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Tocqueville on the Political and Intellectual Effects of the Tyranny of the Majority

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By Arthur Milikh

This thesis examines the greatest problem that Tocqueville identified in modern democracy: the tyranny of the majority. We examine the powers Tocqueville attributes to the majority, how it influences the law, and its power over the mind. In the first chapter we examine the majority's dominance over the legislature, the effects of political parties on politics, and the "moral empire" of the majority. In the second chapter we analyze how public opinion affects the mind, and its influence on natural science, the arts, and language. Finally, we examine the modern attachment to equality as opposed to freedom, and explore the three human affects the love of equality engenders: individualism, materialism, and the love of well-being.

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Contents

Introduction

Alexis de Tocqueville is a humane, far-seeing, and comprehensive writer, and his remarkable book, *Democracy in America,* is a testament to that. Much scholarship has been devoted to his original themes, and he stands almost alone as a moderate critic of liberal democracy who is still seriously studied. Moreover, because Tocqueville is never doctrinaire, bombastic, or abstract in his thought, he also stands nearly alone, it seems, as the proper beginning point from which to understand the intellectual principles and conventions that inform the modern democratic mind. It is for these reasons that this thesis will investigate what Tocqueville considers the greatest cause for fear in modern democracy, what he calls the tyranny of the majority or the mild despotism of the majority. This thesis will explore the depth and breadth of the majority's power over the law, morality, and the mind by turning to Tocqueville's discussions of state politics, political parties, natural science, and the fine arts. Tocqueville is a very subtle writer and part of his subtly consists in the organization of his book. Following his organization, I have attempted to select passages which are particularly useful to developing these themes.

To introduce the Second Volume of his great work, Tocqueville says the following on his own behalf: "I thought that many would take it upon themselves to announce the new goods that equality promises to men, but that few would dare to point out from afar the perils with which it threatens them. It is therefore principally at those perils that I have directed my regard, and believing that I have uncovered them clearly I

was not so cowardly as to be silent about them" (II p. 400).[1] In accord his own promise, Tocqueville's tone throughout *Democracy in America* is never derisive or indulgent. His criticisms of modern democracy stem from insights into genuine threats to liberty and, he warns, he is even willing to publish his opinions at the cost of making real enemies. What are the perils that threaten modern man?

From the beginning of his book, Tocqueville describes the first settlers of America, the Puritans. He sees their republican communities as a successful combination of freedom and religion. He praises them for their republican virility and moral restraint, virtues that allowed freedom to thrive among them (I.1.5. p. 64). However, Tocqueville's book ends with a contrary description of democratic citizens: "the use of [man's] free will, so important but so brief and so rare, will not prevent [men] from losing little by little the faculty of thinking, feeling, and acting by themselves, and thus from gradually falling below the level of humanity" (II.4.6. p. 665). This image chillingly describes an entirely new human condition, and Tocqueville traces its causes to modern democracy and to the effects of the tyranny of the majority specifically. The vision of a society composed of such human beings even tempts him to regret the aristocratic society that is no longer (II.4.8 p. 674).

The tyranny of the majority and the mild despotism of the majority arise from the equality of social conditions and from the effects of the belief in the single modern political principle, equality. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is a study of the threats to freedom brought on by equality and the ruler it empowers, the majority. And,

[1] From this point we cite *Democracy in America* as volume, part, chapter, and page number from the Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop translation.

as Tocqueville shows, this new principle is perhaps at odds with freedom because of the insurmountable power it gives to the majority over law, morality, and the mind.

What Tocqueville calls the tyranny of the majority is the singular and irresistible power a democratic majority potentially possesses over law. In the United States, we have a federal constitution which restricts the will of the majority, and an executive and judicial branch which checks the legislature, which is an extension of the people's will. However, Tocqueville argues, not only is the Constitution subject to change in accord with the majority's desires but, and especially on the level of the states, the spirit of the constitution is neglected and changed. This is due, in part, to the fact that there is no principle of justice superior to the majority's will in modern democracy. One is left to wonder what the boundaries of this will are, and whether the very idea of a constitution is problematic. After Volume One of *Democracy in America*, however, the term "the tyranny of the majority" disappears and is replaced with "the mild despotism of the majority." The change in terminology is congruent with the change in subject matter. For if Volume One is concerned with the laws and the political institutions of democracy, Volume Two is concerned with the human intellect, the objects of its cultivation, and human sentiments under democratic rule.

At nearly every step one takes in contemporary America, one may witness the effects of equality. There are no ruling families, as families now exist for only a few generations. There are no enormous and unmovable fortunes, as the estate tax limits their continuation, while fortunes in America are made and lost in a day. Moreover, there are no classes, as nearly all, whether rich or poor, have the beliefs and tastes of the middle class. Neither is there a class of priests who protect and continue the authority of

Scripture and represent the interests of the next world in politics. And finally, there are no intellectual traditions categorically opposed to the belief in equality. Thus, where there is no intellectual or moral opposition from class, religion, or tradition, where does intellectual and moral authority rest in democracy? Tocqueville answers: in public opinion, the force propelling the mild despotism of the majority.

Throughout Part One of Volume Two, Tocqueville searches for sources of knowledge outside of public opinion which may support the freedom on the mind, and which may counterbalance the mild despotism of the majority, but he finds little to base such hopes upon. Although Tocqueville's book contains many beautiful discussions of poetry, ancient literature, rhetoric, and the role of the university, I turned specifically to Tocqueville's examination of the way in which the natural sciences and the fine arts are cultivated in modern democracy, because these two spheres of knowledge represent man's understanding of the true and the beautiful, respectively.

Tocqueville observes that in America, knowledge gained in the cultivation of the natural sciences is primarily driven by the desire for its application, and is subordinated to the principle of utility. He observes that there are nearly no purely theoretical scientists who remain unconcerned with the application of science, who study nature as an end in itself. Tocqueville leaves readers to wonder whether, under such conditions, the study of nature becomes a mechanism through which democrats fulfill their desires and realize their fantasies.

Moreover, Tocqueville attributes the power of dictating the direction of scientific pursuits and bestowing rewards and honors on scientist to the majority, which it does in accord with its tastes. To contrast this democratic vision of the study of nature,

Tocqueville raises from the dead the example of the aristocratic, Christian philosopher, Pascal, whose desire to simply understand nature, Tocqueville fears, will go unrecognized and unsupported in democracy (he even foresees that such men will be criticized and ridiculed by the majority for restricting themselves only to theory). He fears that that part of man that wishes to gain self-knowledge through the study of nature will be argued out of existence. In democracy, science serves utilitarian ends, and when the study of nature is understood and cultivated in such a way, it is subordinated to the desires of the majority. In our times, the surgeon general is more esteemed than Descartes.

As for the fine arts, or that part of human knowledge that teaches man about the beautiful, informs man of his duties, and serves to open man's heart to love, are overtaken by the influence of the majority over the mind through belief in equality, too. Instead of representing the ideal, the fine arts represent the real by reducing feeling, sentiment, and ideas, to motion and sense. One wonders whether an artistic representation of "shoes," as in Van Gogh's famous painting, really just serves to flatter our attachment to the common, practical, and private, while conflating democratic life with the beautiful. Neither the study of nature nor man's relation to the beautiful elevate man's mind beyond democratic conventions. The mild despotism of the majority's tastes and beliefs over the mind contort these two entrances into man's understanding of himself.

Tocqueville is not an abstract metaphysical theorist; he never propounds systems of justice or ethics. Instead, he describes the political facts of democracy in order to grasp man's understanding of himself. Part Two, of Volume Two, which is guided by an

inquiry into the sentiments of a democratic people, attempts to first explain a new and strictly democratic phenomenon: individualism. However, Tocqueville never speaks about the influence of Hobbes or Locke in establishing the legal and psychological development of individualism, but instead he speaks about the effects of their political project by beginning with an examination of the family (II.2.2 p.483). Men were not individuals in aristocratic orders, because they understood themselves through their country, its particular history, and through their families. Further, Tocqueville says, aristocratic men loved and revered their long dead ancestors, and loved and lived for their descendents who were not yet born.

Democracy, however, does not support such attachments. Democrats must, to a greater extent, face the world alone and, believing that they possess their destinies in their own hands, they tend toward a new ideal: self-sufficiency. Nearly all believe in entering into the market place and fighting for all they attain, the culmination of which is retirement. Moreover, democratic man understands himself to be free, though weak, when viewing himself opposite an enormous, indeterminate crown. Tocqueville questions whether such men become engrossed in materialism and the pursuit of well-being and comfort to such an extent so as to abandon the love of freedom and even thinking beyond one's small sphere of interests. He thus tacitly suggests that perhaps the American Founders engineered an enormous and powerful state, composed of very small individuals.

Democracy in America is written for both Europeans and Americans. For Europe, Tocqueville writes in hopes of reconciling the two opposing schools of European thought: rationalism, following Bacon and Descartes, and traditionalism, following

Edmund Burke. Politically, these opposing currents of thought simultaneously made aristocracy no longer tenable, while they prevented the stability of democracy. The rationalists' "governing idea was to replace the complex of traditional customs with simple, elementary rules derived from the exercise of human reason and natural law."[2] The famous French philosophers of the 18th century who, in part, inspired the French Revolution, were members of this movement. The traditionalist school, reacting against rationalism and against the excesses of the French Revolution, "attacked the abstract, speculatist character of rationalist thought, seeing in it universalism and its contempt for tradition as dangerous doctrine that threatened political stability, diversity, and the noblest elements of civilization."[3] It was between these two opposing schools of thought that Tocqueville seeks to "promote the cause of liberty in modern times," by bringing forth America as an example.[4] Tocqueville writes to show Europe that democracy does not have to be anarchic and nihilistic, and to reconcile the defenders of the old order to the modern world's fate: democracy.

As for America, he wants to instruct it on the means to preserving freedom by warning it of the greatest threats to it. Tocqueville finds many things to admire about American democracy and perhaps about democracy in general. He even concludes that, from the perspective of God, democracy is perhaps more just for the great mass of men, at least in comparison to the aristocratic orders of the past (II.4.8 p. 675). However, there are very real reasons for fear, and he warns of the power of the majority, which at times

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[2] James Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 146.

[3] Ibid., 146.

[4] Ibid., 153.

he likens to being divine in its reach, and describes it as "omnipotent" in its influence over body and soul. It even subtly reaches into the heart of each man to realign it in accord with its prejudices: "Chains and executioners are the coarse instruments that tyranny formerly employed; but in our day civilization has perfected even despotism itself, which seemed, indeed, to have nothing more to learn…it leaves the body and goes straight for the soul" (I.2.7 p. 244). Tocqueville never makes it clear whether the majority's omnipotent power governs in accord with justice or wisdom. But, for Tocqueville, the majority is not cause for righteous indignation on his part: he sees in it less ill-will and malice than clumsiness and instinct.

We must learn the extent of the majority's power and the character of its vision of the world because, as Tocqueville correctly predicted, there are no political alternatives in the modern world to egalitarian beliefs: there is only egalitarian freedom or despotism. Aristocracy is dead, and the majority is ruler (II.4.7 p. 668). In light of this, the following work seeks to examine how the power of the majority comes into existence, practically and theoretically, and how it affects politics and the human soul.

In Chapter One we turn to three spheres that the majority influences: the legislature, political parties, and morals. By witnessing its power over state legislatures, we see that the majority enacts and razes law in accord with its will—Tocqueville wonders whether the very idea of a constitution is enough to subordinate the majority's inclinations. Next, we turn to democratic political parties to analyze the most direct institution through which the majority legislates in order to understand its character and how parties affect democracy's understanding of politics. And finally, we turn to what Tocqueville calls the "moral empire" of the majority over democracy in order to examine

the development of intellectual conformism and the majority's power over the mind.

Continuing with the theme of intellectual authority, we examine in the Chapter Two how the intellect is influenced by the democratic majority by evaluating the study of natural science and the understanding of the beautiful (through the fine arts) in democracy. We first witness the influence of Descartes' thought on America and attempt to grasp how his thought accords with an intellectual reliance on public opinion. Next, we examine how, through the majority's influences, the study of natural science is subordinated to the principle of utility. And finally, we follow Tocqueville's search for a principle to counteract the authority of the majority through the beautiful, as represented in the fine arts.

In Chapter Three, we attempt to explain why modern democrats love equality and what social effects such an attachment develops. In democracy, the love of freedom is subordinated to the love of the democratic ideal, equality. According to Tocqueville, three particular conditions are brought about when the attainment of greater equality is understood as the end of politics: individualism, materialism, and the love of well-being. Individualism, a new and strictly democratic phenomenon, seduces men away from politics into a narrow private existence. Materialism persuades men that the fulfillment of human life is attainable through the body and continuous acquisition. The love of well-being is a blind taste for comforts of the body and security which induces men to lose sight of eternity and, finally, perhaps to give up thinking altogether. We examine these three developments on their own terms while comparing their effects to the requirements of freedom and self-rule to find that they are in conflict.

Part of the inspiration for this work was amazement over the extent to which

Tocqueville's thought is popularly neglected. In contemporary America, even in academia, one very rarely hears of "the tyranny of the majority" or the "mild despotism of the majority" pronounced in any serious way. Yet, it is perhaps only Tocqueville who can articulate the real threats facing democratic politics and the democratic mind. This study, therefore, is an attempt to gain a perspective on ourselves. By writing this thesis I hoped, through Tocqueville's guidance, to clarify the conventions constraining my own mind. As we learn from Tocqueville, we begin to see that the belief in equality does not stop at belief simply. The social and political facts that equality brings about do more than to merely convince the mind that equality and its products are seemingly permanent and just. Even the study of nature and the understanding of the beautiful are transformed by it. Our natural desire for self-knowledge, it seems, must begin from the study of thoughtful critics of our own time who can shed light on the things we hold to be the highest, most just, and most beautiful. This thesis has attempted to study the single phenomenon which worried Tocqueville most in the modern world: the tyranny of the majority. However, this famous term, coined by Tocqueville, generates surprisingly little discussion anywhere today. This fact itself justifies Tocqueville's fears, and serves to prove his observations. For the most part, real concern with the question regarding the freedom of the mind is nearly forgotten.

Chapter 1

This chapter examines the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, which is the intellectual justification for democratic politics. This doctrine gives a democratic majority a power that Tocqueville repeatedly calls irresistible and omnipotent (I.2.7 p. 165). We next examine three particular problems that this doctrine brings about. First, we witness how the majority, justified by this doctrine, alters the forms and undermines the spirit of the American Constitution. Next, we examine how political parties in democracy enhance the majority's power and how party politics enervate citizens' belief in the dignity of democratic politics. And finally, we turn to what Tocqueville calls the "moral empire" of the majority to examine how the majority forces men to conform to its opinions and how such a political power influences man's understanding of himself. This chapter contributes to understanding how the institutions necessary to democracy exacerbate not only the actual power of the majority in politics, but how the majority's political power is tied to its influence over the morality.

Political Omnipotence

What intellectual assumption, stemming from the belief in equality, justifies all free, egalitarian societies? It is the principle or dogma that Tocqueville calls the sovereignty of the people. Tocqueville explains it in the following way: "Providence has given to each individual, whoever he may be, the degree of reason necessary for him to be able to direct himself in things that interest him exclusively. Such is the great maxim on which civil and political society in the United States rests….Extended to the entirety

of the nation it becomes the dogma of the sovereignty of the people" (I.2.10 p. 381). This principle declares that all men are equal because they share a capacity for reason and, the ability to discern their individual interests through reason. All men are therefore united irrespective of birth, country, or time. As applied to politics generally, the dogma may be formulated in this way: "if all men are by nature equal, there is no just alternative to democracy. The central issue is not, then, who should rule. The people should rule."[5] For this principle implies that political orders are only justifiable universally on the basis of the commonality between all men. Virtue, wealth, and religiosity are political principles of the past. To oversimplify, man understands himself in relation to his interests, and politics is derived from, and subordinated to, this knowledge.

Belief in the priority of the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people excludes any other political power outside of the majority. All political power is vested in the majority. In order to observe the manifestations of this principle, we first begin by following Tocqueville's observations of the majority's influence over law, and specifically over the legislature. The *Federalist* foresaw that the legislature would be the most susceptible to the influence of the majority, Tocqueville observes (I.2.7 p. 236). The *Federalist* was concerned with the preservation of the natural rights and the property of minorities, and it was on account of this concern that they argued to set formal, constitutional barriers to the majority's will. Thus, anticipating the problem of majoritarian despotism, the *Federalist* took great care to remove the majority from directly making laws by refining and enlarging "the public views by passing them

[5] Catherine Zuckert, "Political Sociology versus Speculative Philosophy," in *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, ed. Ken Masugi (Maryland: Rowman and Little Publishers, 1991), 122.

through the medium of a chosen body of citizens," or representatives.[6] To this end, the Constitution's Framers first divided the legislature into two assemblies, each representing differing interests. The Senate and the House of Representatives were to consist of different spans of service; each was to have different sources of appointment; each was to govern over different spheres of policy making; and each was to be composed of different elements of society. By making the consent of both houses the threshold of approval of legislation, the Constitution's Framers intended to slow the majority's will and expand its orbit of interest.[7] However, "such institutional checks on the power of the majority…will last so long as the majority itself is convinced that such limitations are desirable."[8]

Tocqueville observes that formal limitations can be undermined in state politics, and the majority in many states has even "sought to augment [the] natural force [of the majority] artificially" by altering the constitutional forms in the following three ways (I.2.7 p. 235). First, states have formed both legislative assemblies to consist of representatives from "the same classes and name them in the same manner," thereby overturning the reason behind the division between the federal Senate and the House of Representatives (I.2.7 p. 236). Consequently, by not following the precautionary measures laid down by the Constitution's Framers, the majority makes legislative motions "rapid and no less irresistible than those of a single assembly" (I.2.7 p. 236). Second, the now overbearing power of the legislative branch takes away the

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[6] "Federalist #10," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 78.

[7] "Federalist #52," and "Federalist #62," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961).

[8] Zuckert, "Political Sociology versus Speculative Philosophy," 138.

independence of the executive branch by subordinating it to the "caprices of the legislature" (I.2.7 p. 236). Third, the legislature denies the judiciary its intended independence by holding judges accountable to the majority through popular election, while granting the legislature the "right to fix the salary of judges each year" (I.2.7 p. 236). The farseeing reasons behind the Constitution's forms are ignored and manipulated by the majority as states do not follow the spirit of the Federal Constitution. The *Federalist* perhaps underestimated the extent to which the majority would lose sight of the ends of its government, and the extent to which the progress toward the consolidation of the majority's power was irresistible.[9] Only two generations after the American founding, the Constitution's power as a document that subordinates the people's will to its principles is weakening.

Political Parties

Next, we turn to Tocqueville's analysis of political parties in democracy in order to clarify the mechanisms through which the majority exercises its political power. Political parties, Tocqueville remarks, are an "evil inherent in free societies" (I.2.2 p. 166). For while political representation is necessary for freedom and self-rule, the character that political parties and party politics impose on free societies may frustrate the moral and intellectual supports of freedom by enervating citizens and bringing the political process into disrepute. Political parties in democracy may even "deprave" society and "trouble it without profit" (I.2.2 p. 167). Following Tocqueville's analysis,

[9] James Madison, "Federalist #51," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 78.

we will examine how parties come into existence, on what basis and under what circumstances they are formed, and how they affect morals in democratic society generally.

Political parties in all free societies, Tocqueville argues, are organized around the question of freedom: the conflict of opinion over the restriction of popular power and its indefinite extension (I.2.2 p. 167). These differences of opinion represent the two opposing sentiments in modern democracy: the love of freedom, which desires setting formal limitations on popular power, and the love of equality, which desires the indefinite extension of popular power (I.2.2 p. 170). The love of freedom favors setting and respecting formal limitations on the inclinations of the people. The belief in equality, by contrast, envisions the people's will as the highest principle of law. These two visions of society are in conflict and have torn societies asunder in the past, but it is not unreasonable for them to co-exist for the purpose of balancing each other, and for creating platforms that allow genuine political opposition and thoughtful reflection on freedom.

In America, such a political division was most prominent between the Federalist and the Republican Party—the former favoring the restriction of popular power and the later favoring indefinite extension (I.2.2 p. 168). However, it took only ten to twelve years from the end of the American Revolution for the Federalist Party to be overwhelmed, dissolved, and ultimately forgotten by its opposition; this came with the election of Thomas Jefferson to the Presidency (I.2.2 p. 168). Until Jefferson's election, the Federalists remained afloat only as a result of the individual genius of their leaders and by benefiting from political circumstance—namely, the dissolution of the first

confederation, which threw the people into fear of anarchy and convinced them to favor a powerful federal government. However, shortly thereafter, "the opposing [political] current was [becoming] too violent," and the "artificial means" and temporary resources by which the Federalist Party had maintained itself collapsed (I.2.2 p. 168). Following the Federalist's collapse, the Republican (now the Democratic) Party "advanced from conquest to conquest, and has taken possession of society as a whole" (I.2.2 p. 168). Its spirit and doctrines have since become the final judgment concerning the theoretical disparity between the two parties. After the victory of the Democratic Party, "one saw it take possession of the *exclusive* direction of affairs. Since then it has not ceased to model mores and laws to its desires" (I.2.2 p. 171). Tocqueville relates this synopsis in order to explain how easily the permanent question regarding the proper extent of freedom is forgotten as the majority consolidates its powers. Thus, modeling mores and the creation and destruction of law emerge as an extension of the majority's power over society, which it exercises through political parties.

Now, all political sides being in agreement over the extent of freedom, the new distinctions between parties arise from material interests (I.2.2 p. 169). The change from freedom to material interest as the central political concern is caused, in part, by the fact that there are no religious hatreds, no class hatreds, and no "public miseries to [be] exploit[ed]" by parties (I.2.2 p. 169). During such times, men "think they have arrived at a final state" (I.2.2 p. 166). In fact, the distinctions of class, religion, and the elimination of public misery are what democratic society aspires to overcome. However, Tocqueville warns, when there is political agreement and social peace, or what may be thought of as the fulfillment of democracy, political parties do more harm than good to society, and the

political stage becomes host to what Tocqueville calls "small parties" (I.2.2 p. 167).

Small parties "are generally without political faith" because they are more concerned with consequences than principles and, not being "elevated and sustained by great objects, their character is stamped with a selfishness that shows openly in each of their acts" (I.2.2 p. 167). Such parties bring to the center of events individual ambition as the primary political motive. Subsequently, the energies and skills of representatives "consist [solely] in composing parties" (I.2.2 p. 169). Under such political conditions, "a politician…at first seeks to discern his interest and to see what the analogous interests are that could be grouped around his; afterwards, he busies himself with discovering whether there might not *by chance* exist in the world a doctrine or principle that could suitably be placed as the head of the new association to give it the right to introduce itself and circulate freely" (I.2.2 p. 169 emphasis added). Ambitious individuals fulfill themselves by offering the majority promises that suit their taste for expanding their power further.[10] Ambitious men are convinced that the way to power is through flattery, citizens that the fulfillment of their desire is the only proper activity of politics. Both political men and citizens begin to believe that politics is concerned with self-aggrandizement instead of the common good. One wonders whether, under such political conditions, political men can serve as models of veneration or imitation, and whether men can genuinely attain honor and self-respect through politics. When flattery becomes a precondition to seeking self-aggrandizement, the political climate enervates democratic citizens by compelling them

[10] Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, introduction to *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), lv. Mansfield adds to this by remarking that "Even well meaning, but untutored, unsure or merely busy, citizens can easily be led astray by political partisans; and in democracy, they tend to be swayed by partisans who advocate the unlimited expansion of popular power. Democratic citizens will constantly be urged, and tempted, to press for increasing the power of the majority without being able to assure its wisdom or justice."

to look only to their individual interests as the source of political legitimacy: democratic politics under such conditions perhaps inclines the majority to equate the common good with its interests. Thus, men may become discouraged from public service and be pushed into a private life.

Furthermore, where citizens are open to flattery, political parties sometimes put into their hands the judgment of questions at once complex and detrimental to the state's affairs. Tocqueville cites as an example a conflict in 1832 between the Bank of the United States and President Andrew Jackson (I.2.2 p. 170). The people believed that the Bank's existence was associated with monopolies that favored special privileges of the wealthy; they were also offended at the sight of such an unmovable institution existing outside of their power (I.2.2 p. 170). By questioning the Bank's constitutionality, Jackson brought out the egalitarian sentiments of the people and thereby gained their support. However, Jackson's reasons were not animated simply by the desire to destroy privilege; he was indeed concerned with the Bank's constitutionality. But, Tocqueville asks: "Do you think that the people could discern the reasons for this opinion amid the twists and turns of such a difficult question when experienced men hesitate? Not at all" (I.2.2 p. 170). Political parties in democracy not only enhance the power of the majority by putting in its hand the judgment of complex questions which are sometimes at odds with their interests and those of the state, but parties also deprave politics by exacerbating the majority's belief that its judgments are the highest principle of politics.

Moral Omnipotence

The majority not only possesses the power to create and change law, it also

imparts an irresistible "moral empire" over democracy that Tocqueville calls "omnipotent" (I.2.7 p. 236). Stemming from the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, a moral influence of the majority emerges over men in democracy, which is founded in part "on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in many men united than in one alone…it is a theory of equality applied to intellects. This doctrine attacks the pride of man in its last asylum" (I.2.7 p. 236). The power of the majority, like any political power, "needs to be lasting in order to appear legitimate," and it does so by denying that an individual mind can alone understand what is conventionally held to be the highest good, the good of the majority (I.2.7 p. 236). Accordingly, it is believed that individual intellects cannot on their own grasp the only legitimate truth of democratic politics.

This implicit doctrine destroys man's pride in understanding himself as a being that rules over himself and thinks for himself. Harvey Mansfield comments on the importance that Tocqueville ascribes to individual pride in democracy, and pride itself, in the following way: "A free individual must have the pride to think himself capable and worthy of governing himself…Pride is the spur to action required for the practice of liberty, and it works through ambition, petty and grand."[11] Even without the majority's conscious effort, the democratic belief in the wisdom of the majority is at odds with the individual's understanding of himself as an independently whole being: it is supposed that men are intellectually tied to the majority's judgment.

[11] Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, "Tocqueville's New Political Science" in *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 84. Mansfield and Winthrop explain further: "The trouble with liberal theory is that it is too harmful to pride. It posits self-preservation as the strongest human desire….The penchant for security is all too consistent with democracy because democracies tend to judge things by the standard of the common needs of humanity rather than the particular goals that arouse individual pride."

How are citizens' minds influenced by such political assumptions? In other words, what are the effects of such relations between ruler and ruled on individual citizens? In order to gain a comparative perspective on this aspect of democracy, Tocqueville first describes the relation between ruler and ruled in an aristocracy. In aristocratic France, citizens loved their king: the king was considered infallible by the citizens, and when he failed, they claimed his failure was due to something outside of himself (I.2.7 p. 237). By contrast, democratic belief in the ruling power, though theoretically based in reason and interest, and not in love, in practice develops into a similarly unthinking habit of adoration of the majority because of its seeming justice and its similarly irresistible power: it seems just because there is no principle of justice outside of it.[12]

The aristocratic claim to power was birth; this idea opened the possibility for the opposition of priests, a class of nobles and, to some extent (if only sometimes by sheer numbers), a political power for the lower classes. The principle of democracy, however, unites all men as a species under the umbrella of a single principle, leaving no possibility for the belief in a legitimate political power outside of it. Such an absolute theoretical basis for politics may even limit man's thought to thinking only from the assumptions necessary to democracy, as the mind apparently cannot justly raise itself beyond them.

These theoretical limitations, imposed on man's understanding of himself, create a particular "national character" (I.2.7 p. 245). Contributing first to the democratic

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[12] Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, introduction to *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), lvi. Mansfield comments that "once the dogma of equality is established…it becomes impossible to see how wrong opinions could ever arise *except* from malicious intent" (emphasis added).

national character is the disappearance of "great men" at the head of affairs (I.2.7 p. 246). During the American Revolution, men like Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison appeared on the political scene because "public opinion [still]…directed wills and did not tyrannize over them" (I.2.7 p. 246). These men's intellects belonged to them, and they were allowed to steer the nation's opinions. At this point in the democracy's history, the majority had not yet insisted on exercising its powers fully. The disappearance of such men is the first aspect of the national character under the majority's rule. There is only the mediocrity of the majority, which holds only itself in esteem.

Second, a kind of political flattery of the ruling power is born. This flattery, however, has a peculiar character as it does not stem from the hope for gain on the part of the flatterer, but its existence describes the narrow character of the relations that individuals have to the majority. Under aristocracy, those closest to the throne were forced to flatter the monarch, but the people did "not lend itself to servitude" (I.2.7 p. 246). The people were sometimes forced by the reigning power to submit out of weakness, habit, ignorance or perhaps love, but they never became simply servile: at times, they even took "a kind of pride and pleasure in sacrificing their will to that of the prince, and so place[d] a sort of independence of soul even in the midst of obedience" (I.2.7 p. 246). Thus, there were genuine loyalties and self-sacrificing sentiments toward the ruler: subjects were sometimes subjugated and miserable, but not degraded. Tocqueville notes that although American "courtiers" do not use such words as "Sire" or "Your Majesty" when addressing the sovereign, they nonetheless must convince their sovereign that he possesses all virtues (I.2.7 p. 246). Even more striking, some democratic "courtiers" are even "sure that [the sovereign] possesses all the virtues,

without having acquired them and so to speak without wanting to do so"; flattery leads the flatterer and the flattered to believe in the falsity of their praise (I.2.7 p. 247). Yet, whereas monarchs from time to time possessed genuine political virtues, Tocqueville leaves readers to wonder whether the praise he bestows on the majority is ever based in something real.

This unreflective ruler is not only open to flattery, but also allows those who "seek to speculate about its weakness and to live at the expense of its passions" to manipulate it (I.2.7 p. 246). Where public and private life is mixed, and where public interests often culminate in private gains, many stand to gain from speculation on the majority's character. Such a power is difficult to esteem, as its character increases the temptation to exploit it. Tocqueville observes that a "much more general abasement of souls" results from immersion in democratic politics than in aristocracy (I.2.7 p. 246). Thus, democratic politics forces men to sacrifice their opinion regarding the dignity of politics and their good opinion of themselves as participants in it. A strange psychological phenomenon occurs: on the one hand, democratic man conceives of no justification for political power outside of the sovereignty of the people, and on the other, if he opposes it he is denied a good opinion of himself. Such a political power puts men in conflict with themselves and forces them to conform to the majority's beliefs.[13] In this way, democratic politics may bring on the destruction of self-respect derived from and necessary to governing oneself.

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[13] Harvey Mansfield, introduction to *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), lvii. Mansfield comments that "the majority's moral authority will be further enhanced where no viable aristocracy has ever existed, as in the United States, by the notion that the *interests*, not just the opinions, of the many should always prevail over those of the few."

Furthermore, as dissenters cannot seek redress by gathering support from those classes naturally opposed to the sovereign, the crowd excludes men from voicing complaints by denying their humanity: "one must in a way renounce one's rights as a citizen and so to speak one's quality as a man when one wants to deviate from the path [the majority] has traced" (I.2.7 p. 247). Not only is there no opposition in fact outside the majority, but in a way it dissolves even the possibility of founding one by destroying the idea. Man must be in agreement with the majority or he is sentenced to isolation and to a life without self-respect. The power to prevent individuals from holding opinions at odds with the majority creates a chilling psychological phenomenon: "One would say at first approach that in America, spirits have all been formed on the same model, so much do they follow exactly the same ways" (I.2.7 p. 247).[14] All men conform to the same opinions.[15] A political world constrained in such a way closes the possibility of men of "virile candor…[and] manly independence of thought," and replaces them with ambitious, self-interested men, uniform in their desires and in their vision of the world. The majority has the power to destroy the human will without even applying force. It is a force "that acts on the will as much as on actions, and which at the same time prevents the deed and the desire to do it" (I.2.7 p. 243). Its "omnipotent power" stops dissent by

[14] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, trans. Roger Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 38. Rousseau also predicts this effect on the mind brought on by modern democracy: "Today, when subtler researches and a more refined taste have reduced the art of pleasing to set rule, a base and deceptive uniformity prevails in our customs, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mould….One no longer dares to appear as he is; and in this perpetual constraint, the men who form this herd called society…will all do the same things unless stronger motives deter them."

[15] Marvin Zetterbaum, "Alexis de Tocqueville," in *The History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 770. Zetterbaum adds that "the majority not only demands conduct that conforms but strives also to make it impossible for individuals to conceive of nonconformity….The tyranny of the majority over the minds of those who are its intellectual superiors absolutizes the disposition of democracy toward mediocrity."

crushing even the thought of it.

The majority's power to isolate, a powerful weapon that crushes the individual will and tempts dissent only at the cost of complete abandonment, friendlessness, and powerlessness, even destroys man's respect for himself because respect is given through conformity by the majority. To describe this, Tocqueville puts words in the mouth of the majority as it addresses the condemned: "You shall remain among men, but you shall lose your rights to humanity. When you approach those like you, they shall flee you as being impure; and those who believe in your innocence, even they shall abandon you" (I.2.7 p. 245). The crowd "lives in perpetual adoration of itself" (I.2.7 p. 245). When criticism is silenced in the heart before it develops and dissenters are sentenced to isolation, a free mind is driven out of existence and, Tocqueville concludes without hesitation, it is for this reason that genius cannot prosper in America. Neither criticism nor anything outside the majority's opinion is tolerated by it (I.2.7 p. 245).

Chapter 2

In this chapter we examine how man's understanding of natural science, religion, and the beautiful, through the fine arts, is subordinated to the belief in equality. The belief in equality is tied to the influence of the majority because belief in equality justifies the majority's right to rule, its moral power and, as we learn in this chapter, its power over the intellect. Science, religion, and the arts teach man about himself and about the meaning of his life. However, the belief in equality alters these spheres of knowledge and perhaps endangers the possibility of freedom of the mind by encircling the mind with strictly democratic principles. The way in which democracy understands itself through the assumptions necessary to its existence contributes to the development of the mild despotism of the majority. We first attempt to understand the sources of intellectual authority in democracy. Next, we turn to democracy's understanding of modern natural science to examine how it subordinates the study of nature to utility. And finally, we turn to Tocqueville's analysis of the arts in democracy in order to see how democracy understands the beautiful, and how democracy modifies language, the first source of thought. This chapter is important to understanding the soft despotism of the majority because in it we explore the influence of equality over man's understanding of the true and the beautiful through natural science and the fine arts, respectively. This chapter further contributes to our understanding by showing how democracy may become dangerous to man's knowledge of himself.

Sources of Intellectual Authority in Modern Democracy

Men in democracy are unencumbered by traditional sources of knowledge or authority through which men once understood themselves: neither class, family, nation, nor tradition shape their self-understanding. Not even philosophy shapes their lives since, of all civilized nations, America is the only one uninterested in it (II.1.1 p. 403). The Americans are a people without a book guiding and unifying their thoughts and lives, but this is not to say that their minds are uninformed by books. For the Americans "possess a certain philosophic method...that is common to them all" but whose origins and purpose they do not know (II.1.1 p. 403). Moreover, Tocqueville points out, it is also partly on account of Descartes, his modern natural science and the way it articulates the world, that the Americans have abandoned old sources of self-understanding (II.1.1 p. 403 and II.1.10 p. 433-438).[16] The Cartesian method is suited for American tastes and coheres with the American social state: it is like a glove that happens to fit, as democracy already has a penchant for contempt for intellectual authority.

By interpreting the world to consist of body and extension, Cartesian science weakens man's attachments to all authority outside of man's own reason; such a world does not support aristocratic claims to nobility of birth or religious claims to revelation. Man is a radically individuated being whose fulfillment is the realization of his limitless intellectual freedom—not piety, honor, or virtue. Thus, belonging only to himself, the individual sees no justifiable connection to the world beyond individual interests, as Cartesian science looks at man abstractly and materialistically. Descartes' scientific

[16] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 246. Bloom comments that "The use of one's natural faculties to determine for oneself what is true and false and good and bad is the American philosophic method. Democracy liberates from tradition, which in other kinds of regimes determines the judgment...Equal political rights make it impossible for church or aristocracy to establish the bastions from which they can affect men's opinions."

method teaches that nature is material, and therefore implies that all things in the world which are beyond the scope of the scientific method are in the realm of opinion. This philosophic doctrine, when practically applied, instructs each individual to follow and rely on "the individual effort of his reason," a tendency already prominent in democracy (II.1.1 p. 403). For these reasons, Tocqueville observes that "America is therefore the one country in the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed" (II.1.1 p. 403). It is Descartes' scientific method through which Americans understand nature, and it is the mental habits derived from this method that Americans have adopted.

Besides Descartes' influence, the social conditions produced by equality destroy the continuation of families, which now extend no further than a few generations since laws against primogeniture limit the continuation of wealth. There are also no stable or unanimous opinions to draw from one's class, there being none. And, all citizens "having become nearly the same," even other individuals are not relied upon as sources of knowledge (not even priests or philosophers) (II.1.1 p. 405). In this way, all individuals are "constantly led back toward their own reason as the most visible and closest source of truth" (II.1.1 p. 404).

Tocqueville reminds readers that the reliance on Cartesian reason is limited by a fact that can never be forgotten about Americans: their religiosity (II.1.1 p. 405). Christianity "reigns not only as a philosophy that is adopted after examination, but as a religion that is believed without discussion" (II.1.1 p. 406). Americans have accepted without reflection a number of moral truths from Christianity, which "restricts the action of individual analysis within narrow limits" (II.1.1 p. 406). In fact, Tocqueville warns

that, although man is free to think, his thought will be restrained "within fixed and sometimes narrow limits" (II.1.1 p. 407). However, religion has no strength as a revealed doctrine and exists only as common opinion—maintaining itself by the force of the majority, not because of belief in revelation and Scripture (II.1.1 p. 406). What Americans really revere is public opinion. God is not the source of knowledge and truth; He is just something everyone believes in.

As the principles of Christianity are adopted without thought, so too are a number of dogmatic beliefs, or "opinions men receive on trust without discussion," which are present at all times and are necessary to both individuals and politics (II.1.2 p. 407). All societies need common action, which originates only from common beliefs. Society cannot be composed of men radically individuated from one another in thought, as the need to protect themselves from foreigners and the desire to prosper necessitate common thought. Such thought is even more indispensable to democratic peoples because they must rule themselves. Moreover, if left wholly free and intellectually on their own, individual men would never finish proving proof after proof to make sense of the world. Human life is too short and the mind too weak to amass all human knowledge in one lifetime. Men need knowledge that either "the more able have found *or* the crowd adopts" to explain their lives to them (II.1.2 p. 408 emphasis added). Dogmatic beliefs are thus made necessary by politics and the sheer limitations of the individual. Accordingly, "the question is not that of knowing whether an intellectual authority exists in democratic centuries, but only where it is deposited and what its extent will be" (II.1.2 p. 408).

Thus, where does one find the source of intellectual authority in democracy,

where “equality of conditions makes men conceive a sort of instinctive incredulity about the supernatural and a very high and often exaggerated idea of human reason” (II.1.2 p. 408)? As the authority of neither Scripture, family, nor tradition is recognized by democratic peoples, “it is in themselves or in those like themselves that they ordinarily seek the sources of truth” (II.1.2 p. 408). But what does this mean?

Believing in equality and having the proof of its apparent truth before his eyes, the whole of mankind having seemingly become equalized, man sees himself as independent, enlightened, and capable of thinking for himself, while opposite him, he finds a faceless mass which he believes to be equally as capable and enlightened. Yet, as stated above, the mind is such that men must inevitably take authority from outside themselves. Tocqueville here hints that the hope that rationally discernable interests will unify men to rule themselves is simply insufficient. Thus, looking around, democratic man sees “with pride” that he is the equal of all. Yet, when looking at the great mass of men he is “immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and weakness” (II.1.2 p. 409).

Psychologically, democratic man finds himself in a paradox—he is simultaneously both everything and nothing in his own eyes, and the spheres in which his thought is engaged are either concrete and narrow (his private life), or vague and nebulous (politics). One is inevitably left to wonder whether the idea of judging on one's own extends any further than the witnessing of one's own experiences. These psychological features encourage the democratic mind to vacillate between mental extremes: between judging from one’s own narrow experiences, and nearly total thoughtlessness in adopting the opinions of the majority. Tocqueville “see[s] very

clearly two tendencies [of thought] in equality: one brings the mind of each man toward new thoughts, and the other would willingly induce it to give up thinking," through intellectual reliance on the majority (II.1.2 p. 410). This tendency is further characterized in Tocqueville's examination of "general ideas," to which we turn next.

In Chapter 3, Tocqueville first compares the perspective of a god to that of man, and, to highlight the indiscriminate passion for generalization of the democratic mind, he then compares three enlightened peoples, the English, Americans, and French to emphasize their peculiar relation to reason.

A perfect mind, that of God, "does not ponder the human race in general," as does democratic man (II.1.3 p. 411). God simultaneously understands both the similarities and differences of things, for He does not need to examine all things, and He does not need the convenience of gathering all things together in general ideas to understand them. Man, however, may tend to two extremes: the aristocratic and the democratic. When man undertakes "to examine and judge individually all the particular cases" that strike his mind, he finds himself lost amidst incongruous facts and differing particulars; this tendency is most descriptive of the English and of aristocracy (II.1.3 p. 412). The English look to their national history and to the family to grasp reality.

The democratic intellectual tendency, the second alternative to that of God, is to organize the world around general ideas—a tendency which does "not attest to the strength of human intellect, but rather to its insufficiency" (II.1.3 p. 411). Yet, Tocqueville corrects the extremes of both aristocratic and democratic visions by reminding readers that "[t]here are no beings in nature exactly alike: no identical facts, no rules indiscriminately applicable in the same manner to several objects at once" (II.1.3 p.

411). Democratic man experiences the world and imposes on it an order in accord with his enlightened prejudices and universalistic vision through "general ideas."

A symptom of this democratic habit of mind is the "pleasure...[and the] ardent and often blind passion" democratic man has "to explain common rules for all things, to enclose many objects within the same form and to explain a collection of facts by a single cause" (II.1.3 p. 412-413). This habit is compounded by democratic man's immersion in economics, his primary activity, which teaches him that only a few enormous causes move things. The Americans are a practical people, with little time, much curiosity, agitated lives, and a passion for seeing democracy reflected in all things.

Moreover, when all men are isolated from one another and are individually weak, and when the mind has no alternative examples before it outside of democratic politics, it tends to disbelieve the possibility of a single, individual will moving politics "in a permanent fashion" (II.1.3 p. 413). It appears as though there are no single human beings who are independent, thoughtful, willful and capable of shaping society. The mind is thus "reduced to searching for a few great causes," a habit that justifies conformist behavior (II.1.3 p. 413).

However, the aforementioned intellectual tendencies are relatively soft and moderate when compared to those of the French, who attempted to change politics by forcing the adjustment of "the practice of human affairs to [rational] theory" (II.1.4 p. 415).[17] This is the most radical symptom of reason liberated from all sources of

[17] Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, introduction to *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), lvii. Mansfield and Winthrop add that "Modern philosophy posits that there are in principle no limits on human will—for that is one meaning of the sovereignty of the people (DA 1 I .4)—and the political forms of modern democracy are inadequate to contain a people's willfulness. Tocqueville nonetheless suggests how even in the unlimited exercise of that will, an inherent limit on its exercise still remains....The natural limit to the will of the majority is…that

authority, through which men lose sight of what a human being is and thus how he ought to be ruled because of the belief in the limitless power of reason. Loss of all consideration for man's nature through the fanatic belief in abstract reasoning created the conditions for tyranny during the French Revolution. The French had never been free to rule themselves and so placed the greatest hopes in reason, while the Americans have always conducted their own public affairs (II.1.4 p. 415). The French, through the application of abstract theories to human affairs, were freed from all sensitivity to human beings and became monsters by destroying the sources of their own meaning.[18] Through this example Tocqueville teaches the disunity between abstract theory and practice, and shows that politics is a world of its own governed by its own internal laws.

Imposing general explanations on the universe and forcing it to cohere with them is an error to which equality and enlightenment give birth. Belief in the truth of general ideas incites men to believe that they are liberated from the necessities of politics and free to design a world in accord with their hopes and ideas. This is a symptom of liberation from traditional intellectual authority: reason itself becomes a dogma and a justification for imposing an order on to the world.

The Sciences

"In aristocratic centuries, enjoyments of the mind are particularly demanded of the

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when the majority's will is asserted so as to disregard, deny, or destroy human pride in man's capacity for rational self-determination, then that will meets its limits in its own destruction."

[18] James Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 147. Ceaser adds to this description: this tendency in French thought "built abstract, utopian models, ignoring the real world and real constraints" which ignited the imagination of the people to indulge their democratic fantasies.

sciences; in democratic, those of the body" (*DA* 437)

In this section we take as our theme man's understanding of what knowledge is, as viewed through science. We follow Tocqueville's comparative analysis of the aristocratic and democratic understanding of science. Tocqueville divides the aristocratic into two examples, the Christian Pascal and the pagan Archimedes (II.1.10 p. 436). The democratic example has no particular characters, only scientists in general and the influence of equality and public opinion on their understanding of science.

The uniquely democratic desire to judge all things on one's own gives man "a taste for the tangible and real and a contempt for traditions and forms," a taste particularly apparent in the study of nature through natural science (II.1.10 p. 433). The Americans cultivate the purely practical portion of science "admirably," showing their minds to be "clear, free, original, and fertile; but there is almost no one in the United States who give himself over to the essentially theoretical and abstract portion of human knowledge" (II.1.10 p. 434). The social conditions within democracy, Tocqueville continues, are perhaps unfit for meditation on the theoretical portions of science. There is no class at rest which can devote itself to abstract study, and "everyone is agitated: some want to attain power, others to take possession of wealth" (II.1.10 p. 434). This agitation is not tumultuous and violent, but "a slight, bothersome movement...a sort of incessant rotation of men over one another that troubles and distracts the mind without animating or elevating it" (II.1.10 p. 435). Moreover, democratic societies have little esteem for the meditation necessary for abstract inquiry because they elevate the virtues of the man of action over the virtues of thought: "[t]he democratic social state and institutions bring most men to act continually" (II.1.10 p. 437).

The life of action and the life of thought require different visions of human excellence. The desire for the precision necessary for genuine thought is not needed in the life of action, since approximations are sufficient in considerations of timeliness. Further, freedom and equality induce men to long for advancement from their current station and to increase their fortunes. They dream of ways to shorten the path to wealth and imagine "every machine that shortens work, every machine that diminishes the costs of production, every discovery that facilitates pleasure and augments them seems to be the most magnificent effort of human intelligence" (II.1.10 p. 436). This, in part, causes the necessarily slow and profound engagements of the mind to be underappreciated. For these reasons "[p]ublic opinion influences the judgment of men who cultivate the sciences; it persuades them that they can succeed at them without meditation or it diverts them from those sciences that require it" (II.1.10 p. 435). Democratic instincts persuade men that knowledge and its pursuit through science are subordinated to utility; what is to be feared is that the natural inclination to seek knowledge for its own sake will be forgotten.[19]

Aristocratic men, on the other hand, seeing themselves in relation to those over whom they rule, feel their own strength and, believing their elevated position to be permanent, conceive an often elevated and high-minded idea of man. These opinions, though perhaps exaggerated, "facilitate the natural spark of mind toward the highest regions of thought and naturally dispose it to conceive a sublime and almost divine love

[19] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 251. Bloom comments that "the democratic concentration on the useful, on the solution of what are believed by the populace at large to be the most pressing problems, makes theoretical distance seem not only useless but immoral...Thus the mere announcement of the rule of reason does not create the condition for the full exercise of rationality, and in removing the impediment to it some of its supports are also dismantled."

of truth" (II.1.10 p. 436). The aristocratic scientist is inclined to support his understanding of man with his science. Archimedes, a pagan, thought that putting the products of science into practice to be "vile, low, and mercenary, he applied his mind and his study to writing only things whose beauty and subtlety were not at all mixed with necessity" (II.1.10 p. 436). For the pagan, the sciences are an exploration of the potential power of the human mind, and his inquiries support his elevated understanding of himself. Tocqueville teaches that aristocracy is more supportive of the natural inclinations of the mind toward wisdom, but that the genuine approach to science is somewhere between these two alternatives.

The other aristocratic example, Pascal, a Christian, could not have exhausted all human strength to die of old age at forty had he been motivated by profit or glory alone. His disinterested and ceaseless pursuit of knowledge is a motive unrecognized in democracy, for it is a manifestation of a part of the human soul whose reality is denied by the democratic approach to knowledge.

The Arts

The beautiful, too, Tocqueville warns, will be subordinated to democratic principles. Painting and poetry attempt to depict and understand the ideal (II.1.11 p. 442-443 and II.1.17 p. 458). Democratic peoples, however, are inclined to appreciate the utility of things rather than their beauty; they will even "want the beautiful to be useful" (II.1.11 p. 439). Tocqueville examines the arts in order to find, through man's relation to the beautiful, something to counteract the mild despotism of the majority—to find something that can induce democratic man out of his individualism and isolation. Yet,

Tocqueville finds nothing in the arts to base such hopes upon.

The practical arts, Tocqueville argues, are guided by two democratic principles: the economic laws of mass and efficient production and the vain nature of the human heart which, possessing the "hypocrisy of luxury," the vice of democratic times, makes each hope "to be able to appear what he is not and engages in great effort to succeed at this" through the practical arts (II.1.11 p. 441). As fortunes change hands and the rich become poor, while the poor, not yet rich, develop luxurious tastes, the laws of the market still dictate production, and a class of men who desire beautiful things for their own sake cannot guide tastes or support a highly skilled artisan class.

As for the fine arts, Tocqueville sees similar causes that contribute to their corruption, but he draws more deeply seated problems from the effects. The democratic understanding of art disconnects man from the beautiful, the representation of the ideal, by burying the beautiful beneath a world formed around equality. He predicts the democratic taste for the representation of body over soul, and motion and sensation over ideas and sentiments and, finally, "in place of the ideal they put the real"—the proof of which can be witnessed in any gallery of modern art (II.1.11 p. 442).

Artistic representations of this kind are immediate and sensible to all, even individuals without elevated morals or intellects, for such elevation is no longer required or developed through the arts. But, one wonders if genuine sentiments cannot be developed and refined through art, can the heart be touched by the beautiful. Abstract, sensual representations replace the experience of the beautiful with that of the senses. As always, Tocqueville revealingly compares two extremes to bring out his point: he compares the art of the Renaissance to the art of the French Revolution. The Renaissance

painter Raphael, lacking “rigorous exactitude,” aimed through his art to “surpass nature” by painting men better than nature made them; while David, an anatomist, “followed nature exactly” in regard to anatomy, and represented only the real (II.1.11 p. 443). Artists of the Renaissance sought great subjects to depict in order to inspire human excellence, while democratic artists depict the details of private life, the common and the ordinary. Through the fine arts, democratic man sees nothing but his own image, and nothing which inspires the heart toward virtue or excellence.

As the paths to self-knowledge through science and beauty become closed, even language, “the first instrument of thought,” is subordinated to the majority's instincts (II.1.16 p. 452). Tocqueville comments that enlightened Englishmen complain that Americans have created new words taken from the language of parties, mechanical arts, and business and have changed the meaning of old words from the mother tongue (II.1.16 p. 453). This is nothing to be surprised by, for “in [democratic] peoples the majority makes the law in the matter of language just as in everything else” (II.1.16 p. 454).

In aristocracies, all things being held immovable and few new things coming before the mind, language was only rarely modified. When new words entered aristocratic society they had learned and concrete origins. During these ages, certain words were even “pass[ed]...from generation to generation like inheritances” (II.1.16 p. 455). Men who understood themselves through their ancestral origins preserved the language of their fathers as a source of their self-understanding. In democracy, by contrast, when men change station, destroy classes, and where all intermingle, words “that cannot suit the greatest number perish” (II.1.16 p. 455). Words do not animate a permanent order to which democratic man belongs, but instead represent only the

precarious state of his mind. As the habits of the majority are not philosophical or literary, but political and business-like, language reflects these penchants. Constant changes in language, Tocqueville warns, close the door through which independent intellects may approach philosophical and theological studies—the portal to both reason and God become sealed shut as the mind has no fixed rules, notions, or concepts because of the instability of language.

Men who are "often left to the individual efforts of their intellect, are almost always nagged by doubt" (II.1.16 p. 457). As their situation changes constantly, they are "never held firmly to any of their opinions" (II.1.16 p. 457). Their very lives contribute to the confusion of their minds. And, since man's thoughts are vacillating, "they must have very large expressions to contain them" (II.1.16 p. 457). Thus, the passion democratic man shows for general ideas is reflected in his use of language. Democratic peoples "passionately love generic terms and abstract words because their expressions enlarge thought, and, by permitting the inclusion of many objects in a small space, they aid the work of the intellect" and perhaps flatter it (II.1.16 p. 456).

Democratic writers, Tocqueville observes, often use abstract nouns such as *capacities*, *actualities*, or *eventualities* to depict the causes of actions and thereby personify abstractions as the moving forces in the universe. These abstractions replace thoughtful action and the possibility of serious reflection on causality. It is through these abstractions that democratic man explains the nature of things to himself. The majority shuts itself up from thought by cutting off at its origin the way to thinking. Commenting on the tendencies of democratic historians who demonstrate these habits, Mansfield points out the dangerous tendencies of a mind incited by such thinking: "[b]y denying

power to some individuals, they [historians] bring people to believe that no one acts voluntarily, that whole peoples, even the whole human race, are moved as if in obedience to a power above or below them. Worse, one attributes to that power an inexorable necessity that forecloses human choice. In this view, politics is meaningless and human freedom is impossible...but it could also be self-fulfilling, because people under its influence who could act decisively might abandon their attempts as futile."[20]

[20] Harvey Mansfield, introduction to *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), lxv.

Chapter 3

How do the intellectual and moral powers of the majority influence man's sentiments? In democracy, man's sentiments are united by an attachment to an ideal—equality—which sets the mind on the future and liberates men from the past. We first examine why men love equality, and whether this love is in conflict with freedom. Next, we examine how the love of equality gives rise to three related propensities in man: individualism, materialism, and the love of well-being. We examine how the majority forces men to conform to its instincts, and how it thereby subtly seduces souls away from politics, the love of freedom, and even thinking altogether. This section of the thesis is important because, according to Tocqueville, an immoderate attachment to equality leads to the destruction of freedom and makes virile citizens into a domesticated herd.
We will learn that man's love for this particular ideal is perhaps opposed to love of family, nation, and tradition, and it may destroy the founding assumption upon which democracy exists, the ability to rule oneself.

Love of Equality

In all ages, Tocqueville teaches, there is a "mother idea, or principal passion" which affects all sentiments and ideas. It is man's love for equality that determines both the ideas and sentiments of our time (II.2.1 p. 480). Further, Tocqueville teaches that men experience the world through what they love and believe to be good. Yet, he warns, perhaps this love of equality is at odds with the love of freedom. In order to come to this conclusion, we must carefully follow Tocqueville's characterization of how and why men

love equality.

Just before we enter this discussion, however, Tocqueville reminds readers of a fact that the love of equality leads men to forget: equality is not a passion that exists for its own sake, but ought to exist for the equal right to rule. That is, the justification for equality stems from freedom: equality should have at its center the contempt for tyranny and love for self-government. Tocqueville paints an idealized example of the combination of these two principles: "with none differing from those like him, no one will be able to exercise a tyrannical power; men will be perfectly free because they will all be entirely equal....That is the most complete form that equality can take on earth" (II.2.1 p. 479). Tocqueville reinterprets the understanding of equality as being subordinated to freedom because he sees that equality is compatible with either freedom or despotism. If understood as an ideal unrelated to the right to self-rule, equality does not depend on political freedom and remains merely social, or present only in the general body of the society, so that citizens "can have the right to indulge in the same pleasures, to enter the same professions, to meet in the same places; in a word, to live in the same manner and purse wealth by the same means, without having all take the same part in government" (II.2.1 p. 479). In the case of social equality, equality may become confused with freedom to the extent that all citizens become subordinated under a single despot or an administrative state without the right to share in rule. Freedom, on the other hand, is not dependent on equality since it can exist in a large aristocratic class like it did in ancient Athens. In other words, democracy is not needed to support political freedom. It is therefore not to freedom that democratic man's sentiments are primarily attached. Moreover, the desire that equality produces in men, namely for further equality, and the

ends equality promises, comfort and security, without the firm habits of freedom, are perfectly in line with despotic government.

Moreover, when political freedom is not elevated as the primary end of politics it may easily slip away unnoticed. The excesses of freedom are easily witnessed by all, even by the dullest wits, because its evils are immediately sensed. Further, nearly all men feel the advantages of equality and benefit from them. Equality need not be constantly fought for but is offered to each alike, for "each little incident of private life seems to give birth to [feelings of attachment], and to taste [its benefits], one needs only to be alive" (II.2.1 p. 481). The pleasures equality bestows are felt by the vast majority of citizens; the majority's loyalties are thus won over. Further, only "attentive and clairvoyant" minds can perceive the dangers equality only slowly produces (II.2.1 p. 480). But even these attentive and clairvoyant individuals are forced to "avoid pointing [the dangers] out," since the attachment of all to equality closes the possibility of criticism of it (II.2.1 p. 480). The rational arguments supporting freedom are easily forgotten because freedom's preservation demands sacrifice, effort, and constant intellectual reinforcement, and the majority's ears are closed to them.

Equality also appears to be permanent because of the difficulty of destroying it. A nation would have to turn itself upside down, alter its social state, laws, ideas, habits and mores, to destroy it (II.2.1 p. 480). What seems permanent seems cosmically supported. Tocqueville remarks: "do not ask what unique charm men in democratic ages find in living as equals...equality forms the distinct characteristic of the period they live in; that alone is enough to explain why they prefer it to all the rest" (II.2.1 p. 480). In times of equality, men believe that equality is the fundamental and governing fact of the

order to which they belong; the love of oneself as a being living in particular times is nearly enough to kindle love for it. The love of freedom cannot always explain the meaning of man's life as equality can; equality satisfies man's pride and his opinion of himself as liberty cannot.

However, while America never had a democratic revolution, the French had to force equality on their country. The French developed the "taste for and idea of freedom" only as a consequence of the emergence of equality of conditions, after laws and mores had already become democratic (II.2.1 p. 481). Europe failed to secure political freedom because freedom was not the desired end of the egalitarian revolutions, but only an afterthought which existed "in ideas and tastes," and not in sentiments (II.2.1 p. 482). In the French, Tocqueville saw a jealous and fanatical, even delirious, love of equality. During the French Revolution, the love of equality filled their hearts so as to blind them to all other objects of worship; they were even deaf to both their dearest interests and to the love of freedom to the point of absurdity. Equality to the French was the "one good in the whole universe worth longing for," and their jealous love was heightened by resentment carried over from the old regime (II.2.1 p. 481).

Speaking more generally, Tocqueville states a final reflection on the relationship between freedom and equality: "I think that democratic peoples have a natural taste for freedom; left to themselves they seek it, they love it, and they will see themselves parted from it only with sorrow. But for equality they have an ardent, insatiable, eternal, invincible passion; they want equality in freedom, and, if they cannot get it, they still want it in slavery. They will tolerate poverty, enslavement, barbarism, but they will not tolerate aristocracy" (II.2.1 p. 482). The democratic love of equality is stronger than the

love of freedom because men understand themselves primarily as equals; this belief is reinforced by what they seemingly glance in nature through their experiences—freedom is only a secondary idea which improves on equality. The love of equality further weakens the love of freedom through the creation of apolitical individuals who adore satisfactions of the body and well-being.

Individualism, Materialism, and Well-Being

Next, let us turn to the three most symptomatic human effects that the love of equality produces: individualism, materialism, and the love of well-being. Individualism is a new human condition originating from the effects of democratic life and the love of equality, which forces man to "turn all his sentiments toward himself alone" (II.2.2 p. 482). Tocqueville defines individualism as "a reflective and peaceable sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of those like him and to withdraw to one side with his family and his friends, so that after having thus created a little society for his own use, he willingly abandons society at large to itself" (II.2.2 p. 482). And in our times, individualism may be understood as "not so much a sentiment as a conviction that one should live one's life without paying serious attention to anyone but oneself, or at most to one's family and friends."[21] How does individualism develop?

As the bonds of class and family are loosened, man's view turns to the human race as a whole, and the weak individual sees himself in relation to it. Man is left to contemplate a radically individuated self in relation to a large indeterminate mass of

[21] Harvey Mansfield, introduction to *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), lxiii.

indifferent individuals. And, as Harvey Mansfield notes, the "natural love of self is greatly enhanced by the erroneous judgment that one *should* care only about oneself" (emphasis added).[22]

The first reason for the development of individualism is the effect of democracy on the family. The democratic family exists for only a few generations, whereas the aristocratic family gave men a view of the past, through respect for their ancestors, and of the future, through the love of those not yet born. Aristocratic men felt duties to both, and "frequently [came] to sacrifice [their] personal enjoyments for beings who no longer exist or who do not yet exist" (II.2.2 p. 483). Moreover, aristocratic institutions tightly bound men of the same class together. They depended on each other for cooperation and trusted one another as beings sharing a similar fate. In such societies men willingly devoted themselves to class or to particular individuals which allowed them to sometimes forget themselves.

The implicit distinction between private and public spheres in modern democracy further contributes to individualism. In the political sphere, men identify themselves in others through compassion, as opposed to reverence and esteem. Compassion is the democratic sentiment that links men's hearts to one another because they see themselves in others. While compassion may mitigate individualism by forging "a new sort of moral bond among democratic citizens," the object of compassion is derived from general needs of the human race which perhaps begin and end with needs of the body. This peculiar moral vision may tend to destroy an essential element in politics, particularly necessary to

[22] Harvey Mansfield, introduction to *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), lxvi.

democracy: human excellence. Mansfield explains that, in the public sphere, "each citizen comes to identify himself with others through the generally experienced miseries of isolation, indecision, restiveness, and impotence." Sensing their own weakness and estimating the general weakness of all those like themselves, men cannot believe in the possibility of self-government when individuals cannot pride themselves on their freedom to rule themselves. And, "what does remain of pride [in the public sphere]...is mostly turned to business, where it may still be honored."[23] Therefore, on the one hand democratic man feels an exaggerated self-confidence and self-importance when looking at himself, and on the other, they "may in the end be overwhelmed by their sense of weakness and insignificance. With unlimited choices, unsure of everything and passionate about little else but securing their comfort, they will be temped to surrender responsibility for making their own decisions, and simply follow public opinion."[24]

Democratic man draws his duties to others from the belief that he belongs to a species.[25] Yet, one wonders whether having a duty to all men finally loosens the understanding of duty to such an extent that real sacrifice is virtually nonexistent. There is something hypocritical about a moral sentiment that asks no sacrifice of us while filling us with moral satisfaction. The sentiment guiding the feeling of belonging to the human

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[23] Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, introduction to *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), lxix.

[24] Ibid., lxix.

[25] Ibid., lxv. Mansfield and Winthrop add: "'Individualism' accuses democrats of living only for themselves and a close circle of friends... [and] pantheism accuses them of forgetting the individual [altogether]. The individual described under 'individualism' has, in his weakness and vulnerability, lost his individuality. He seeks his identity in the very universal, mass forces to which be regards himself subject. Democracy creates individuals, then leaves them unprotected so that, abetted by pantheism and 'democratic historians,' they easily fall into individualism."

race as a whole fails man's hopes for genuine human connections and loyalties; a genuine global community of men is perhaps only a democratic fantasy. Moreover, as the human race fails man's hopes for a moral existence, so too the democratic family does not provide genuine duties or a sense of continuity as "new families constantly issue from nothing, others constantly fall into it, and all those who stay on change face; the trace of generation is effaced. You constantly forget those who have preceded you, and you have no idea of those who will follow. Only those nearest have interest" (II.2.2 p. 483). Through the family, men no longer envision eternal existence since families exist for only a minute, so to speak, and each individual sees only himself and the immediacy of his existence.

Now being equal, men become strangers to each other. Individuals are confined to the small society of immediate friends and family within a greater society and are isolated from and indifferent to political engagement. A new ideal is born from these circumstances: self-sufficiency. Having a sense of their own weakness, but having worked their lives to provide for themselves, democratic men are left to be self-sufficient in isolation. They "owe nothing to anyone; they expect so to speak nothing from anyone; they are in the habit of always considering themselves in isolation, they willingly fancy that their whole destiny is in their hands" (II.2.2 p. 484).

Confined to the solitude of their hearts, individuals mark the center of their narrow concerns and develop a taste for material well-being which affects nearly all citizens. This taste is exclusive of other pieties and the satisfaction of it is taken to be an end in itself. The taste for material well-being is linked to equality because it is a practical manifestation of equality: enjoyment of material well-being is individual, and all

are more or less equally capable of it. So an "'honest materialism' becomes the content of equality and the end of democratic life," the satisfaction of which is directed toward the desires of the body.[26] Although the concern for well-being stems from the natural fear of death, in its manifestation in America it is a kind of reaction against death and even a denial of it.

Aristocratic societies kept classes immobile and, the rich unquestionably having everything provided for well-being, and the poor not dreaming of possessing it, both classes avoided single-minded devotion to well-being. Where there are no classes, and enlightenment and freedom exist in all, the poor imagine the joys of well-being while the rich fear losing what they have. Yet, under this social order, as a multitude of mediocre fortunes are established, "[t]hose who possess [mediocre fortunes] have enough material enjoyments to conceive the taste for these enjoyments and not enough to be content with them. They never get them except with effort, and they indulge in them only while trembling" (II.2.10 p. 507). To preserve what little they have they must work at it, while their imagination always breeds greater desire, which remains incomplete. Their energies are exhausted in acquisition, preservation, and fear of losing all for which they have worked their lives to amass.

For men born without nobility of birth or fortune, it is natural to develop a taste for well-being, Tocqueville teaches, as it is "essentially a middle-class passion," which spreads among rich and poor alike (II.2.10 p. 507). The poor never give up hope of attaining it, and the rich, most having only recently become so, never look on it with contempt. After great efforts, and finally becoming rich, "the passion that accompanied

[26] Ibid., lxvii.

the struggle survives it" (II.2.10 p. 507). Even those who inherit their wealth still show an ardent love of well-being, since the "love of well-being has become the national and dominant taste" (II.2.10 p. 507). This is the passion that animates democratic man's heart, spread from the majority to all.

Strangely, such a consuming passion does not lead to violence or disorder in the Americans. When aristocratic peoples turn to material enjoyments alone it generally proceeds from the corruption of beliefs, excessive wealth, and from being forced out of politics, for then "they seek forgetfulness of their past greatness in enjoyments of the body" (II.2.11 p. 508). They focus all their energies on this fulfillment alone. Thus, they "must have a sumptuous depravity and a brilliant corruption"; they seek the contrary to the image of their former greatness in their depravity.

Democratic man, however, in his attachment to material enjoyments and love of well-being, does not seek to thwart his fate or unsettle the universe to satisfy a passion. Instead, having worked all his life, he concentrates his tenacious desires on the satisfaction of small comforts: he shops, goes to dinners, buys a plot of land. These desires close the view to a greater world, and even stand between man and his reflection on eternity (II.2.11 p. 509). All souls conform to this soft democratic taste. These tendencies are in part guided by the majority's taste for tranquility and industry, as both need the rule of law to support their continuation.[27] These tastes may also live

[27] Ibid., lxxiv. Mansfield and Winthrop add that Tocqueville notes that "democratic eras as well as ages of religious skepticism suffer from an instability both of desire and of condition, which tends to confine those who live in them to immediate goals requiring only brief exertion. Although modem political theory was meant to increase human power and give men better control of events, in practice, the instability of democracy may give greater scope to chance than was seen in political life when people did not believe everything was in their control, but was instead at the mercy of higher powers. From democratic instability arises the possibility of a majoritarian politics characterized by a continuous, meaningless flux. The flux

harmoniously with religious instincts because, in America, law-abidingness in this world promises salvation in the next (II.2.11 p. 509). The soft despotism of the majority further imposes itself on souls by placing all objects of desire within the sphere of democratic religion and morality. The objects of democratic desire are always placed within the sphere of permitted enjoyments. The pursuit of well-being corrodes the heart by instilling in it the belief that the pursuit of tame, domesticated well-being is justified even by the powers of religion and morality.

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may seem to justify an apathy that leaves the field to passionate, if fleetingly aroused, majorities; then in he end, it subsides into mild despotism."

Conclusion

The breadth and depth of Tocqueville's book cannot be matched by any attempt at scholarship. This thesis did not seek to surpass or find fault with Tocqueville's observations. Instead, this long inquiry gave its author the opportunity to reflect on Tocqueville's thoughts and to investigate the influences affecting the modern democratic mind. Although Tocqueville's book was written over 160 years ago about a country that believes itself to change, progress, or redefine itself with each subsequent generation, modern Americans may still find in it a startlingly accurate portrait of themselves. Moreover, in it we can find an explanation of our worst tendencies, the reasons for their existence, their dangers, and subtle predictions regarding our perilous future.

In many ways, Tocqueville reinterprets America's history for very wise and far-seeing reasons. His book is meant to be a guide for the Americans to tame their tendencies toward abstraction and cosmopolitanism. As an example of his intentions, he begins his book by describing the landscape of America. Scholars have suggested that these descriptions are an investigation into the relation between a people and its geography, but perhaps Tocqueville wanted to purge the modern mind of its abstract tendencies by teaching the Americans to love their country by allowing them to see poetry in it.[28] He wants to teach a people, whose self-understanding is grounded in

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[28] Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, trans. Richard Howard and Helen Weaver (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1965), 193. Aron suggests that Tocqueville, following Montesquieu's philosophical method, looks at America's geography as a minor cause of its economic prosperity and even its freedom. This is perhaps true, but it is not Tocqueville's only reason for describing it in such a way. Tocqueville is also writing his book specifically for Americans, that is, his book is not only a sociological study, as Aron describes it. Thus, Tocqueville desires to ground the abstract intellectual tendencies of the American mind through the love of the particularities of their country so that American geography is seen with wonder and grandeur, and not just economic opportunity. He wants to insight love for the natural

rational principles, to love the particularities of their own country.

Further, Tocqueville speaks of the enormous influence the Puritans had on the American founding and their effects on America's moral constitution. But the American Founders never name the Puritans as contributing to the American founding. This is Tocqueville's doing, and now schools teach students about the pilgrims and the ideas that inspired their voyage. Through the example of the Puritans, Tocqueville wants to encourage the habits of freedom by drawing a small, idealized example from the Puritans' successful combination of religion and freedom. Through this example, Tocqueville also wants to teach Americans how religion can be combined with freedom and how the practice of freedom must be premised on a strict moral order.

As mentioned in the introduction, the beginning of *Democracy in America* and the end are strikingly different in the characterization of the inhabitants of democracy. In the beginning of the book, we are introduced to virile republican communities, concerned with freedom and morality. By the end, we witness an indeterminate herd fit only for subordination to an administrative state or a tyrant. Tocqueville leads us to wonder whether modern democracy culminates only in vast centralization of power and creates only a mass of indeterminate human beings: "I let my regard wander over this innumerable crowd composed of similar beings, in which nothing is elevated and nothing is lowered. The spectacle of this universal uniformity saddens and chills me, and I am tempted to regret the society that is no longer" (II.4.8 p. 674).

In this thesis we attempted to analyze Tocqueville's criticisms of modern democracy by investigating the causes for the rise of the majority's power over politics

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environs of America.

and the mind. We looked at the theoretical doctrines justifying the power of the majority, the principle of the sovereignty of the people, to find that it implicitly restricts even the possibility of political doctrines beyond democratic politics, and, when recognized as the only political dogma, it stops the mind from thinking beyond democratic convention. By turning to the study of political parties, we saw the mechanism through which the majority establishes and holds on to its power. The analysis of parties showed that parties do not merely represent the interests of the majority: they tend to impose on the populace its tastes and prejudices and thereby corrode the belief in self-rule. This effect is largely forgotten in the contemporary study of politics; such an argument as Tocqueville's is presented neither in the press nor in academia. Finally, the "moral empire" established by the majority is the final act in destroying all resistance against it, since the mind is compelled to believe in the majority's opinion at the threat of isolation, ridicule, and even the loss of one's self-respect.

Even the potential counterbalances to the majority's power over the mind, which Tocqueville seeks to solidify through the cultivation of the arts and sciences, are failures. The cultivation of science is in service of the majority's desires, for the majority alone bestows honors and rewards on its purveyors. And, men like Pascal, whose motives seem absurd to modern democrats, are forgotten. One wonders whether the single-minded pursuit of truth can be recognized, esteemed, or cultivated under such conditions. The arts, too, only serve the majority's tastes by producing works that flatter it and reinforce its vision of the world by reducing the beautiful to sense, motion, and form. And finally, as the last example of the overwhelming though subtle power of the majority, it takes hold of language and reinterprets even the causes of things in accord

with its abstract tendencies of mind.

In the last chapter we investigated the democratic attachment to equality, and heard Tocqueville's startling observation: men would rather be equal in slavery than unequal in freedom. Such a love for the democratic god, equality, encourages men to understand themselves as isolated individuals. One's hopes for fulfillment through materialism and the pursuit of well-being, following the understanding of oneself as an individual, bring men to a psychological condition unsuited for freedom.

Genuinely intelligent criticism of democracy is virtually unheard of today. The poorest and the wealthiest and most learned alike demand greater equality and praise the majority. Even the intellectual reactions against democracy are unrespectable failures, like fascism and communism. Thus, Tocqueville perhaps stands alone in the intelligence of his observations of the modern world, and if only for this reason, serious study of him is merited.

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