, rather than being a case of heteronomy, the reader is in fact trying to fulfill his or her own standards about proper affective character.

As Nicholas Capaldi points out, part of what it means to be autonomous according to Mill is "to make the fundamental choice of what kind of person one wants to be."[397] Mill's own word for autonomy used so prominently in *On Liberty* is "individuality," which requires that our beliefs and feelings are "our own."[398] Mill's idea of individuality has an intellectual dimension in that it implies having an active, self-reliant mind through which one makes deliberate choices about one's opinions and plans for life. To a greater degree than Tocqueville, who, despite his critique of the intellectual tyranny of the majority in America, also strongly approved of the average American's unquestioning deference to the traditional Christian religion, Mill demands that each individual follow Socrates in critically examining his or her inherited beliefs about the good life.[399] But for Mill achieving individuality requires more than just using deliberative

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aestheticized through the idealizing power of imagination for the individual to live up to it, realize it in his or her life.

[396] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_238.

[397] Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 250.

[398] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_1003.

[399] It must be noted that, though, unlike most contemporary liberal political philosophers, Mill simultaneously promotes a conception of deliberative autonomy and a particular, substantive notion of the good life.

rationality to establish one's own beliefs; it is also a matter of cultivating certain feelings or affective traits that are in harmony with one's intellect ("our desires and impulses should be our own likewise"[400]).

In *On Liberty* and elsewhere, Mill suggests that the intellectual and affective development of the individual presupposed by individuality ("Individuality is the same thing with development"[401]) is crucial for social development as well. For example, Socrates' deliberate life, leading to "originality"[402] in ideas and driven by his affective virtues such as the love of truth and virtue, provided an invaluable service to the ancient city of Athens (and other subsequent societies), not least by inspiring others like Mill himself to critically examine the existing beliefs in society (including Socrates' own).

Whereas, as mentioned earlier, Mill conceived individuality as harmoniously combining both rational and nonrational elements of a human being, he was also aware, partly due to his own experience during the mental crisis, that a person's ethical beliefs and feelings can be out of sync to the detriment of his or her individuality as well as social progress. For instance, even someone who intellectually accepts based on valid reasons that one must have a deep concern for public good may still actually lack the feeling in demand (the love of public good). As far as the cultivation of such a feeling was concerned, Mill found it useful to treat another person's individuality (such as that of Socrates) as "a noble and beautiful object of contemplation."[403]

Given the way Plato depicts Socrates in the *Gorgias*, in the commentary on the dialogue Mill focuses on "the love of virtue"[404] to illustrate the dependence of the generation of affective

[400] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_1003.
[401] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_1008.
[402] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_1009.
[403] *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_1007.
[404] To clarify, when I discuss "virtue" as an element of Mill's theory of moral transformation, I am using the term in a broad way to include also what he refers to as "the love of virtue" in his commentary on the *Gorgias*. In other words, at a higher level of analysis, "the love of virtue" is itself discussed as an affective virtue.

virtues upon aesthetic elevation rather than rational persuasion. But it is clear from his commentary that Mill believes the theoretical insight derived from Plato's poetic portrayal of Socrates in the dialogue can also inform his own more specifically utilitarian project of promoting the love of public good among ordinary citizens. For instance, from the very beginning of the publication, Mill stresses the broad significance of the *Gorgias* in the study of facilitating moral transformation in society; a close reading of the dialogue is "well fitted to suggest many reflections on the nature of ethical writings in general, and on the principles by which our estimation of a moralist ought to be guided."[405] Also, as a previously mentioned passage suggests, Mill thinks his reflection on the generation of the Socratic "love of virtue" applies to "every other noble feeling" as well.

Furthermore, it must be noted not only that Mill tended to see Socrates as an exemplar of utilitarian morality across his different writings[406] but also that the *Gorgias* itself presents Socrates as a champion of public-spirited deliberative politics. In the dialogue, while criticizing political orators in the Greek world in his day for "neglecting the public interest for the sake of their own private concerns,"[407] Socrates presents himself as a citizen who prioritizes formative politics and not averse to public deliberation as such. The reason why Socrates considers himself to be "a politician in the true sense of the word"[408] is because he is among the few Athenians who hold a deeply formative conception of politics; for him "the business of a good citizen" consists solely in "exhorting and impelling the nation to those courses by which the citizens might become better men."[409] This view of politics serves as a basis for Socrates' criticism of not

[405] *Collected Works,* 11:97.
[406] The relevant writings include *Utilitarianism*, *On Liberty*, and his autobiography.
[407] *Collected Works,* 11:133.
[408] *Collected Works,* 11:145.
[409] *Collected Works,* 11:142.

only common majority-pleasers like Callicles but also the more eminent statesmen like Pericles. Unlike the Socrates of the *Gorgias,* Mill held a conception of public-spirited politics where promotion of society's "general prosperity"[410] – its material welfare – is not given a second place and had a more favorable opinion of Pericles. But at the same time, Mill was similarly a practitioner of formative politics who intervened in public debates and affairs with a view to creating "a better and higher form of national character"[411] as a way of maximizing happiness in society. Meanwhile, Socrates in the *Gorgias* does not limit his deliberative activity to inner or semi-public dialogues. This can be seen in the final paragraph where Socrates says: "And having thus practiced it [virtue] in common, we will then, if we see fit, apply ourselves to public life, or adopt any course to which our deliberations may lead us, being then fitter for deliberation than we are now."[412] This illustrates that, contra Dana Villa in *Socratic Citizenship,* Socrates is willing to participate in public deliberations that lead to collective decisions after certain demands of self-cultivation are met.

As mentioned earlier, Mill attributed the impotence of even valid arguments for the love of virtue to most people's insufficiently strong attachment to the ends promoted by virtue, such as "the happiness of mankind" and "the approbation of the wise and good." In the case of the love of public good, there is in addition another kind of difficulty. Since Mill essentially equates public good with the good of mankind, any utilitarian moral argument on its behalf (one that argues that we must love public good) that appeals to "the happiness of mankind" would depend for its efficacy on the very affective state it tries to generate.

[410] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_215.
[411] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_214.
[412] *Collected Works,* 11:148.

So far, I have reconstructed Mill's critique of rational persuasion in the domain of moral transformation solely based on the specific framework and argument he employs in his commentary on the *Gorgias*. In this writing ("Gorgias"), conceiving an affective virtue to be basically in the structure of "the love of X," Mill questions the efficacy of utilitarian arguments in inspiring such a feeling by asking what end is served by "X" (e.g. "virtue" in the narrow sense of moral integrity). But I think Mill would willingly make the same point about utilitarian moral arguments by asking instead what end is achieved by "the love of X" itself and extending the application of the comments he makes about "virtue" (moral integrity) in "Gorgias" to moral virtue in general. From this perspective, he would suggest the difficulty of rationally generating the love of public good or motivating its characteristic practices by indicating people's insufficient care for any end that the affective virtue or its conduct typically promotes.[413]

Significantly, Mill expresses a similar thought in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) even roughly three decades after the publication of "Gorgias" (1834). In Chapter 6 ("Of the Infirmities and Dangers to which Representative Government is Liable"), where Mill discusses "sinister interests" in politics that are contrary to public good, he describes the futility of trying to change the conduct of a person with such an interest through rational persuasion that appeals to his or her "real ultimate interest"[414]:

> On the average, a person who cares for other people, for his country, or for mankind, is a happier man than one who does not; but of what use is it to preach this doctrine to a man who cares for nothing but his own ease, or his own pocket? He cannot care for other people if he would. It is like preaching to the worm who crawls on the ground, how much better it would be for him if he were an eagle.[415]

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[413] In this regard, recall a previously discussed passage from "Gorgias": "All valid arguments in favour of virtue, presuppose that we already desire virtue, or desire some of its ends and objects. You may prove to us that virtue tends to the happiness of mankind, or of our country; but that supposes that we already care for mankind or for our country. You may tell us that virtue will gain us the approbation of the wise and good; but this supposes that the wise and good are already more to us than other people are." *Collected Works,* 11:150.
[414] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_271.
[415] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_272.

Later in the same year when these words were published, Mill's *Utilitarianism*, his most systemic and comprehensive exposition of utilitarian moral philosophy, also appeared in the world for the first time. Yet it seems that even after this event his thoughts about the conclusions of "Gorgias" regarding moral transformation through aesthetic elevation rather than rational persuasion did not change. For example, in his review (1866) of Grote's book on Plato, published nearly five years after *Utilitarianism* first appeared, it is striking that Mill assesses the significance of the *Gorgias* in the history of moral education in largely the same terms he used in his earlier commentary on the dialogue. Notably, the review shows continuation in Mill's high esteem for Plato as a moralist on account of the latter's skill as an *artist*; Platonic dialogues are praised as "[affording] an example, once in all literature, of the union between an eminent genius for philosophy and the most consummate skill and feeling of the artist."[416] Similarly, in "Inaugural Address," (1867) Mill says, "We may imbibe exalted feelings from Plato, or Demosthenes, or Tacitus, but it is in so far as those great men are not solely philosophers or orators or historians, but poets and artists."[417] What might account for Mill's persistent emphasis on aesthetic elevation even after the completion of his utilitarian moral philosophy?

An important feature of *Utilitarianism* which is relevant to the discussion of Mill's aesthetic liberalism is his introduction of the notions of higher faculties and pleasures, which reflects his interest in the romantic idea of self-development. In the work, Mill suggests that human happiness requires the exercise of higher faculties, such as intellect and imagination, that uniquely belong to human beings and are essential to their nature as progressive beings. Higher faculties, which have "moral, intellectual, and aesthetic aspects,"[418] enhance happiness by

[416] *Collected Works,* 11:410.
[417] *Collected Works,* 21. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/255#Mill_0223-21_785.
[418] Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 157.

generating the experience of what Mill refers to as "higher pleasures."[419] Whereas lower pleasures are derived from "mere sensation," higher pleasures "of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments"[420] take certain abstractions, or ideas, as their source.[421] Marking a departure from Jeremy Bentham's classical utilitarianism, Mill establishes the so-called "qualitative hedonism" by claiming that higher pleasures are qualitatively superior to lower ones.[422] Mill elaborates on the meaning of this superiority through the notion of "competent judges"[423] who are "equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying,"[424] both kinds of pleasures. Higher pleasures are precisely those pleasures to which almost every such competent judge gives a decided preference separate from any sense of moral obligation to prefer them. Based on his theory of higher pleasures, Mill memorably concludes: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."[425]

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[419] *Collected Works,* 10:212.
[420] *Collected Works,* 10:211.
[421] In describing the source of higher pleasures as ideas (as opposed to mere impressions of the senses), I follow Susan Feagin's interpretation of Mill's distinction between the two pleasures. Susan Feagin, "Mill and Edward on the Higher Pleasures," *Philosophy* 58, no. 224 (April 1983): 244-252. But whereas Feagin attributes the generation of higher pleasures exclusively to "ideas of improvement," it is not clear what warrants this delimitation. Also, although Feagin acknowledges that, aside from aesthetic pleasure, there are higher pleasures associated with the ethical and the prudential, she gives no reason to think they are any different from one another except in terms of their names. It is crucial, however, that Mill considers the feeling of beauty to be grounded in ideas of *perfection*. It seems that the other two types of higher pleasures, especially the prudential one, do not have to involve this sort of idealization; an improved state does not necessarily mean a state of ideal perfection.
[422] Contra David Brink, I agree with Wendy Donner that Mill's doctrine of higher pleasures is consistent with hedonism and a subjective conception of happiness; Mill's insistence that quality be included in the measurement of the overall value of pleasure does not logically require him to give up an internal mental state account of pleasure. John Skorupski, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Brink, however, because he interprets higher pleasures as *activities* and *pursuits* that are constituted by our exercise of higher faculties rather than *mental states* produced by such exercise, concludes that Mill holds a non-hedonistic deliberative conception of happiness. David Brink, "Mill's Deliberative Utilitarianism," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 21 (1992): 67–103. But I think it is more accurate to say that Mill justifies the deliberative life based on qualitative hedonism.
[423] *Collected Works,* 10:213.
[424] *Collected Works,* 10:211.
[425] *Collected Works,* 10:212.

As to why Mill was most likely doubtful about the efficacy of even those arguments on behalf of virtue that can be derived from *Utilitarianism*, Susan Feagin's discussion of higher pleasures offers some insight:

> I shall give one reason which is elaborated on to some extent by Mill himself why higher pleasures *should* feel different in some important way. But the one thing Mill does *not* attempt to do is to give a description of the difference between how the higher and lower pleasures feel. Mill, I am convinced, believed that what was essential to the higher pleasures could not be described but could only be felt . . . The only hope of one's understanding the depth and fulfillment of one of these "higher pleasures" is to experience it oneself. This is the basis, I believe, for Mill's claim that one cannot be argued or rationally convinced into being virtuous. The character of the pleasure one will feel as a result of being virtuous cannot be described, and hence it cannot figure in an argument.[426]

Since unvirtuous persons are not literally lower animals,[427] the dichotomy between higher and lower pleasures does not perfectly map onto the one between the virtuous and unvirtuous, though Feagin does not seem to be sensitive to this fact. But the passage usefully suggests the idea that there might be some higher pleasures unique to virtuous life which cannot serve as sufficiently powerful motivating reasons prior to being personally experienced; they are in a sense too "abstract" to serve as ends that inspire pleasure and desire in the unvirtuous.

Whereas in rational persuasion a higher pleasure is employed as an abstract term in an argument, aesthetic elevation, to the extent that it relies on the *experience* of the beautiful, involves a higher pleasure (an imaginative pleasure) which is *felt*. As the previous discussion of Mill's romantic notion of cultivating oneself as a work of art suggests, this particular higher pleasure plays a key role in self-cultivation in general, which ultimately allows the individual to experience other new higher pleasures including those associated with strong social feelings.

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[426] Feagin, "Mill and Edward on the Higher Pleasures," 250.

[427] Most ordinary people in liberal society obviously do use their higher human faculties in their daily lives; they, too, deliberate (at least as an economic agent) and take pleasure in certain popular forms of cultural activity. In fact, even in the most disadvantaged social class, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone whose happiness consists solely in the pleasures of the senses.

Moreover, in the process of striving toward moral perfection ("[keeping] before himself a type of perfect beauty in human character"), the beneficiary of beauty in turn becomes the benefactor – a new source of aesthetic contemplation and elevation for others.

IV. Mill's Liberal Aesthetics: Toward Aestheticized Philosophy and Politicized Art

From Mill's perspective, an important implication of the theoretical conclusions drawn from Plato's *Gorgias* regarding the transformative power of imagination and beauty is the need for an aestheticization of moral and political philosophy as well as a politicization of art in liberal democracy. At various points in his career, Mill envisioned artists, philosophers, philosopher-poets, or artist-philosophers to play a crucial role in either of these processes. This is illustrated by not only his discussions of Plato and poetry but also Mill's own performative acts as a writer on a wide range of topics.

As indicated earlier, in the commentary on the *Gorgias*, Mill notes that "poets or artists" can significantly facilitate the generation of the love of virtue and other noble feelings by "[clothing] those feelings in the most beautiful forms" and "[breathing] them into us through our imagination and our sensations." This point can be understood more clearly in consideration of Mill's aesthetic theory.

In the 1869 re-release of James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, Mill provides in the form of note a commentary on his father's thoughts on the experience of beauty. In the note, unlike his father who relied on Archibald Alison for aesthetics, Mill endorses some of the basic views of Ruskin as presented in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846). According to Mill, Ruskin serves as "an unconscious witness to the truth of the Association

theory" by illustrating that "the things which excite the emotions of beauty or sublimity are always things which have a natural association with certain highly impressive and affecting ideas" "whether the catalogue which he has made of those ideas is correct and complete or not."[428] Mill adds that once this point is admitted, "we need no other mode of accounting for the peculiar character of the emotions, than by the actual, though vague and confused, recal of the ideas."[429]

Extending the above analysis, we can say that, as a work of art, a literary description of a heroic figure induces us to "recal" certain "highly impressive and affecting ideas" with which we conceive in imagination an ideal of moral perfection, or "a type of perfect beauty in human character." It is this process which, for Mill, makes poetic or artistic skill such a decisive asset for a moralist *qua* moralist and establishes the exemplary status of some of Plato's dialogues.

Also, as an artist-philosopher, Plato can be said to have aestheticized philosophy through inventing a form of moral philosophical writing that, with the aim of promoting a virtuous life, not only makes rational argumentation but also stimulates the reader's imagination and aesthetic feelings and desire by depicting a heroic person like Socrates. In the *Gorgias*, especially, Plato indicates Socrates' unusual degree of commitment to moral integrity by portraying him as a steadfast champion of a just, non-tyrannical life who, against Polus and Callicles, insists that committing injustice against others is the worst evil for oneself (in fact, so much so that suffering injustice is better than doing it). Socrates' love of truth as well as courage to speak his mind honestly against a social consensus are also represented in the dialogue by some of his self-characterizing words:

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[428] James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), 2:252-3, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044054092960&view=1up&seq=262.
[429] Mill, *Analysis*, 2:253, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044054092960&view=1up&seq=263.

> [Socrates to Polus] Now too, nearly every Athenian and alien will take your side on the things you're saying, if it's witnesses you want to produce against me to show that what I say isn't true. Nicias the son of Niceratus will testify for you . . . And so will the whole house of Pericles . . . Nevertheless, though I'm only one person, I don't agree with you. You don't compel me; instead you produce many false witnesses against me and try to banish me from my property, the truth.[430] [472a-b]

> [Socrates to Callicles] I think it's better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, though I'm only one person.[431] [482b]

Meanwhile, in *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill*, Parvin Sharpless includes not only Plato but also Mill in the latter's own category of "the philosopher-poet."[432] Sharpless does this on account of the fact that "the appeal which Mill found in the disinterested love of virtue and heroic spirit of the *Gorgias* is the same inspiration that Mill's life and many of his works produce on his readers."[433] Sharpless also adds that it would not be "inappropriate to apply to our reaction to Mill as revealed in *On Liberty, Utilitarianism,* and the *Three Essays,* the description he gives to the Socrates of the *Gorgias*."[434] In short, Mill was an artist-philosopher whose several major philosophical writings inspire the love of moral integrity and other elevated feelings in the reader through the implicit portrayal of Mill the author himself as a moral hero.

On Liberty (1859), it seems, illustrates this especially well. Charles Kingsley, a contemporary of Mill and a pioneer of Christian socialism, once related how he, "[picking] up a copy of *On Liberty* at a bookseller's shop," "felt compelled to sit down, then and there, and read

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[430] *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 816.
[431] *Plato: Complete Works*, 827.
[432] Parvin Sharpless, *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 10.
[433] Sharpless, *Literary Criticism,* 231.
[434] Sharpless, *Literary Criticism,* 231. Indeed, as mentioned previously, "a British Socrates" is a title occasionally given to Mill by his commentators.

it from beginning to end."[435] "*On Liberty* made of Kingsley 'a clearer-headed, braver-minded man on the spot,' nothing less than a new man."[436]

Obviously, unlike Plato, Mill did not write any dialogue, and *On Liberty* is not an exception. Plato wrote in a dramatic form and thereby exists only as an implicit voice[437] in his writings, which means it is difficult to establish any straightforward relationship between him and anything one of his mimetic characters – including Socrates – says. In *On Liberty*, however, Mill writes in the authorial "I," so the text serves as an implicit representation of the author's own character. In the essay, Mill figures himself as a staunch critic of tyranny (specifically, the tyranny of the majority), which is similar to what Plato does with Socrates in the *Gorgias*. Also, Mill's deep concern for truth can be felt from not only his argument on behalf of the freedom of thought and discussion (in the second chapter) but also his method of carefully considering any important potential counter-argument to his own case.

While I agree with Sharpless on "the poetic qualities of Mill's character" which seep through his writings and "catch the imagination and move the feelings," Sharpless misapplies Mill's notion of "the philosopher-poet" because, strictly speaking, neither Plato nor Mill wrote "poetry" by Mill's definition. For Mill, although poetry, as "thoughts coloured by the feelings,"[438] can be conveyed by a wide range of artistic genres (and not just by verse), it is to be sharply distinguished from eloquence, for "[all] poetry is of the nature of soliloquy."[439] In other words, for us to be able to claim that we have produced poetry, "no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us must be visible in the work itself."[440] Although, as I pointed out in the

[435] Janice Carlisle, *John Stuart Mill and the Writing of Character* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 34-5.
[436] Carlisle, *John Stuart Mill,* 35.
[437] Blondell: "[Dramatic] mimesis just *is* the suppression of the authorial voice [the authorial "I"]." Blondell, *Play of Character*, 16.
[438] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_642.
[439] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_644.
[440] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_644.

previous section, Mill interpreted some of Plato's writings (most noticeably the *Gorgias*) *as if* they were poetry, strictly speaking, neither Plato's dialogues nor Mill's major writings in moral/political philosophy, such as *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism,* fit the above description.[441] So I suggest that the two thinkers are more aptly described as "artist-philosophers" than philosopher-poets.

Mill's notion of "the philosopher-poet" is in fact indicative of his attempt to promote the politicization of art by advancing an ideal of the poet who has sufficient intellectual power to discern and artistically represent the best moral and political insights of philosophy up to that time. In "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," Mill describes "the philosopher-poet" as being formed by the union of "a poetic nature" and "logical and scientific culture" and hence better positioned to arrive at "truth" than "the mere poet."[442] In "Tennyson's Poems" (1835), Mill also suggests that this philosopher-poet must pursue "the noblest end of poetry" which is to elevate "the desires and characters of mankind through their emotions,"[443] thereby reiterating the theme of the artist's moral/political mission present in his commentary on the *Gorgias* published a year earlier.

Concerning the project of promoting a virtuous life through art, Mill took interest in artistic forms other than poetry as well. In 1838, Mill published a review of William Ware's *Letters from Palmyra* (1838), an American epistolary novel historically based on the fall of the ancient city of Palmyra under Queen Zenobia's rule by the Roman imperial army. In the review, Mill compliments Ware primarily for being "one of the few" among contemporary fiction writers who "can conceive, with sufficient strength and reality to be able to represent, genuine unforced

[441] In fact, Sharpless goes so far as to say that many of Mill's writings after 1851 including *On Liberty* "are, in no invidious sense of the word, propaganda." Sharpless, *Literary Criticism,* 223.
[442] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_675.
[443] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_740.

nobleness of character."[444] Mill worries that, whereas the old romances and chivalrous literature used to "[fill] the youthful imagination with pictures of heroic men, and of what are at least as much wanted, heroic women," "for the first time perhaps in history, the youth of both sexes of the educated classes are universally growing up unromantic."[445] In this age of "the huckstering virtues," Ware's novel is commendable for "keeping alive the chivalrous spirit."[446]

A point that merits emphasis here is that what underlies much of Mill's wide-ranging literary criticisms is his concern about the *political* utility of art. This is illustrated to some extent by his distinction between two different kinds of beauty. Holding that "critical standards are relative to the needs of the time," Mill also concluded that "the particular needs of [his] age [required] more significant qualities of art than abstract beauty,"[447] which refers to classical beauty based on formal perfections such as symmetry and harmony. Although Mill did not "absolutely condemn abstract Beauty as an objective of art," he had less regard for it because he thought it was "politically useless" for his age.[448]

In contrast, Mill had strong appreciation of the beauty of a moral exemplar, or what may be especially in his case aptly called "heroic beauty."[449] This is the beauty of human feelings characterizing the heroic life of pursuing a noble aim with courage and energy despite pain and

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[444] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_971.
[445] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_972.
[446] *Collected Works,* 1. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/242#Mill_0223-01_972.
[447] Sharpless, *Literary Criticism,* 188.
[448] Sharpless, *Literary Criticism,* 189.
[449] Since the kind of beauty in question belongs to a moral exemplar, it might be suggested that "moral beauty" is a more appropriate label than "heroic beauty." But the alternative label can be confusing because in Mill's writings "moral" and "morality" have unaesthetic connotations as well. As Wendy Donner points out, whereas Mill sometimes "uses the phrase 'moral arts and sciences' to refer to the entire span of the practical arts of living," he also uses the term "morality" to indicate only one compartment of this comprehensive scheme of the Art of Life in contradistinction to the domain of "aesthetics." Varouxakis and Kelly, *John Stuart Mill,* 86. In contrast, words associated with the heroic are seen as essentially aesthetic categories by Mill. In his review of Grote's work on ancient Greek history, for instance, Mill writes that Greek history, when "considered aesthetically," is "an epic, of which Athens, as a collective personality, may be called the hero." *Collected Works,* 11:316. Also, the exceptional affective personal qualities that give rise to heroic beauty fit well into Mill's conception of the heroic explicitly developed in "Civilization." (see the footnote below)

struggle.[450] More than any other type, heroic beauty clearly addressed his profound political concern about the predominance of "the huckstering virtues" of the commercial middle class over public-minded deliberative citizenship.

Before concluding, I want to briefly return to *Considerations on Representative Government* as a way to illuminate how Mill's aesthetics relates to the institutional dimension of his political thought. This canonical work in political theory is commonly read as a text that valorizes the role of democratic political institutions in cultivating civic virtues, such as public spirit, which highlights, without complicating, Mill's affinity with contemporary deliberative democrats who place faith in institutional practices of deliberation itself as a way to bridge the distance between actual and ideal citizens.[451] However, Mill in the same text also problematizes the idea of such institutions' being a school of public spirit. Especially, his discussion of "sinister interests" suggests that, far from practicing taking public perspectives on political issues and thereby being morally transformed through a Godwinian process, citizens in liberal democracy might in fact become *more* entrenched in their selfishness by practicing interest politics through their political institutions.

Some readers, while recognizing this point in the text, might argue that he addressed the issue in the same work by offering romanticized utilitarian moral arguments based on self-

[450] In "Civilization," Mill claims that the heroic as such "essentially consists in being ready, for a worthy object, to do and suffer, but especially to do, what is painful or disagreeable." *Collected Works,* 18. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233#Mill_0223-18_700. From this perspective, Mill conceives Socrates as a hero based on the latter's pursuit of a noble end (e.g. truth, virtue, and public good) even when this is individually costly in worldly terms (e.g. the loss of material comfort, life, or social approval). Though heroism is not conceptually identical with individuality in Mill's thought, pursuing the latter might in certain circumstances involve the former. Meanwhile, Mill certainly considers the heroic to be a key element of human moral perfection.

[451] In *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship*, in response to contemporary political theory's argument that "*deliberation* will help bridge the gap between actual and ideal citizens," Alex Zakaras observes that "political power is much more centralized [in America] than it was in Tocqueville's day." Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 17. Zakaras' comment illustrates not only a certain institutional emphasis in contemporary deliberative political thinking but also a common tendency among the critics of this view to problematize only the absence or disempowerment of the institutions in question.

development or higher pleasures. Among others, Nancy L. Rosenblum implies such an idea in *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* when she writes: "Mill's rationale for shifting involvements [between the private and public spheres] is self-cultivation, and the particular promise he holds out is the experience of larger sentiments that are not excited or expressed in the ordinary course of private life."[452] In this way, Rosenblum conceives Mill's romanticism as consisting in reliance on rational arguments that deploy romantic rationales for liberal utilitarian political purposes. But as the previously discussed passage (about the worm's incomprehension of the eagle's happiness) in the chapter about sinister interests illustrates, *Considerations on Representative Government* actually contains Mill's critique of rational persuasion as such in addressing the problem of either the disuse or misuse of democratic political institutions, which is Mill's romanticism that is overlooked by most readers of the work.

Meanwhile, it is possible to interpret Mill as suggesting aesthetics as a substitute for rational arguments in actualizing the promise of participatory institutions as a school of civic virtue. In his thinking on the education of character, practice and affective virtue are in a mutually enhancing relationship. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, for instance, pointing out that "[the] food of feeling is action," he says, "Let a person have nothing to do for his country, and he will not care for it."[453] This is why, in various parts of the work, Mill highlights how trying public-minded participation through democratic political institutions is necessary for cultivating public spirit. But this institutional means of achieving civic virtue has a chance of being taken up by only someone who desires such virtue as an end for oneself. This

[452] Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 131.
[453] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/234#Mill_0223-19_207.

probably explains why in *A System of Logic* (1843) where Mill proposes a science of character formation which he calls "Ethology"[454] he attempts to distinguish himself from James Mill and Robert Owen (who emphasized the influence of external factors on character formation) by saying, "His character is formed by [antecedent] circumstances . . . but *his own desire to mould it in a particular way* is one of those circumstances, and by no means one of the least influential [emphasis added]."[455] In this chapter, I illustrated that Mill also conceived such desire as being oriented toward the artistic aesthetic value of beauty. From this perspective, aesthetics plays an important role in moral transformation because it inspires our aesthetic desire to beautify our own existence as a work of art, creating a key internal factor for character formation that leads us to avail from the moralizing effect of democratic political institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on recovering Mill's distinctive conception of aesthetic liberalism. His deep concern about depoliticization and the economization of politics under the modern liberal culture of materialistic egoism combined with his romantic reading of Plato led him to articulate the role of heroic beauty in generating affective virtues presupposed by deliberative citizenship. Although Mill is typically seen as having strong faith in "the forceless force of the better argument," as far as his civic project of fostering public spirit and other political virtues was concerned, he affirmed both the power and moral legitimacy of the aesthetic force of beauty while acknowledging the impotence of even the best utilitarian moral arguments. From this

[454] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 8, *A System of Logic Part II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/247#Mill_0223-08_511.
[455] *Collected Works,* 19. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/247#Mill_0223-08_460.

theoretical orientation emerged his cultural vision of a liberal aesthetics centering on the representation of heroic beauty.

Overall, the findings of this chapter promote a better understanding of Mill's idea of moral cultivation through aesthetics as well as its relationship to other key elements of his thought, such as utilitarian reason and deliberative politics. Whereas the existing scholarship on Mill is rather opaque about exactly how an aesthetic experience, and the perception of beauty in particular, effects a deep moral transformation in the individual, this chapter articulated the relevant psychological processes using several notions imbedded in his thought such as the moral ideal, heroic beauty, life as a work of art, and the cultivation of affective virtues through participation in institutional practices. In this chapter, I also explored from Mill's perspective the importance of beauty and liberal aesthetics vis-à-vis rational and institutional factors for moral change. These and other aspects of Mill's aesthetic political thinking that were given focus in the chapter add complexity to the conventional image of him as a deliberative theorist. He implies that deliberative rationality (understood in a utilitarian sense), though it is an essential faculty for democratic citizenship, has little role compared with aesthetic sensibility in generating the love of public good presupposed by deliberative citizenship.

Having established Tocqueville and Mill as aesthetic liberals, in the next chapter I am going to explore yet another version of aesthetic liberalism offered by Emerson. Although Emerson was similarly concerned about the political impact of the commercial culture of liberal society and saw a potential solution in aesthetics, his thinking was somewhat differently inflected by romanticism than the other two thinkers'. In order to bring out the unique aspects of Emerson's aesthetic political thought, I will give special attention to his intuitionist epistemology and aesthetic egalitarianism.

Chapter Four:

A Moralist of Beauty in America: Emerson on the Cultivation of Public Virtue in Liberal Democracy

Introduction

Within the corpus of aesthetic liberalism, it is perhaps in Emerson's writings that references to "beauty" and the related words abound most. For instance, *Nature* (1836), one of his first major works, contains a chapter titled "Beauty" where he discusses the beauty of not only natural forms but also thought and heroism. There is also another essay titled "Beauty" included in his later work *The Conduct of Life* (1860) which contains his reflections on the beauty of virtue – Emerson is clearly an exception for Tocqueville's idea of a typical American moralist who "almost never say that virtue is beautiful."[456]

Apart from these two essays, there is additionally a wide range of other works by Emerson where the notion of beauty appears in relation to a key topic of his thought, such as self-reliance and reform. Here is one non-exhaustive list: "Idealism" (1836), "The American Scholar" (1837), "The Divinity School Address" (1838), "Introductory Lecture on the Times" (1841), "The Conservative" (1841), "Love" (1841), "Art" (1841), "The Transcendentalist" (1842), "New England Reformers" (1844), "The Poet" (1844), "Manners" (1844), "Considerations By the Way" (1860), "Culture" (1860), "Behavior" (1860), "Character" (1866), "The Scholar" (1876)."

Although there are many scholarly works that provide a detailed analysis of Emerson's aesthetic theory (eg. Hopkins 1951, Brown 1957, Hudnut 1996, and Shustermann 1999), few of

[456] *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la democratie en Amerique, A Bilingual French-English Edition*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 3 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 918.

them relate the notion of beauty to his central political concerns and concepts. Among political theorists, George Kateb is quite singular for trying to elucidate Emerson's perspective on the political significance of beauty for democratic politics.

In "Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility," Kateb discusses in depth various types of aestheticism and their moral implications. He defines aestheticism as "the effort to get from experience," or "non-art," "what persons ordinarily seek and often find in works of art."[457] Throughout much of the article, he illustrates that nearly all types of aestheticism, whether unconscious or deliberate, result in immoralities. But there is at least one kind, called "democratic aestheticism" by Kateb, whose "cultivation could contribute to the side of morality in the permanent war waged on morality by the other kinds of aestheticism."[458]

Democratic aestheticism is for the most part "receptivity or responsiveness to as much of the world as possible – its persons, its events and situations, its conditions, its patterns and sequences" – and in doing this it "indiscriminately confers on non-art the reception that others think only art – high art – deserves."[459] Kateb derives democratic aestheticism mostly from Emerson and his American successors such as Henry Thoreau and Walt Whitman:

> As practiced by Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, and others, democratic aestheticism tries hard to show that nearly everyone and everything is worthy of aesthetic attitudes and feelings. They try to show, first, that there is far more beauty and sublimity in the world than either conventional opinion allows or aristocratic or elitist canons of taste countenance. A revised but richer aesthetic sense reduces both craving and discrimination.[460]

As the last line implies, the chief moral purpose of democratic aestheticism which Kateb attributes to Emerson is to prevent any immorality that can be committed in "an attempt to

[457] George Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility," *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (February 2000), 12.
[458] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 30.
[459] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 31.
[460] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 32.

remedy or control or to make over"[461] "the world as it is."[462] According to Kateb, then, Emerson conceives beauty, as an element of democratic aestheticism, to serve democratic politics by checking our urge to reform the existing society.

While Kateb is right to suggest that beauty has an important place in Emerson's political thought and his interpretative case for democratic aestheticism is not without plausibility, Kateb does not do justice to Emerson's much more explicit concern for furthering individual and social reforms in American society. In this chapter, I aim to provide a more complicated but richer account of Emerson's political aesthetics by showing how in his view beauty also *promotes* reform politics through the generation of public virtues which ethically constitute a sociopolitical reformer.

By focusing on beauty, the chapter furthermore seeks to inform the ongoing debate about the notion of exemplarity in Emerson's moral and political thinking. Many of his commentators have noted his emphasis on the role of moral exemplars in the promotion of virtue, including self-reliance, in society (eg. Berry 1961, Cavell 1990, Kateb 1995, Buell 2003, Zakaras 2009). According to Kateb, for instance, Emerson holds that "the self-reliance of one can help elicit the self-reliance of another."[463] Lawrence Buell, too, highlights Emerson's belief in the "exemplary propagation of self-reliant action."[464] But what is crucially missing in the extant scholarship is any clear and full account of the psychological mechanism that mediates witnessing virtue in another individual and becoming virtuous oneself. In other words, what is the precise nature of

[461] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 33.
[462] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 32.
[463] George Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 138.
[464] Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 67.

"the force of example"[465] in Emerson's thought? I suggest that the answer is partially to be found in his reflection on the aesthetic force of beauty.

In the following sections, I begin by illustrating Emerson's concern about political implications of liberal commercial society and then articulate the republican element of his civic ideal. In the process, his key notion of self-reliance as well as his relationship to the abolitionist politics of his time will be also explained. In the last section, I argue that a romantic epistemology and theory of imagination led Emerson to privilege imagination over discursive reason in the task of promoting public virtue in liberal society, which is illustrated by both his valorization of literature, especially poetry, in moral education and his own practice as a literary moralist in America.

I. Public Virtue under Liberal Commercial Civilization

Similar to Tocqueville and Mill, Emerson saw commerce – broadly referring to market transactions in liberal society – as a major category for comprehending and critiquing his liberal age; in a journal entry in 1836, for instance, he says, "'This age will be characterized as the era of Trade, for every thing is made subservient to that agency.'"[466] As Neal Dolan suggests in *Emerson's Liberalism*, Emerson never fundamentally opposed liberal market society and in fact had a strong appreciation for several commercial virtues, such as prudence.[467] Unlike Anglo-American "classical" republican thinkers like James Harrington who believed in an agrarian

[465] Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, 138.
[466] Daniel S. Malachuk, "The Republican Philosophy of Emerson's Early Lectures," *The New England Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (September 1998), 422.
[467] Neal Dolan, *Emerson's Liberalism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 102.

model of society, Emerson also did not hold that commerce necessarily corrupts civic virtue.[468] Nevertheless, throughout his career, Emerson too often noticed and felt uneasy about certain political manifestations of the materialistic egoism of commercial society.

As early as in the 1830s, Emerson expressed a strong disapproval of materialistic politics in American democracy. In a journal entry in 1834, for example, Emerson writes:

> When I . . . speak of the democratic element, I do not mean that ill thing, vain and loud, which writes lying newspapers, spouts at caucuses, and sells its lies for gold; but that spirit of love for the general good whose name this assumes. There is nothing of the true democratic element in what is called Democracy [the Democratic Party]; it must fall, being wholly commercial. I beg I may not be understood to praise anything which the soul in you does not honor, however grateful may be names to your ear and your pocket.[469]

In sum, Emerson is criticizing the Democratic Party for "being wholly commercial," lacking the true "democratic element" which he identifies with the "spirit of love for the general good." But although in the passage he mentions only the Democratic Party, his other writings in the period indicate that he likewise considered the Whig Party to "[suffer] from too much of the vices of materialism and selfishness."[470]

Emerson's criticism of politics driven by material self-interest continues into the 1840s and 1850s, though his chief target during this period is proslavery forces including not only southern slave interests but also northern commercial interest groups in support of proslavery measures.[471] As discussed in the introductory chapter, in "An Address . . . on . . . the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies" (1844), Emerson explicitly relates America's commercial culture to the establishment and maintenance of slavery: "And we are

[468] Malachuk, "The Republican Philosophy," 409.
[469] Arthur I. Ladu, "Emerson: Whig or Democrat," *The New England Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (September 1940), 428.
[470] Ladu, "Emerson: Whig or Democrat," 441.
[471] Their politics can be conceived as "irresponsible" in the sense that they did not care about the terrible consequences of their political action for blacks in the country.

shopkeepers, and have acquired the vices and virtues that belong to trade . . . It was or it seemed the dictate of trade, to keep the negro down."[472] The address also begins by depicting the kind of an individual "who would not so much as part with his ice-cream" to "save them [slaves] from rapine and manacles," and although for the sake of the cause Emerson is willing to civilly offer antislavery arguments based on economic advantage, he does express at one point his strong disgust with such an overriding concern for material self-interest in politics ("I had almost said, Creep into your grave, the universe has no need of you!").[473] Furthermore, after the arrival of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Emerson vehemently denounced Daniel Webster, the Massachusetts senator who played a pivotal role in the passage of the legislative package that included the Act, calling him in one address "the commercial representative,"[474] which implies Emerson's awareness of and concern about the political activism of northern proslavery commercial interests.

Meanwhile, as many scholars have pointed out, Emerson's writings reflect his acute awareness of the fact that in politics not only action but also inaction can be morally culpable, and his most prominent example of passive complicity in injustice is "the citizens of New England who claim in private to be appalled by the practice of slavery, but who take no public action against it."[475] One of the reasons for this political inaction Emerson highlights in his anti-slavery writings in the 1840s and 1850s is many New England people's overriding concern for their own material well-being. For instance, in "Antislavery Speech at Dedham" (1846), he cites

[472] *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, eds. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 20.
[473] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 8.
[474] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 66.
[475] Alex Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 98. Although this is a case of political inaction, one may also see it as an example of political irresponsibility; Alex Zakaras, for instance, describes the politically passive white population of New England as having given up their responsibility as democratic citizens.

the desire for maintaining the business relations as usual with the South as a major reason for the "inaction and apathy" of many citizens in Massachusetts in the face of slaveholders' "vicious politics."[476] Later, after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, Emerson likewise attributed the public inaction found in the state "throughout the active classes on the subject of domestic slavery and its appalling aggressions" to "the national spirit" that was "so drowsy, preoccupied with interest, deaf to principle."[477]

II. Emerson's Civic Ideal: Republican, Abolitionist, and Self-Reliant

As the previous section suggests, from the earliest period in Emerson's career as a public lecturer (in the 1830s), Emerson's conception of ideal citizenship was characterized by the republican element of public-spiritedness, or the "spirit of love for the general good" (which he also calls "the democratic element").[478] Formally, in terms of his metaphysical view, public good for Emerson can be described as that good which one's impersonal, universal self affirms and cares for ("I beg I may not be understood to praise anything which the soul in you does not honor, however grateful may be names to your ear and your pocket."); hence, Daniel S. Malachuk's conception of Emerson as a representative of "cosmic republicanism."[479] But a slightly more concrete sense of what Emerson means by public good in politics may be gleaned

[476] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 42.
[477] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 86.
[478] As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this emphasis on public-mindedness is shared among all three aesthetic liberals. But it is worth pointing out that Emerson's ideal citizen is not deliberative in the way Mill's is. Since, as I will explain in more detail in the next section, Emerson locates epistemic authority in intuitive reason ("Reason") rather than discursive reason, he does not demand that the citizen engage in the kind of Socratic inner deliberation (examining grounds of different beliefs) which Mill stressed across various writings. Among others, Zakaras downplays this difference between the two thinkers in *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship*.
[479] Malachuk, "The Republican Philosophy," 414.

from some of his antislavery writings. In "The Fugitive Slave Law" (1854), while describing the "vulgar politics" of the Whig Party as "[going] for what has been, for the old [material] necessities, the *musts*," Emerson says "the reformer goes for the better, for the ideal good, for the *mays*" filled with "the sense of right and duty," siding with "Will, or Duty, or Freedom."[480] In "Lecture on Slavery" (1855), too, Emerson exhorts all Americans to dedicate themselves to the cause of guaranteeing to "each man the largest liberty compatible with the liberty of every other man."[481] For Emerson, for the most part, to be a public-minded political agent meant to promote the political values of liberty and equality or individual rights defined by these values.

During the 1840s and 1850s, Emerson considered the abolitionists as the paradigmatic example of public-spirited political actors who morally put to shame northern and southern proslavery forces as well as politically inactive New England citizens. In the 1846 anti-slavery speech, for instance, Emerson says: "amidst these causes of the political apathy of Massachusetts, and New England . . . I value as a redeeming trait, the growth of the abolition party . . . With the noblest purpose in the general defection and apathy the Abolitionists have been faithful to themselves."[482] Later, Emerson also described John Brown as "the rarest of heroes, a pure idealist, with *no by-ends of his own* [emphasis added]."[483]

But how is Emerson's public-spirited civic ideal as represented by the abolitionists related to his key notion of self-reliance? In this section, relying on his major essay on the topic "Self-Reliance" (1841) as well as various other writings, I am going to articulate some of the essential contents of the concept.

[480] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 81.
[481] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 104.
[482] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 44.
[483] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 118.

It is clear that Emersonian self-reliance is partly about pursuing a thought which one believes to be valid for all regardless of social and other kinds of risks to oneself. Self-reliance has an intellectual dimension in that it requires having a thought. Thoughts, which are also referred to as "laws" or "ideas" by Emerson, are called "ideals" when they have normative content. What is an ideal? In one of his early lectures on human culture, Emerson observes that a "human being always compares any action or object with somewhat he calls the Perfect" – "a certain Better existing in the mind," or "the Ideal."[484] From the perspective of reform politics, a relevant ideal is a mental conception of one's own society that is in some sense significantly "better" than the existing one.[485] That self-reliance can mean aspiring to an ideal, a certain better possibility in the mind, is also suggested by Stanley Cavell's definition of self-reliance as "the reliance of the attained on the unattained/attainable."[486] More specifically, Cavell understands self-reliance to involve "a continual process of transformation of both the self and the world whereby we, in circling spirals that never end, continually project the world we *think*, the world we imagine and dream of, as the possibility for the world we live in now, as the possible next."[487] Self-reliance also requires self-trust, or the strong belief that one's thought is valid for everyone and not a mere individual idiosyncrasy. Most notably, in "Self-Reliance," Emerson

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[484] *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, eds. Stephan E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), 217.

[485] Although Emerson does not elaborate on this notion of "better," it seems plausible that, in the case of a political ideal, he takes the relevant standards to be freedom and equality. This may be inferred from his endorsement of the abolitionist cause (America without slavery) as a promotion of equal liberty for all. See also Hans von Rautenfeld's "Charitable Interpretations: Emerson, Rawls, and Cavell on the Use of Public Reason" (2004) for an illustration of the centrality of the political values of freedom and equality in Emersonian citizenship.

[486] Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 12. Cavell draws from a line in Emerson's "History" (1841): "So all that is said of the wise man . . . describes to each reader his own idea, describes his unattained but attainable self." *Essays & Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 239. Whereas Cavell seems to associate self-reliance exclusively with an ideal, or a better possibility, in my opinion Emerson considers a wider range of thoughts as a potential intellectual element of self-reliance. Laws or ideas in natural sciences, for instance, count also.

[487] Shannon Mariotti, "On the Passing of the First-Born Son: Emerson's 'Focal Distancing,' Du Bois' 'Second Sight,' and Disruptive Particularity," *Political Theory* 37 no. 3 (June 2009), 359.

says: "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, – that is genius."[488] Importantly, Emerson expects a self-reliant individual to speak and act on one's own thought; "[genius] is not a lazy angel contemplating itself and things" but "insatiable for expression,"[489] and "the spirit" "sheds and showers action, countless, endless actions."[490] But because Emerson thinks living in accordance with one's own conviction is often individually costly, he associates self-reliance closely with the virtue of courage; we must have "courage to be what we are."[491] In one of his late essays, Emerson provides a striking example of such courage in the figure of the scholar: "He [a scholar] is not there to defend himself, but to deliver his message . . . bruise, mutilate him, cut off his hands and feet, he can still crawl towards his object on his stumps."[492]

Furthermore, though Emerson scholars seldom explicitly make this point, to be self-reliant is to experience the beauty of one's own thought which one believes to be true. The beauty of what one understands to be a universally valid, or "impersonal," thought is something which Emerson indicates across a wide variety of writings. In "The Transcendentalist" (1842), Emerson says that each in "the eternal trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" "in its perfection [includes] the three."[493] Emerson also often illustrated the aesthetic experience implied in the

[488] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 259. When the thought in question is more specifically an ideal, what does it mean to believe in its validity? An ideal, as a bundle of representations imbued with a sense of being "better" than some status-quo, has a normative content issuing one or more validity claims. To believe in the validity of an ideal is to accept such claims. For instance, the abolitionist ideal implies claim for the validity of statements such as "In America, blacks should have equal moral rights as whites."
[489] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, *Fireside Edition*, vol. 12 (Boston and New York, 1909). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1962#Emerson_1236-12_123.
[490] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 163.
[491] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 1096.
[492] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, *Fireside Edition*, vol. 10 (Boston and New York, 1909). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1960#Emerson_1236-10_501.
[493] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 206.

concept of self-reliance through the figure of the poet whom he once described as the "man of Beauty" with access to "the sublime vision."[494]

All of the above description of self-reliance certainly applies to the political idealism of the abolitionists. Unlike most citizens in New England, the abolitionists had been "faithful to themselves" in fearlessly pursuing their "sublime" vision in which "the right [has] [conquered]."[495] Meanwhile, it is true that Emerson did not exempt the abolition movement from his earlier criticism of actual reforms based on the principle of self-reliance. As Len Gougeon suggests, Emerson's initial conception of self-reliance privileged individual action over association.[496] For this reason, in some of his early lectures on reforms Emerson even recommends wise and patient inaction over any action that compromises one's self-reliant character no matter how laudable the moral cause in question may be.

But as Gougeon and others point out, Emerson's attitude towards anti-slavery activism went through a dramatic change around 1844. In "An Address . . . on . . . the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies" (1844), Emerson describes the British abolition as a great "moral revolution"[497] whose history exhibits "a stately spectacle"[498] of the abolitionists' promoting human rights with much patience and well-supported arguments. Also, in the 1855 lecture on slavery, Emerson explicitly affirms the compatibility of self-reliance with reform movements: "But whilst I insist on the doctrine of the independence and the inspiration of the individual, I do not cripple but exalt the social action."[499] It is clear that, in saying this, he had chiefly abolitionist politics in mind; in the lecture, what he cites as a prime example of how

[494] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 460.
[495] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 44.
[496] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, xxiv.
[497] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 11.
[498] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 9.
[499] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 11.

"delicious" it is "to act with great masses to great aims" is "the summary or gradual abolition of slavery."[500] These and other parts of his later discussions of abolition suggest that Emerson increasingly came to see anti-slavery activism as clearly exemplifying self-reliant political action.

In light of this, whereas Kateb thinks Emersonian self-reliance is incompatible with associating for reform, it is plausible to hold, as Michael Strysick does, that "Emerson could have never seen self-reliance as a hard and fast principle not open to alteration" and was in fact led by experience to "extend and expand" the principle itself.[501] As previously illustrated, by 1855 at the latest, Emerson's principle of self-reliance had evolved to allow for reform-minded associationism.

Although Emerson nowhere provides an explicit clue as to why his conception of self-reliance shifted in the 1840s or 1850s, one plausible explanation seems to be his increasing awareness of the need for an organized and focused resistance against proslavery forces during the period. As Gougeon points out, around the time of the annexation of Texas to the Union as a slave state (1845), Emerson must have felt that "the emphasis on universal reform and individual action, which he favored, had so far failed not only to diminish slavery but even to contain it,"[502] and the subsequent war on Mexico (1846) and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) could have only invoked similar feelings in him. Likewise, Alex Zakaras argues that "[the] encroachment of slavery into New England and the northern territories, by means of the Fugitive

[500] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 13.
[501] T. Gregory Garvey, ed., *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 142-3.
[502] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, xxvii.

Slave Law and the Kansas Nebraska Act, had gradually led Emerson to believe that organized political resistance and action were necessary, despite their dangers."[503]

Yet comments such as Strysick's that Emerson "embraced John Brown as exemplary of self-reliance"[504] need to be qualified in light of the notion's counterpart to the phase of conviction and courageous action described previously. As Emerson's own change of mind regarding self-reliance's relation to associationism illustrates, a capacity for self-revision is another key aspect of Emersonian self-reliance.

Perhaps this combination of conviction and openness embedded in the notion is nowhere better expressed than in the following line in "Self-Reliance": "Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day."[505] On the one hand, Emerson seems to think that some period of persistency, or "good-humored inflexibility,"[506] with respect to one's own thought is necessary for the individual to make a strong case for it in public. Accordingly, in "Worship" (1860), he even says, "Why should I give up my thought, because I cannot answer an objection to it?"[507] On the other hand, the line from "Self-Reliance" on the value of inconsistency clearly implies that a self-reliant person can be *wrong* about his or her thought ("though it *contradict* every thing you said to-day [emphasis added]"). A self-reliant individual's cognitive fallibility is a main reason why Emersonian self-reliance cannot literally be reliance on God or Reason, though Emerson does often describe the self underlying self-reliance this way.[508]

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[503] Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 95.
[504] Garvey, ed., *The Emerson Dilemma*, 161.
[505] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 265.
[506] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 259.
[507] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 1070.
[508] Whereas Malachuk, in "The Republican Philosophy of Emerson's Early Lectures," defines self-reliance mostly as Reason-reliance, this definition is plausible, as Malachuk himself seems to be aware, only when one downplays the importance of Emerson's crucial essay on the topic "Self-Reliance." Hence, although pursuing a universally valid thought apprehended by intuitive reason certainly falls under the category of self-reliance, not every case of

Between "to-day" and "to-morrow" there is a phase of openness that makes self-revision possible which is referred to as "receptivity" by Kateb among others. Receptivity, which means first and foremost fully receiving the sense impressions of the outer world, is for Emerson a requirement of good intellect:

> We define Genius to be a sensibility to all the impressions of the outer world.[509]

> That mind is best which is most impressionable. There are times when the cawing of a crow, a reed, a snow-flake, a boy's willow whistle, or a farmer's planting in his field is more suggestive to the mind than the Yosemite gorge or the Vatican would be in another hour. In like mood an old verse, or certain words, gleam with rare significance.[510]

More specifically, receptivity as opening up to "all the impressions of the outer world" is a way of attentively contemplating even a most ordinary things without any daily instrumental interest.[511] Because the impressions under consideration here are not limited to those of works of visual arts and music, Emersonian receptivity involves taking an attitude of aesthetic appreciation toward a wide range of "non-art"[512] phenomena like nature, human beings, and their social life.

Meanwhile, as the last line of the above passage suggests ("In like mood an old verse, or certain words, gleam with rare significance."), receptivity also means for Emerson fully receiving the "impressions" of words. The general idea behind it seems to be that words should not be experienced as mere sounds or ink prints but their meanings and images should be accurately registered in our mind – words, too, must be contemplated.

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self-reliance is based on such an objective truth; what is demanded for the latter is simply the subjective sense of certainty about the truth of one's own thought.

[509] Emerson, *The Works*, 10. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1960#Emerson_1236-10_159.

[510] Emerson, *The Works*, 12. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1962#Emerson_1236-12_122.

[511] On this kind of aesthetic attitude Zakaras similarly says: "To see the world aesthetically, for Emerson, is . . . to discover a relation to the world unmediated by others, and unmediated by the purposeful instrumentality that colors most of everyday living." Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 67.

[512] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 12.

Emerson expects such receptivity to the world to unsettle at least some of the individual's existing beliefs, though others might endure until the life's end.[513] When a new intuition or insight creates a tension with an old belief, which draws its main support from the approval of others or one's past self, self-reliance, as discussed previously, requires that one trust, speak, and act on one's present thought. Conversely, conformity, the "aversion"[514] of self-reliance, means living in accordance with anything other than the present self (e.g. society and a former self).

Importantly, contra Kateb, Emerson conceives the phase of receptivity as naturally and properly transitioning into that of conviction and action. Whereas Kateb in *Emerson and Self-Reliance* strongly privileges receptivity as "the highest form of self-reliance"[515] that is "discontinuous"[516] with, and "[worthier]"[517] than, active self-reliance, this radically dichotomous and hierarchical framework is not warranted by the writings of Emerson himself. As mentioned previously, the spirit, or the mind, that Emerson valorizes is one that "sheds and showers action, countless, endless actions." In the same essay where he describes receptivity as "a sensibility to all the impressions of the outer world," he also stresses that one must "not only receive all" but also "render all."[518] Our minds can be said to have been properly working only when their contents manifest in the world through our various actions including sociopolitical reform activities: "In the healthy mind, the thought is not a barren thesis, but expands, varies, recruits itself with relations to all Nature, paints itself in wonderful symbols, appears in new men, *in*

[513] For instance, it does not seem that Emerson ever changed his mind about the fundamental rightness of abolition. Certain normative beliefs such as this seem to be closely associated with his epistemological and metaphysical notion of Reason.
[514] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 261.
[515] Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, 6.
[516] Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, 33.
[517] Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, 29.
[518] Emerson, *The Works*, 10. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1960#Emerson_1236-10_159.

institutions, in social arrangements, in wood, in stone, in art, in books [emphasis added]."[519] Hence, though Kateb is right to point out receptivity as a key aspect of Emersonian self-reliance, it is a mistake, as he does, to suggest that a truly self-reliant individual refuses to take a strong, particular stance on a contested issue (except on the issue of self-reliance itself). Rather, according to Emerson, a self-reliant person continuously shifts back and forth between contemplative openness and action based on a powerful conviction, the process (of another kind of inconsistency) through which "a greater self-reliance" "[works] a revolution in all the offices and relations of men."[520]

Finally, while there can be a liberal concern about the phase of strong conviction, persistency, or inflexibility that is ineliminable from Emerson's conception of self-reliance, it is important to note Emerson's constant, basic liberal commitment to respect for the moral rights of all persons. Although self-reliance requires conviction in one's thought as well as courage to pursue it even when doing so poses great individual risks, this way of living is not identical with what Max Weber referred to as "an ethic of ultimate ends" in that the former does not imply indifference to consequences of one's action for others in achieving one's end (except for hurting their feelings). In this regard, it is significant that, even at the height of his abolitionism, in his public speeches on Brown after the raid on Harper's Ferry, Emerson deliberately "[elided] the use of weapons by the martyred hero"[521] as he had done for the abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy many years earlier. In fact, in Emerson's accounts, both figures are presented to *suffer* violence from either an illiberal mob or state rather than inflict it on others who opposed them.

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[519] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works*, vol. 12 (New York and Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904). https://www.bartleby.com/90/1202.html.
[520] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 275.
[521] Larry J. Reynolds, *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery, and the American Renaissance* (Athens, US: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 75.

III. Emerson's Moral Aestheticism: Romanticism, Imagination, and the Power of Beauty

On the topic of romanticism's influence on Emerson, although Patrick J. Keane, David Greenham, and many others rightly focus on his adoption of a romantic epistemology and theory of imagination, few of them sufficiently draw out these influences' implications for his theory of political regeneration in liberal society. In this section, I will show how they shaped his elevation of imagination over discursive reason in the project of promoting virtue, public or private, among liberal citizens. Also, toward the end of the section, I will briefly discuss Emerson's own practice as a literary moralist.

A romantic thinker who perhaps had the most discernable impact on Emerson's thought is Samuel Taylor Coleridge. More than anyone else, Coleridge served as a major interpreter of Immanuel Kant for Emerson (which seems to apply to Emerson's understanding of Kant's third *Critique* on reflective judgment and aesthetics as well[522]). Keane points out, "Perhaps never fully aware of the precise ways in which Coleridge had altered Kant, Emerson consistently adopts, and deploys, this Coleridgean version of Kant, of whom he knew little or nothing before reading Coleridge, Carlyle, and Hedge."[523]

The key "Kantian" epistemological distinction which Emerson acquired through reading Coleridge beginning in the late 1820s was that between Reason, "an intuitive, visionary, imaginative, quasi-divine faculty, a *via illuminativa* to the Truth," and understanding, "a faculty

[522] Jeffrey Downard, "Emerson's Experimental Ethics and Kant's Analysis of Beauty," *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 39, no. 1 (Winter, 2003), 93.
[523] Patrick J. Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic "Light of All Our Day"* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 120.

capable of rational calculation but sense derived and thus limited to empirical deduction."[524] Following Coleridge, Emerson epistemically elevated the former, which "never *reasons*, never proves, [but] simply perceives," over the latter which, by "'[pointing] at Custom & Interest," "persuades one man that declarations of Reason are false" and "another that they are at least impracticable.'"[525]

Although Emerson, like Coleridge, presumably distinguished discursive reason from understanding, considering that "[the] Romantics and Transcendentalists" "found the merely 'discursive' faculty too close for comfort to 'mere' understanding,"[526] it is reasonable to conclude that Emerson did not expect discursive reason to offer sure grounds for moral truths apprehended by intuition. So whereas Mill did not place much hope in rational arguments on behalf of virtue as a way of promoting virtue in liberal society *despite* his strong commitment to an empiricist rationalism, Emerson's lack of trust in the transformative power of moral arguments rested on the more radical belief that no sound ones could in fact be provided by discursive reason, not to mention any other faculty. In fact, if understanding, described in the earlier paragraph, is any indication, discursive reason would most likely *contradict* moral truths or at most offer weak or unsound arguments for them. This distrust of the authority of discursive reason in the domain of moral knowledge also undergirds Emerson's romantic association of the faculty with moral skepticism, which is illustrated by his comment that, unlike the naturally believing poet, "the philosopher, after some struggle, [have] only reasons for believing."[527]

Meanwhile, Coleridge's romantic theory of imagination had a major influence on Emerson's perception of the faculty as the key to individual moral change. Emerson absorbed

[524] Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, 120.
[525] Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, 52.
[526] Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, 67.
[527] Emerson, *The Works*, 12. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1962#Emerson_1236-12_53.

from Coleridge "the concept of imagination as image-making power" in the service of Reason.[528] In *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge says that "'an IDEA,'" "'in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol,'" illustrating his belief that "the mind could not grasp pure or disembodied truth without some fleshy clothing."[529] Similarly, in *Nature* (1836), Emerson defines imagination as "the use which the Reason makes of the material world," a faculty which turns objects of nature into symbols of thought.[530] Emerson's stress on the shaping power of imagination can be also seen in the definition he provides in an early lecture on English literature (1835): imagination is "that active state of the mind in which it forces things to obey the laws of thought; takes up all present objects in a despotic manner into its own image and likeness and makes the thought which occupies it the center of the world."[531]

When imagination puts "fleshy clothing" on some normative thought apprehended by Reason, this results in an "ideal," which, as illustrated in the previous section, often constitutes the intellectual dimension of self-reliance. Emerson's notions of ideal, imagination, and their role in aesthetic experience can be usefully compared with the corresponding conceptions in Kant's aesthetics, the gist of which Emerson was most likely familiar with.[532] According to Kant, we experience an object to be beautiful when our two cognitive faculties – imagination and understanding – are in a free and yet harmonious relationship. In the case of ordinary perception of an object, imagination combines the information provided by the senses into a perceptual

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[528] Vivian C. Hopkins, *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 32. William Wordsworth, another romantic thinker who had much influence on Emerson, also closely linked imagination to the Coleridgean intuitive reason by defining the former as "'Reason in her most exalted mood.'" James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 275.
[529] Hopkins, *Spires of Form*, 32.
[530] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 34. Imagination is elsewhere also described as "a second sight." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Fireside Edition*, vol. 8 (Boston and New York, 1909). https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1946#Emerson_1236-08_45.
[531] Whicher et al, eds., *The Early Lectures*, 1: 224.
[532] Downard, "Emerson's Experimental Ethics," 93.

unity that can be fully subsumed under the determinate concepts of understanding. But in the case of experiencing beauty, imagination, apart from carrying out its usual role in cognition, also "'freely plays' through a series of thoughts and associations which cannot be pinned down by determinate concepts."[533]

Imagination, when freed from the rules of understanding, is creative rather than merely cognitive in that it constructs an "aesthetic idea," "'an intuition (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept cannot be found.'"[534] Rather than being a single representation, an aesthetic idea is better understood as "a plurality of representations or thoughts linked together" and "unified by a certain theme."[535] Although an aesthetic idea created by free imagination eludes conceptualization by understanding, it does serve as a symbolic presentation of a "rational idea,"[536] such as freedom and the moral law. It is the aesthetic idea which is the source and ground of aesthetic pleasure and judgment.[537]

I suggest that "the ideal" in Emerson's aesthetics is akin to "the aesthetic idea" in Kant's aesthetic theory.[538] Just as an aesthetic idea is creative imagination's concrete exhibition of a rational idea, an ideal, as a "better" possibility in the mind, is an embodiment, or a specific interpretation, of certain abstract values and principles. Crucially, the intellectual moment of

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[533] Andrew Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste: The role of aesthetic ideas," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85, no. 3 (2007), 425.
[534] Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste," 424.
[535] Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste," 424.
[536] Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste," 420. Rational ideas are representations which "reason in its speculative and practical capacities naturally find interesting" and can have mathematical, religious, metaphysical, or moral content, though several influential commentators on Kant's aesthetics like Anthony Savile focus on moral ideas such as freedom and the moral law. Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste," 420. Strictly speaking, rational ideas "cannot be exemplified in experience or by means of imagination," and yet aesthetic ideas "seek to approximate to an exhibition" of rational ideas. Hannah Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2013), 19-20.
[537] Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste."
[538] I say "akin to" because, as discussed earlier, Coleridge's "Kantian" epistemology and theory of imagination on which Emerson relied was in fact significantly different from Kant's in various ways. The analogy I suggest in the paragraph pivots on the role of creative imagination in giving concrete, sensuous forms to abstract ideas including the normative.

forming an ideal in one's mind is also an aesthetic one in which a sense of beauty is inspired in the (be)holder of the ideal.

The idealizing power of imagination therefore suggests the faculty's importance in Emerson's aesthetic theory. For example, in "Beauty" (1860), he writes: "Things are pretty, graceful, rich, elegant, handsome, but, until they speak to the imagination, not yet beautiful . . . It [beauty] is properly not in the form, but in the mind."[539] Earlier, in "Love" (1841), he made a similar point using examples from fine arts:

> The statue is then beautiful when it begins to be incomprehensible, when it is passing out of criticism, and can no longer be defined by compass and measuring-wand, but demands an active imagination to go with it, and to say what it is in the act of doing. The god or hero of the sculptor is always represented in a transition *from* that which is representable to the senses, *to* that which is not. The same remark holds of painting. And of poetry, the success is not attained when it lulls and stupefies, but when it astonishes and fires us with new endeavors after the unattainable.[540]

Imagination's varied functions include allowing us to construct certain better possibilities in our mind based on our receptivity to the world's impressions. Works of sculpture, painting, poetry, and all other arts are beautiful when they induce us to imagine such ideals in our mind (Hence beauty is "properly not in the form, but in the mind.").

Despite the similarities between the two thinkers' aesthetic theories, Emerson's is distinguished for a certain democratic emphasis that is missing in Kant's. Although Kant would acknowledge that "it is *possible* in principle for the imagination to call to mind a string of associations in connection with experience of any object or subject-matter," he highlights the unlikelihood of an ordinary thing to inspire an aesthetic idea in the subject.[541] In contrast,

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[539] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures,* 1110.
[540] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures,* 333. In describing the ideal, Emerson vacillates between "unattained but attainable" and "unattainable," but the former is distinguished for being in harmony with the meaning of the ideal as a certain better *possibility*.
[541] Chignell, "Kant on the normativity of taste," 427.

Emerson stresses that *all* actual entities, however seemingly insignificant, can stimulate creative imagination. Indeed, as indicated earlier, he thinks sometimes "the cawing of a crow, a reed, a snow-flake, a boy's willow whistle, or a farmer's planting in his field is more suggestive to the mind than the Yosemite gorge or the Vatican would be in another hour." Likewise, in "The American Scholar" (1837), Emerson emphasizes that "the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause" is always "lurking" in "the common," "the familiar," and "the low."[542] This belief has an important aesthetic implication, which is that nothing in the world is entirely devoid of beauty when rightly perceived; receptivity allows one to "clothe every thing ordinary and even sordid with beauty."[543] As Keane suggests, in expressing this notion that beauty/sublimity resides even in the ordinary, Emerson very much echoed Coleridge and William Wordsworth,[544] and in "The American Scholar" Emerson explicitly credits Wordsworth for pursuing the idea.[545]

It is this egalitarian aspect of Emerson's aesthetics which Kateb appropriates in constructing the notion of "democratic aestheticism," which is essentially "receptivity or responsiveness to as much of the world as possible"[546] with the expectation of deriving aesthetic satisfaction from "the world as it is."[547] In Kateb's hands, beauty grounded in receptivity in Emerson's thought becomes exclusively associated with the anti-reformist aim of "[dulling] the urge to change the world."[548] According to Emerson, however, receptivity is also closely related to a kind of beauty that indirectly facilitates social reform by playing an essential role in the formation of a public-spirited reformer. This is because, as suggested by the passage from

[542] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 68-9.
[543] Whicher et al, eds., *The Early Lectures*, 1: 228.
[544] Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, 261.
[545] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 69.
[546] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 31.
[547] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 32.
[548] Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality," 34.

"Love," the contemplative reception of impressions from the external world may stimulate imagination to creatively conceive an ethical ideal that inspires an elevating sense of beauty.

The foregoing discussion of Emerson's notions of intuitive reason, imagination, and ideal serves as a necessary backdrop to his theory of individual moral transformation propelled by an aesthetic *differential*.[549] The basic idea of the theory is as follows. Once a moral ideal conceived in imagination gives rise to a sense of beauty, a subjectively experienced aesthetic gap between one's ideal and actual selves motivates various attempts at self-reform.[550] This moral aestheticism is based on the individual's aesthetic discontent with the existing self in contrast to a vividly imagined better, possible self. This feeling of dissatisfaction as well as desire for a new form of beauty in the world together drive the individual to cultivate one's own character as a work of art.

One of the earliest instances where the basic idea of aesthetic discontent in connection to reform appears in Emerson's writings is "The Protest" (1839).[551] There, the figure of the youth, a potential reformer or even revolutionary, is described as "a beholder of beauty"[552] for holding a gripping ideal and "likes his imagination better"[553] to the extent that he is deeply dissatisfied with the actual status-quo. In "Reforms" (1840), Emerson also points out that life is "prosaic" (as

[549] The two distinct types of aestheticism implied in this section each corresponds to either of the two phases of self-reliance discussed earlier (receptivity and convinced action).
[550] At the same time, the moral ideal in question may inspire a desire for a moral reform of society when many others are also perceived to fall short of the ideal.
[551] Emerson's moral psychology of reform grounded in the idea of aesthetic discontent illustrated below applies to both individual/moral and social/legal reforms. The cultivation of public virtue (or the formation of a reformer) belongs to the former category. A reform movement may be concerned with either task, though in the former case its task would be to promote its desired type of individual reform widely in society (i.e. a moral reform of society).
[552] *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 3, eds. Stephan E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), 94.
[553] Whicher et al, eds., *The Early Lectures*, 3:93.

opposed to "picturesque") when it is "false and violates the laws of the mind"[554] and that "each of the popular reforms is an accusation of some lapse from the fair Ideal life."[555]

The same theme appears in "Lecture on the Times" (1841), one of his major essays on reform movements:

> The history of reform is always identical; it is *the comparison of the idea with the fact*. *Our modes of living are not agreeable to our imagination* . . . In conversation with a wise man, we find ourselves apologizing for our employments; we speak of them with shame. Nature, literature, science, childhood, appear to us beautiful; but not our own daily work, not the ripe fruit and considered labors of man. *This beauty which the fancy finds in everything else, certainly accuses that manner of life we lead.* Why should it be hateful? Why should it contrast thus with all natural beauty? . . . Out of this fair Idea in the mind springs the effort at the Perfect. It is the interior testimony to *a fairer possibility of life and manners*, which agitates society every day with the offer of some new amendment [emphasis added].[556]

Here Emerson describes a situation where an experience of beauty provided by our receptivity and imaginative response to certain aspects of the outer world like nature gives rise to a feeling of "shame"[557] about our existing way of living, which, when represented by our imagination, is now entailed by a feeling of ugliness. It turns out that the flip side of formation of an ideal in one's mind is de-idealization of a corresponding aspect of the actual world in the same mind. Crucially, such aesthetic discontent with the actual motivates action for changing it in accordance with the ideal, which undergirds Emerson's claim in the same essay that every reform is born of the aesthetic gap between our "idea of the Beautiful," or "a fairer possibility of life and manners," and our "modes of living [which] are not agreeable to our imagination."[558]

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[554] Whicher et al, eds., *The Early Lectures*, 3:259.
[555] Whicher et al, eds., *The Early Lectures*, 3:260.
[556] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 159.
[557] As Bernard Williams claims in *Shame and Necessity* (1993), unlike guilt which primarily points to "what has happened to others" due to my wrongful action, shame "looks to what I am" and "may be expressed in attempts to reconstruct or improve [myself]." Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 92-3.
[558] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 159.

Although aesthetic discontent and the associated feeling of shame are integral to Emerson's moral aestheticism, the latter presupposes a positive aesthetic affect as well: the love of beauty. Emerson calls this love a "nobler want of man"[559] and describes transcendentalists like himself as first and foremost "lovers and worshippers of Beauty."[560] He furthermore suggests that the love of beauty leads to creative efforts:

> All men are in some degree impressed by the face of the world; some men even to delight. This love of beauty is Taste. Others have the same love in such excess, that, not content with admiring, they seek to embody it in new forms. The creation of beauty is Art.[561]

Far from being merely a receptive contemplator of the existing world and an imaginative dreamer, an Emersonian individual is also an active artist who seeks to "embody [beauty] in new forms" in accordance with ideas or models in his or her imagination. It is important to keep in mind that, on the whole, Emerson uses the notion of art to describe a wide range of activities outside of the narrow field of fine arts as well. In "Art" (1870), for example, he defines art as the "conscious utterance of thought, by speech or action, to any end," and in an earlier essay with the same title he describes "[the] best of beauty" as belonging to "the work of art of human character."[562]

Emerson never imagined moral aestheticism to occur in a cultural vacuum; rather, he believed art and literature had an important role to play in stimulating the idealizing capacity of the individual's imagination. Literature, according to Emerson, must describe "the new heroic life of man, the new unbelieved possibility of simple living and of clean and noble relations with men"[563] and offer "[a] text of heroism, a name and anecdote of courage, [which] *are not*

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[559] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 14.
[560] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 206.
[561] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 18.
[562] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 435. This is one of the romantic metaphors Emerson shared with Mill.
[563] Emerson, *The Works*, 12. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1962#Emerson_1236-12_446.

arguments [but] sallies of freedom [emphasis added]."[564] In fact, in "Poetry and Imagination" (1872), Emerson even says: "All writings must be in a degree exoteric, written to a human *should* or *would*, instead of to the fatal *is*."[565]

Similar to the romantics, Emerson especially emphasized the moral mission of the literary genre of poetry. Again, in "Poetry and Imagination," he locates "the supreme value of poetry" in "[educating] us to a height beyond itself"[566] by expressing, "not the common-sense, – as the avoirdupois of the hero, or his structure in feet and inches, – but the beauty and soul in his [the hero's] aspect as it shines to fancy and feeling."[567]

Moreover, Emerson himself arguably practiced such aesthetics through various works. From early in his career, he showed interest in biography "which inspires morality by example rather than precept."[568] In a journal entry in 1832, for instance, complaining that "[they] that have [written] the lives of great men have not written them from love and from seeing the beauty that was to be desired in them," Emerson expresses his wish to "draw characters" based on the belief that "'life is communicable.'"[569] According to Edmund G. Berry, although Emerson "never wrote the 'modern Plutarch' of which he spoke in his early journals," certain aspects of Plutarch's biographical method can be traced in Emerson's "sketches of persons."[570] Berry illustrates this claim mostly through "the lecture series 'Biography' of 1835 and the several other biographical essays written at various times."[571]

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[564] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 956-7.
[565] Emerson, *The Works*, 8. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1946#Emerson_1236-08_64.
[566] Emerson, *The Works*, 8. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1946#Emerson_1236-08_204.
[567] Emerson, *The Works*, 8. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1946#Emerson_1236-08_127.
[568] Edmund G. Berry, *Emerson's Plutarch* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 256.
[569] Berry, *Emerson's Plutarch*, 256.
[570] Berry, *Emerson's Plutarch*, 258.
[571] Berry, *Emerson's Plutarch*, 258.

Considering all of Emerson's "sketches of persons" throughout his career, one can realize that public life dedicated to a political cause increasingly became an important element of Emerson's conception of heroism. In his early essay "Beauty" from *Nature* (1836), Emerson describes Henry Vane, a leading Parliamentarian during the English Civil War who was beheaded in 1662 for treason, as a heroic figure for "[suffering] death as the champion of the English laws."[572] Similarly, in "Heroism" (1847), Lovejoy, the abolitionist editor shot to death by a proslavery mob in 1837, figures as a hero who sacrificed his life "for the rights of free speech and opinion."[573]

Emerson's idealization of the abolitionists culminated in his public compliments of Brown. After Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and capture in 1859, Emerson gave two public speeches in praise of the abolitionist's character. As mentioned earlier, in the one given in the same year before a Boston audience, Emerson called Brown "the rarest of heroes, a pure idealist, with no by-ends of his own."[574] Then in the next year at a meeting at Salem, Emerson again offered a highly idealized picture of Brown: "Thus was formed a romantic character absolutely without any vulgar trait; living to ideal ends, without any mixture of self-indulgence or compromise . . ."[575]

To a degree, Emerson's lavish praise in both instances owed to his insufficient knowledge about Brown's life. It seems that "everything Emerson knew about John Brown came directly from Brown himself via his selective conversational statements and the autobiographical fragment, or from selected portions of public documents concerning him."[576] Most importantly,

[572] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 17.
[573] Joel Porte, ed., *Essays & Lectures*, 380.
[574] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 118.
[575] Gougeon and Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, 122.
[576] John J. McDonald, "Emerson and John Brown," *The New England Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (September 1971), 393.

Emerson was not likely to have known Brown's murder of five unarmed proslavery men at Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas.[577] In addition, it is possible that Emerson misunderstood – interpreted too figuratively – some of "the literal words of Brown" such as: "'Better that a whole generation of men, women and children should pass away by a violent death, than that one word of either [the Golden Rule or the Declaration of Independence] should be violated in this country.'"[578]

Yet Emerson also deliberately idealized Brown's life by eliding the latter's reliance on physical violence at Harper's Ferry. On the issue of Emerson's perception of Brown's violence, Gilman M. Ostrander argues that Emerson believed Brown "was justified in following a course which the ordinary citizen could not honorably follow,"[579] but this view is not supported by Emerson's reaction to the news of the raid as shown in his personal letters. In them, he characterizes "'the sad Harpers Ferry business' as a 'fatal blunder' at which a 'true hero . . . lost his head.'"[580] Admiring Brown's disinterested motive but disapproving of his method, Emerson chose to elide the latter aspect in his public speeches about Brown, which is highly similar to what he had done for Lovejoy in an earlier decade. In *Democracy,* Tocqueville includes in the poet's task "[offering] a higher image to the mind" by "taking away a part of what exists."[581] Emerson was one iconic American moralist who fit Tocqueville's description of the poet.

Conclusion

[577] McDonald, "Emerson and John Brown," 383.
[578] Gilman M. Ostrander, "Emerson, Thoreau, and John Brown," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39, no. 4 (March 1953), 720.
[579] Ostrander, "Emerson, Thoreau, and John Brown," 717.
[580] McDonald, "Emerson and John Brown," 385.
[581] *Democracy in America*, 3: 832.

In this chapter, while establishing Emerson's commonality with Tocqueville and Mill in terms of aesthetic liberalism, I also explored some unique theoretical perspectives Emerson offers within the tradition. Similar to those of the other two thinkers, Emerson's aesthetic response to the insufficient supply of public-spirited politics in liberal commercial society reflected the romantic substitution of imagination for discursive reason in the domain of moral transformation. But unlike in the others' cases, Emerson's distrust in the power of discursive reason to effect moral change was specifically based on Coleridgean philosophy in which the faculty's epistemic authority was radically diminished. Furthermore, Emerson is distinctive for simultaneously suggesting an aesthetic liberalism based on the heroic beauty of reformers and an anti-reformist aesthetic egalitarianism.

Whereas there are many scholarly works that discuss Emerson's aesthetics, few demonstrate the significance of the notion of beauty in his political thought. Against this backdrop, the chapter highlighted beauty's role in addressing his major political concern about the displacement of reform politics by both moral inaction and selfish, unjust politics rooted in the commercial culture of liberal society, thereby also correcting Kateb's overemphasis on Emerson's anti-reformist impulse. Additionally, in this chapter I used this artistic aesthetic category to illuminate some of his key concepts such as self-reliance and exemplarity.

In the next, concluding chapter, in addition to providing a brief summary of the dissertation, I will discuss aesthetic liberalism's significance for contemporary liberal democracies while responding to several potential criticisms against it. It will be shown, too, that the study of aesthetic liberals is also fertile with some new suggestions for contemporary liberal political thought.

Conclusion:
Aesthetic Liberalism in the Age of Liberal Democracy

In this dissertation, I observed that Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson all shared a deep concern about political inaction and interest politics attending the modern structural changes in society based on economic liberalism. Another common fact about those three liberals, I argued, is that they all prioritized aesthetics over philosophical moral arguments in fostering public spirit in liberal society. In their writings, I identified what I call "aesthetic liberalism," according to which the beauty of a heroic political actor's character and conduct (which I also refer to as "heroic beauty") can help liberal citizens take public-spirited political action by evoking in them an aesthetic desire to live up to their own latent ethical ideal.

Unlike Wilhelm von Humboldt and Jacob Burckhardt, two other major liberal thinkers in the nineteenth century who also incorporated the aesthetic category of beauty into their sociopolitical philosophies, the three aesthetic liberals subscribed to neither apolitical aestheticism nor political quietism under modern conditions but insisted on reform-minded or even revolutionary political action. Also, whereas some of their liberal predecessors such as Thomas Hobbes and David Hume, even while recognizing the power and usefulness of some of the human passions, tended to stress the potential moral and political danger of imagination,[582] aesthetic liberals, under the influence of nineteenth-century romanticism, elevated to an unprecedented degree the idealizing power of imagination, the contemplation of greatness, and heroic aesthetics over discursive rationality and moral philosophy in the life of a liberal citizen.

[582] Hobbes, for instance, considered glory, an imaginative pleasure rooted in the contemplation of one's own greatness, as the most serious threat to peace, a fundamental cause of violent conflict. Meanwhile, according to James Engell, "one of Hume's central themes" was that "the imagination is very easily deceptive." James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 54.

While articulating the three thinkers' commonly shared identity as aesthetic liberals, my dissertation also traced important variations across their aesthetic liberalisms. Whereas Tocqueville's aesthetic liberalism was inspired by the heroic beauty of the French revolutionaries of 1789, Mill based his notion largely on the figure of Socrates while developing a clearer account of the impotence of discursive reason in generating political virtues. As for Emerson, even as he admired and theoretically appropriated the heroic beauty of the American abolitionists, he simultaneously had much greater appreciation than the other two thinkers for the aesthetic quality of the ordinary and its power to restrain rather than promote political reform. The dissertation further established that these and other significant differences among aesthetic liberals mostly reflect their distinct relationships to the two dominant intellectual currents of their time: utilitarianism and romanticism.

Beyond the individual scholarships on the three major liberal thinkers, my dissertation contributes to the study of liberal political thought in general as well as contemporary political theory. First, it provides a new perspective on romanticism's historical relationship to liberalism. Some scholars, including Isaiah Berlin and Nancy L. Rosenblum, present romanticism as ultimately having provided new justifications for the basic liberal norms and institutions. In my account, romanticism's more radical impact consists in shaking the liberal faith and confidence in the practice of value justification itself. More specifically, the romantic critique of discursive reason and valorization of imagination contributed to aesthetic liberalism's emphasis on aesthetic elevation over rational persuasion in the generation of civic virtue. My dissertation also intervenes in the aesthetic turn in contemporary political theory. Conceiving the aesthetic very broadly to include not only the experience of beauty or sublimity but also basic sense perception and the sense of intelligibility, the aesthetic turn addresses a set of modern political problems that

have been neglected within contemporary liberal political philosophy. Yet the aesthetic turn shares a common deficiency with the liberal theory it critiques in neglecting the problem of political action posed by liberal modernity. Whereas the aesthetic turn tends to simply presuppose the presence of public-minded political actors, aesthetic liberalism helps us think about how with the aid of the aesthetic such agents might emerge in the first place within a liberal culture of materialistic egoism.

Furthermore, as the previous discussion of the aesthetic turn suggests, my dissertation brings some new theoretical possibilities or potential insights to the contemporary debate about the gap between ideal and actual citizenships in liberal democracy. In this regard, I want to note first that, despite the distance separating the nineteenth century and today, aesthetic liberals' political problematization of *homo economicus* in liberal modernity finds some echo among contemporary political theorists. In *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (2009), for instance, concerning Tocqueville's worry that "*homo economicus* was ascendant and *homo politicus* increasingly rare,"[583] Alex Zakaras writes:

> This particular anxiety is, of course, pertinent to our own politics. Contemporary critics often lament the decline of civic participation and the privatization of leisure time . . . In the twentieth century, empirical theories of democracy suggest that the individual is essentially an economic creature – that is to say, essentially a private creature, a consumer. As such, he is thought fundamentally unsuited for political judgment; he is expected to express only private preferences, which democracy then aggregates. Politics as a sphere of activity requiring special kinds of judgment and duty is radically narrowed and becomes the domain of the trained elite.[584]

In *Teachers of the People: Political Education in Rousseau, Hegel, Tocqueville, and Mill* (2017), Dana Villa also cites Tocqueville to make a similar observation about contemporary America. On Tocqueville's warning about the danger of political apathy based on materialism for

[583] Alex Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.
[584] Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 14-5.

democracy in *Democracy in America*, Villa comments that "it would be hard to find a more compact or accurate description of the attitude of many in the United States toward public and its obligations."[585] Going so far as to say that "[the] triumph of the consumer over the citizen in American consciousness is a universally recognized phenomenon,"[586] Villa argues that, "when it comes to public matters, the most important virtue to be cultivated is the capacity to at least partially bracket the reflexive response of 'what's in it for me (or my group)?'."[587] Among social scientists, Robert Putnam, a "self-proclaimed [neo-Tocquevillian],"[588] "marshals data to demonstrate that [American] society has moved 'toward individual and material values and away from communal values'"[589] in his widely influential work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000).[590] Meanwhile, this kind of criticism is certainly not made only with reference to Tocqueville. In *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (2016), for example, Sheldon S. Wolin describes contemporary America as a country where "[the] citizen, the crucial actor in the theory of democracy, merges with *homo economicus* and, like the constitution, is hybridized. ('vote your pocketbook!')."[591]

Judging from this literature, even though the notion of *homo economicus* may not exhaust the content of liberal civil society's culture and only rarely thoroughly describe an individual's life, it does seem to indicate a cultural element that has no negligible negative political

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[585] Dana Villa, *Teachers of the People: Political Education in Rousseau, Hegel, Tocqueville, and Mill* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 203.
[586] Villa, *Teachers of the People*, 203.
[587] Villa, *Teachers of the People*, 200.
[588] Brian Danoff, "Asking of Freedom Something Other than Itself: Tocqueville, Putnam, and the Vocation of the Democratic Moralist," *Politics & Policy* 35, no. 2 (2007), 167.
[589] Danoff, "Asking of Freedom," 168.
[590] Concerning Putnam's diagnosis of contemporary American culture, it is also telling that he, as both David Schultz (2002) and Brian Danoff (2007) suggest, almost exclusively relies upon a contemporary version of the doctrine of interest well understood, which Tocqueville describes in *Democracy* as the characteristic strategy of the American moralist, for the purpose of persuading his American readers to participate more in communal life. In short, Putnam seems to assume his readers to be for the most part *homo economicus*.
[591] Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 589.

implications for today's liberal democracy. It can be said that, then, aesthetic liberalism speaks to an important contemporary political problem while representing an approach that has never been sufficiently explored by scholars in political theory and the social sciences.

Moreover, though aesthetic liberalism as articulated in this dissertation is directly concerned only with the problem of *homo economicus*, the moral psychology underpinning the tradition is relevant for discussion about ways to realize almost any demanding civic ideal in modern society (e.g. "individuality" (Zakaras 2009) and "Socratic citizenship" (Villa 2001)). To a degree not found among contemporary scholars who deal with the idea of citizenship, aesthetic liberals ask us to give serious consideration to the aesthetic force of beauty as a means of narrowing the chasm between actual and ideal citizens in liberal democracy.

But what and how much significance aesthetic liberalism's approach may have given the fact that political theorists and social scientists (and aesthetic liberals like Mill and Tocqueville themselves) have suggested several other means of political cultivation? Influenced by romanticism, aesthetic liberalism offers a critical perspective especially on the power of rational persuasion in civic education which is rarely explicitly questioned by contemporary political philosophers who try to justify their favored civic ideals (including liberal deliberative virtues such as "tolerance, 'broad-mindedness,' fairness, reflectiveness, and rationality"[592]) with various philosophical arguments (whether or not they explicitly revisit the idea of citizenship). As illustrated by this dissertation, the romantics and aesthetic liberals collectively offer a wide range of reasons for being skeptical about the transformative power of such arguments (e.g. their abstractness, philosophical weakness, and appeal to ends that do not motivate actions or generate feelings).

[592] Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 10.

Another potential contributor to the cultivation of civic virtue that has been suggested for liberal democracy is political or other kinds of communal participation through associations or local participatory institutions. As discussed in some of the previous chapters, this institutional/associational factor was recognized by both Tocqueville and Mill. Among the contemporary representatives of this approach is the neo-Tocquevillian Putnam. In "Asking of Freedom Something Other than Itself: Tocqueville, Putnam, and the Vocation of the Democratic Moralist" (2007), Brian Danoff provides a helpful description of Putnam in this regard:

> As a public intellectual, Putnam appears to be trying to use all of his reasoning powers to induce Americans to participate first by necessity, and afterwards by choice. In other words, Putnam tries to convince us that *if* we want to be 'healthy, wealthy, and wise' (Putnam 2000, 287), then it is *necessary* for us to participate in the community; it is Putnam's fond hope that we will then develop the habit of participation, so that our future participation will become a matter of choice and taste . . . Building on Tocqueville, then, Putnam appears to believe the following: we may start out as *homo economicus*, to use Schultz's term, but if people can be persuaded to engage in civic and political activity out of self-interest, then, over time, their hearts and souls will move toward a more genuine form of civic virtue.[593]

This passage also illustrates the idea that rational arguments, though powerless by themselves, may work in conjunction with communal activities rooted in associations and institutions to construct – borrowing a phrase from McLean et al. (2002) – "a public-spirited community on the privatistic motives of individuals."[594] As my previous chapter on romanticism suggests, a similar idea and the underlying logic were given expression by William Godwin as early as the late eighteenth century.[595]

Despite the enduring attraction of the idea, more than a few scholars doubt whether it is as promising as it is often portrayed to be. In *Teachers of the People,* for instance, Villa observes: "The moralizing potential of political participation – a potential that Tocqueville saw

[593] Danoff, "Asking of Freedom," 175.
[594] Danoff, "Asking of Freedom," 174.
[595] *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793)

as critical – turns out to be remarkably feeble in a world in which profit, commerce, and politics are seamlessly interwoven."[596] In fact, as mentioned in my chapter on Tocqueville, even Tocqueville himself, while affirming that political participation can have a moralizing effect, did not believe it would be common for a person to transition from *homo economicus* to *homo politicus* through this channel. Also, even if it is true that everyone can cultivate public spirit by repeatedly trying public-minded participation in political institutions, what would motivate people to go through this process? Among aesthetic liberals, as it was discussed in a previous chapter, Mill believed that aesthetics is a better candidate for addressing this issue than rational arguments.

In addition, the kind of local political institutions which are depicted to serve as the locus of ordinary citizens' political activity in *Democracy* are either unavailable or significantly disempowered in many of today's liberal democracies. Even America, which has been one of the most decentralized democracies in the world, is not as exceptional as it used to be with respect to local political participation; in *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, in response to contemporary political theory's argument that "*deliberation* will help bridge the gap between actual and ideal citizens," Zakaras observes that "political power is much more centralized [in America] than it was in Tocqueville's day."[597] It seems that, then, in many countries the public good of a politically decentralized state, which is believed to promote civic virtue, must itself be brought into existence by a sufficiently many citizens possessing such virtue; as Jean-Jacque Rousseau might put it, good laws which create good citizens often require the latter to be born in the first place.

[596] Villa, *Teachers of the People*, 200.
[597] Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy*, 17.

Yet whatever shortcomings the alternatives might have, it is legitimate to question the effectiveness of the approach represented by aesthetic liberalism itself: What evidence is there that the force of beauty would actually perform the task aesthetic liberals assign to it? As primarily a work in the history of political thought, my dissertation does not seek to prove the psychological efficacy of the aesthetic approach it reconstructs in a way that meets the standards of some relevant empirical science. But I think it is worth pointing out that aesthetic liberalism is at least solidly rooted in aesthetic liberals' personal experiences in their moral and political lives as their various writings clearly indicate. As far as generating psychological *hypotheses* is concerned, these cases are not a negligible basis.

Apart from the issue of efficacy, some may criticize aesthetic liberalism based on normative grounds. For example, relying on the force of beauty rather than simply the force of reason to motivate a person is perhaps a form of manipulation that disrespects his or her autonomy? But if this broadly Kantian moral standard, which delegitimizes affect as such, is to be accepted, then it seems that aesthetic liberalism is no more illegitimate than certain forms of rhetoric/persuasive speech which many contemporary political theorists (including deliberative theorists such as Simone Chambers and John Dryzek) affirm for political reasons.[598] Another source of normative uneasiness with aesthetic liberalism in terms of individual autonomy might be its recommendation for the emulation of political heroes, such as the French revolutionaries and the American abolitionists. No matter how admirable these political actors are, is not aesthetic liberalism endorsing a form of heteronomic imitation? This potential criticism, however, overlooks the element of affirmative judgment the spectator has on the actor (or more precisely on the ideal represented by the actor) that is built into the notion of aesthetic elevation.

[598] Inder S. Marwah, "A Dangerous Turn: Manipulation and the Politics of Ethos," *Constellations* 00, no. 0 (2015).

To elaborate, the kind of hero "imitation" commended by aesthetic liberalism is none other than using one's own creative imagination to construct an ideal, an aesthetic embodiment of one's own latent moral beliefs, and feeling its attraction, its force of beauty, to become more like it. An encounter (mediated or unmediated) with a heroic actor only serves as a helpful stimulus to this process of creating and conforming to one's higher *self*-image. This, too, seems to be a kind of autonomy.

Lastly, others may take an issue with the "liberalism" aspect of aesthetic liberalism.[599] As pointed out in some of the earlier chapters, despite their criticism of certain aspects of liberal modernity, all three aesthetic liberals affirmed the basic liberal socioeconomic organization while showing varying degrees of openness to arguments from non-liberal political traditions. This, however, does not mean that aesthetic liberalism is suggestive or relevant only to someone with specifically liberal political commitments. The kind of aesthetic elevation explored by aesthetic liberalism – its moral psychology – can be put in the service of political projects defined by a non-liberal public good as well. It is, for instance, quite conceivable for someone to feel and inspired by the heroic beauty of socialist political actors selflessly committed to the public good of perfect distributive justice; after all, liberalism does not have the sole claim on the public, political values of freedom and equality.

I will conclude by briefly discussing how aesthetic liberalism relates to contemporary liberal political thought. As far as I know, aesthetic liberalism as first developed by Tocqueville, Mill, and Emerson does not reemerge among major liberal political thinkers after the nineteenth century when romanticism was at the peak of its influence. But it is significant that aesthetic

[599] Liberals obviously have no objection to this aspect. In discussing this potential criticism, I have mainly in mind the socialist political tradition and its movements including the Revolution of 1848 in France, to which Tocqueville was famously hostile.

liberalism raises and uniquely responds to several important issues related to reconciling liberalism's various elements and needs. For instance, whereas, as explained in the first chapter, the modern liberal system of individual rights or liberties constitutes the structural conditions for the materialistic egoism of market society on the one hand and rational skepticism about moral values on the other, liberal democracy also requires citizens who possess certain moral excellences or virtues in order to survive and progress. As this dissertation suggests, one such necessary virtue seems to be public-minded participation in politics, which is reflected by the fact that, as Rosenblum points out, "[a] recurrent preoccupation of liberal thinkers is determining how individuals immersed in the private pursuit of happiness can be inspired to participate in politics (or even defend themselves against injustice)."[600] Another issue of reconciliation which was discussed in the introductory chapter in relation to aesthetic liberalism and continues to concern contemporary liberalism is the need for simultaneously affirming liberal conviction and toleration in liberal democratic politics. Without necessarily having the last word on these and other similar issues, aesthetic liberals both individually and collectively impart much wanted seriousness and new perspectives to the current liberal discourse about them. On the whole, I believe the enduring relevance of aesthetic liberals for the liberal political tradition lies in their ability to illuminate some of its key internal tensions or dilemmas while boldly embracing certain seeming contrarieties (e.g. equality/heroism, openness/conviction, rational deliberation/aesthetic enchantment), thereby testing the limits of what liberalism can be.

[600] Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 128. Rosenblum even describes this issue as "a [classic liberal problem]." Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism*, 127.

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