

Democracy in America, Readthrough VI

Alexis de Tocqueville, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000)

Volume II, Part 4

Chapter 1: Equality Naturally Gives Men the Taste for Free Institutions

Equality, which renders men independent of one another, makes them contract the habit and taste of following their will alone in their particular actions. This entire independence, which they enjoy continually vis-à-vis their equals and in the practice of private life, disposes them to consider all authority with the eye of a malcontent and soon suggests to them the idea and love of political freedom. Men who live in these times therefore advance on a natural slope directing them toward free institutions. Take one of them at random; go back, if possible, to his primitive instincts: you will discover that among the different governments, the one he conceives of first and prizes most is the government whose head he has elected and whose actions he controls.

Of all the political effects that equality of conditions produces, it is this love of independence that first strikes one's regard and which most frightens timid spirits, and one cannot say that they are absolutely wrong to be so, for anarchy has more frightening features in democratic countries than elsewhere. As citizens do not have any influence over one another, it seems that disorder will immediately go to the limit at the instant when the national power keeping them all in place happens to fail, and that, as each citizen strays off in his own direction, the social body is going to be reduced to dust all at once.

Yet I am convinced that anarchy is not the principal evil that democratic centuries will have to fear, but the least.

Equality produces, in fact, two tendencies: one leads men directly to independence and can drive them all at once into anarchy, the other conducts them by a longer, more secret, but surer path toward servitude.

Peoples easily see the first and resist it; they allow themselves to be carried along by the other without seeing it; to show it is therefore particularly important.

For me, far from reproaching equality for the intractability it inspires, I praise it principally for that. I admire it as I see it deposit that obscure notion and instinctive penchant for political independence at the bottom of the mind and heart of each man, thus preparing the remedy for the evil to which it gives birth. It is on this side that I cling to it.

Chapter 2: That the Ideas of Democratic Peoples in the Matter of Government Are Naturally Favorable to the Concentration of Powers

The idea of secondary powers, placed between sovereign and subjects, naturally presented itself to the imagination of aristocratic peoples because those powers contained within them individuals or families whom birth, enlightenment, and wealth held up as without peer and who

seemed destined to command. For contrary reasons, this same idea is naturally absent from the minds of men in centuries of equality; it can only be introduced artificially then, and it is retained only with difficulty; whereas they conceive, so to speak without thinking about it, the idea of a lone central power that leads all citizens by itself.

In politics, moreover, as in philosophy and religion, the intellect of democratic peoples receives simple and general ideas with delight. Complicated systems repel it, and it is pleased to imagine a great nation in which all of the citizens resemble a single model and are directed by a single power.

After the idea of a lone central power, the one that presents itself most spontaneously to the minds of men in centuries of equality is the idea of uniform legislation. As each of them sees himself little different from his neighbors, he hardly understands why the rule that is applicable to one man should not be equally so to all others. The least privileges, therefore, are repugnant to his reason. The slightest dissimilarities in the political institutions of the same people wound him, and legislative uniformity appears to him to be the first condition of a good government.

I find, on the contrary, that this same notion of a uniform rule equally imposed on all members of the social body is foreign, as it were, to the human mind in aristocratic centuries. It does not receive it or it rejects it.

These opposing penchants of the intellect end on both sides by becoming such blind instincts and such invincible habits that they still direct actions despite particular facts. In spite of the immense variety of the Middle Ages, individuals perfectly alike were sometimes encountered: this did not prevent the legislator from assigning diverse duties and different rights to each of them. And, on the contrary, in our day governments exhaust themselves to impose the same usages and the same laws on populations that do not yet resemble each other.

As conditions are equalized in a people, individuals appear smaller and society seems greater, or rather, each citizen, having become like all the others, is lost in the crowd, and one no longer perceives [anything] but the vast and magnificent image of the people itself.

This naturally gives men in democratic times a very high opinion of the privileges of society and a very humble idea of the rights of the individual. They readily accept that the interest of the former is everything and that of the latter, nothing. They willingly enough grant that the power representing society possesses much more enlightenment and wisdom than any of the men who compose it, and that its duty as well as its right is to take each citizen by the hand and lead him.

If one wants to examine well our contemporaries from up close and to pierce through to the root of their political opinions, there one will find some of the ideas I have just reproduced, and one will perhaps be astonished to encounter so much accord among people who so often make war on each other.

Americans believe that in each state the social power ought to emanate directly from the people; but once that power is constituted, they imagine so to speak no limits to it; they willingly recognize that it has the right to do everything.

As for the particular privileges granted to towns, families, or individuals, they have lost even the idea of them. Their minds have never foreseen that one might not apply the same law uniformly to all parts of the same state and to all men inhabiting it.

These same opinions are spreading more and more in Europe; they are introduced into the very heart of the nations that repel the dogma of the sovereignty of the people most violently. The latter give another origin to power than the Americans, but they view power with the same features. In all of them, the notion of intermediate power is obscured and effaced. The idea of a right inherent in certain individuals is rapidly disappearing from the minds of men; the idea of the all-powerful and so to speak unique right of society comes to fill its place. These ideas take root and grow as conditions become more equal and men more alike; equality gives birth to them, and they in their turn hasten the progress of equality.

In France, where the revolution I am speaking of is more advanced than in any other people in Europe, these same opinions have entirely taken possession of intellects. Should one listen attentively to the voice of our different parties, one will see that there is not one of them that does not adopt them. Most deem that the government acts badly; but all think that the government ought to be acting constantly and to take everything in hand. The very ones who make war on each other most roughly do not fail to agree on this point. The unity, ubiquity, and omnipotence of the social power, the uniformity of its rules, form the salient feature characterizing all newly born political systems of our day. One finds them at the foundation of the most bizarre utopias. The human mind pursues these images even when it dreams.

If such ideas present themselves spontaneously in the minds of particular persons, they offer themselves still more readily to the imagination of princes.

While the old social state of Europe is altering and dissolving, sovereigns develop new beliefs regarding their faculties and their duties; for the first time they comprehend that the central power they represent can and ought to administer all affairs and all men by itself, and on a uniform plan. This opinion, which, I dare to say, had never been conceived before our time by the kings of Europe, penetrates the intelligence of these princes most profoundly; there it stands firm amid the agitation of all other [opinions].

Men of our day are therefore much less divided than one imagines; they dispute constantly to know into whose hands sovereignty will be delivered, but they easily agree on the duties and rights of sovereignty. All conceive the government in the image of a lone, simple, providential, and creative power.

All secondary ideas in the matter of politics are mobile; that one remains settled, unalterable, and like unto itself. Publicists and statesmen adopt it, the crowd seizes it avidly; the governed and those governing are in accord in pursuing it with the same ardor; it comes first; it seems innate.

It therefore does not issue from a caprice of the human mind, but is a natural condition of the current state of men.

Chapter 3: That the Sentiments of Democratic Peoples Are in Accord with Their Ideas in Bringing Them to Concentrate Power

If, in centuries of equality, men easily perceive the idea of a great central power, one cannot doubt, moreover, that their habits and sentiments predispose them to recognize such a power and to lend it a hand. One can demonstrate this in few words, most of the reasons having already been given elsewhere.

Men who inhabit democratic countries, having neither superiors nor inferiors nor habitual and necessary associates, willingly fall back on themselves and consider themselves in isolation. I have had occasion to show this at great length when individualism was in question.

It is therefore never effortless for these men to tear themselves away from their particular affairs to occupy themselves with common affairs; their natural inclination is to abandon the care of the latter to the sole visible and permanent representative of collective interests, which is the state.

Not only do they not naturally have the taste to occupy themselves with the public, but often they lack the time to do it. Private life is so active in democratic times, so agitated, so filled with desires and work, that hardly any energy or leisure remains to each man for political life.

That such penchants are not invincible I shall not deny, since my principal goal in writing this book has been to combat them. I only maintain that in our day a secret force constantly develops them in the human heart, and that not to stop them is enough for them to fill it up.

I have also had occasion to show how the growing love of well-being and the mobile nature of property make democratic peoples dread material disorder. Love of public tranquillity is often the sole political passion that these peoples preserve, and it becomes more active and powerful in them as all the others are weakened and die; this naturally disposes citizens constantly to give the central power new rights, or to allow it to take them; it alone seems to them to have the interest and the means to defend them from anarchy by defending itself.

As in centuries of equality no one is obliged to lend his force to those like him and no one has the right to expect great support from those like him, each is at once independent and weak. These two states, which must neither be viewed separately nor confused, give the citizen of democracies very contrary instincts. His independence fills him with confidence and pride among his equals, and his debility makes him feel, from time to time, the need of the outside help that he cannot expect from any of them, since they are all impotent and cold. In this extremity, he naturally turns his regard to the immense being that rises alone in the midst of universal debasement. His needs and above all his desires constantly lead him back toward it, and in the end he views it as the unique and necessary support for individual weakness.

This serves to make understandable what often happens in democratic peoples, where one sees men who so uneasily tolerate superiors patiently suffer a master, and show themselves proud and servile at the same time.

The hatred that men bear for privilege is increased as privileges become rarer and less great, so that one would say that democratic passions are more inflamed in the very times in which they find the least nourishment. I have already given the reason for this phenomenon. When all conditions are unequal, there is no inequality great enough to offend the eye, whereas the smallest dissimilarity appears shocking in the midst of general uniformity; the sight of it becomes more intolerable as uniformity is more complete. It is therefore natural that the love of equality grow constantly with equality itself; in satisfying it, one develops it.

This immortal hatred, more and more afire, which animates democratic peoples against the slightest privileges, particularly favors the gradual concentration of all political rights in the hands of the sole representative of the state. The sovereign, being necessarily above all citizens and uncontested, does not excite the envy of any of them, and each believes he deprives his equals of all the prerogatives he concedes to it.

Man in democratic centuries obeys his neighbor, who is his equal, only with extreme repugnance; he refuses to recognize in him any enlightenment superior to his own; he distrusts his justice and looks on his power with jealousy; he fears and scorns him; he loves to make him feel at each instant the common dependence of them both on the same master.

Every central power that follows these natural instincts loves equality and favors it; for equality singularly facilitates the action of such a power, extends it, and secures it.

It can also be said that every central government adores uniformity; uniformity spares it the examination of an infinity of details with which it would have to occupy itself if it were necessary to make a rule for men, instead of making all men pass indiscriminately under the same rule. Thus the government loves what citizens love, and it naturally hates what they hate. This community of sentiments which, in democratic nations, continuously unites each individual and the sovereign in the same thought, establishes a secret and permanent sympathy between them. The government is pardoned for its faults for the sake of its tastes, public confidence abandons it only with difficulty in the midst of its excesses or errors, and it returns to it when it is recalled. Democratic peoples often hate the depositories of the central power; but they always love this power itself.

Thus I have come by two diverse paths to the same goal. I have shown that equality suggests to men the thought of a lone, uniform, and strong government. I have just brought out that it gives them the taste for it; the nations of our day tend therefore toward a government of this kind. The natural inclination of their minds and hearts leads them to it, and it is enough that they not be held back for them to arrive at it.

I think that in the democratic centuries that are going to open up, individual independence and local liberties will always be the product of art. Centralization will be the natural government.

Chapter 6: What Kind of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear

During my stay in the United States I had remarked that a democratic social state like that of the Americans could singularly facilitate the establishment of despotism, and I had seen on my return to Europe how most of our princes had already made use of the ideas, sentiments, and needs to which this same social state had given birth to extend the sphere of their power.

That led me to believe that Christian nations would perhaps in the end come under an oppression similar to that which formerly weighed on several of the peoples of antiquity.

A more detailed examination of the subject and five years of new meditations have not diminished my fears, but they have changed their object.

In past centuries, one never saw a sovereign so absolute and so powerful that it undertook to administer all the parts of a great empire by itself without the assistance of secondary powers; there was none who attempted to subjugate all its subjects without distinction to the details of a uniform rule, nor one that descended to the side of each of them to lord it over him and lead him. The idea of such an undertaking had never presented itself to the human mind, and if any man had happened to conceive of it, the insufficiency of enlightenment, the imperfection of administrative proceedings, and above all the natural obstacles that inequality of conditions gave rise to would soon have stopped him in the execution of such a vast design.

One sees that in the time of the greatest power of the Caesars, the different peoples who inhabited the Roman world still preserved diverse customs and mores: although subject to the same monarch, most of the provinces were administered separately; they were filled with powerful and active municipalities, and although all the government of the empire was concentrated in the hands of the emperor alone and he always remained the arbitrator of all things in case of need, the details of social life and of individual existence ordinarily escaped his control.

It is true that the emperors possessed an immense power without counterweight, which permitted them to indulge the outlandishness of their penchants freely and to employ the entire force of the state in satisfying them; they often came to abuse this power so as to deprive a citizen of his goods or life arbitrarily: their tyranny weighed enormously on some, but it did not extend over many; it applied itself to a few great principal objects and neglected the rest; it was violent and restricted.

It seems that if despotism came to be established in the democratic nations of our day, it would have other characteristics: it would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without tormenting them.

I do not doubt that in centuries of enlightenment and equality like ours, sovereigns will come more easily to gather all public powers in their hands alone and to penetrate the sphere of private interests more habitually and more deeply than any of those in antiquity was ever able to do. But the same equality that facilitates despotism tempers it; we have seen how, as men are more alike and more equal, public mores become more humane and milder; when no citizen has either great power or great wealth, tyranny in a way lacks an occasion and a stage. All fortunes being mediocre, passions are naturally contained, imagination bounded, pleasures simple. This universal moderation moderates the sovereign itself and holds the disordered sparks of its desires within certain limits.

Independently of these reasons drawn from the very nature of the social state, I could add many others that I would take from outside my subject, but I want to stay within the bounds I have set for myself.

Democratic governments can become violent and even cruel at certain moments of great excitement and great peril; but these crises will be rare and transient.

When I think of the small passions of men of our day, the softness of their mores, the extent of their enlightenment, the purity of their religion, the mildness of their morality, their laborious

and steady habits, the restraint that almost all preserve in vice as in virtue, I do not fear that in their chiefs they will find tyrants, but rather schoolmasters.

I think therefore that the kind of oppression with which democratic peoples are threatened will resemble nothing that has preceded it in the world; our contemporaries would not find its image in their memories. I myself seek in vain an expression that exactly reproduces the idea that I form of it for myself and that contains it; the old words despotism and tyranny are not suitable. The thing is new, therefore I must try to define it, since I cannot name it.

I want to imagine with what new features despotism could be produced in the world: I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others: his children and his particular friends form the whole human species for him; as for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is beside them, but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone, and if a family still remains for him, one can at least say that he no longer has a native country.

Above these an immense tutelary power is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood; it likes citizens to enjoy themselves provided that they think only of enjoying themselves. It willingly works for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent and sole arbiter of that; it provides for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living?

So it is that every day it renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller space and little by little steals the very use of free will from each citizen. Equality has prepared men for all these things: it has disposed them to tolerate them and often even to regard them as a benefit.

Thus, after taking each individual by turns in its powerful hands and kneading him as it likes, the sovereign extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one's acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.

I have always believed that this sort of regulated, mild, and peaceful servitude, whose picture I have just painted, could be combined better than one imagines with some of the external forms of freedom, and that it would not be impossible for it to be established in the very shadow of the sovereignty of the people.

Our contemporaries are incessantly racked by two inimical passions: they feel the need to be led and the wish to remain free. Not being able to destroy either one of these contrary instincts, they strive to satisfy both at the same time. They imagine a unique power, tutelary, all powerful, but elected by citizens. They combine centralization and the sovereignty of the people. That gives them some respite. They console themselves for being in tutelage by thinking that they themselves have chosen their schoolmasters. Each individual allows himself to be attached because he sees that it is not a man or a class but the people themselves that hold the end of the chain.

In this system citizens leave their dependence for a moment to indicate their master, and then reenter it.

In our day there are many people who accommodate themselves very easily to this kind of compromise between administrative despotism and the sovereignty of the people, and who think they have guaranteed the freedom of individuals well enough when they deliver it to the national power. That does not suffice for me. The nature of the master is much less important to me than the obedience.

Nevertheless I shall not deny that such a constitution is infinitely preferable to one which, after having concentrated all powers, would deposit them in the hands of an irresponsible man or body. Of all the different forms that democratic despotism could take, this would surely be the worst.

When the sovereign is elected or closely overseen by a really elected and independent legislature, the oppression it makes individuals undergo is sometimes greater; but it is always less degrading, because each citizen, while he is hindered and reduced to impotence, can still fancy that in obeying he submits only to himself and that it is to one of his wills that he sacrifices all the others.

I understand as well that when the sovereign represents the nation and depends on it, the strength and rights that are taken away from each citizen serve not only the head of state but profit the state itself, and that particular persons get some fruit from the sacrifice of their independence that they have made to the public.

To create a national representation in a very centralized country is therefore to diminish the evil that extreme centralization can produce, but not to destroy it.

I see very well that in this manner one preserves individual intervention in the most important affairs; but one does not suppress it any less in small and particular ones. One forgets that it is above all in details that it is dangerous to enslave men. For my part, I would be brought to believe freedom less necessary in great things than in lesser ones if I thought that one could ever be assured of the one without possessing the other.

Subjection in small affairs manifests itself every day and makes itself felt without distinction by all citizens. It does not make them desperate; but it constantly thwarts them and brings them to renounce the use of their wills. Thus little by little, it extinguishes their spirits and enervates their souls, whereas obedience, which is due only in a few very grave but very rare circumstances, shows servitude only now and then and makes it weigh only on certain men. In vain will you charge these same citizens, whom you have rendered so dependent on the central power, with

choosing the representatives of this power from time to time; that use of their free will, so important but so brief and so rare, will not prevent them from losing little by little the faculty of thinking, feeling, and acting by themselves, and thus from gradually falling below the level of humanity.

I add that they will soon become incapable of exercising the great, unique privilege that remains to them. Democratic peoples who have introduced freedom into the political sphere at the same time that they have increased despotism in the administrative sphere have been led to very strange oddities. If one must conduct small affairs in which simple good sense can suffice, they determine that citizens are incapable of it; if it is a question of the government of the whole state, they entrust immense prerogatives in these citizens; they make them alternatively the playthings of the sovereign and its masters, more than kings and less than men. After exhausting all the different systems of election without finding one that suits them, they are astonished and seek again, as if the evil they notice were not due much more to the constitution of the country than to that of the electoral body.

It is in fact difficult to conceive how men who have entirely renounced the habit of directing themselves could succeed at choosing well those who will lead them; and one will not make anyone believe that a liberal, energetic, and wise government can ever issue from the suffrage of a people of servants.

A constitution that was republican at the head and ultramonarchical in all other parts has always seemed to me to be an ephemeral monster. The vices of those who govern and the imbecility of the governed would not be slow to bring it to ruin; and the people, tired of their representatives and of themselves, would create freer institutions or soon return to lying at the feet of a single master.

Chapter 7: Continuation of the Preceding Chapters

I believe that it is easier to establish an absolute and despotic government in a people where conditions are equal than in any other, and I think that if such a government were once established in a people like this, not only would it oppress men, but in the long term it would rob each of them of several of the principal attributes of humanity.

Despotism therefore appears to me particularly to be dreaded in democratic ages.

I would, I think, have loved freedom in all times; but I feel myself inclined to adore it in the time we are in.

I am convinced, on the other hand, that all those in the centuries we are now entering who try to base freedom on privilege and aristocracy will fail. All those who want to attract authority to a single class and retain it there will fail. In our day there is no sovereign clever enough and strong enough to found a despotism by reestablishing permanent distinctions among its subjects; nor is there a legislator so wise and so powerful as to be in a position to maintain free institutions if he does not take equality for his first principle and creed. All those of our contemporaries who want to create or secure the independence and dignity of those like themselves must therefore show themselves as friends of equality; and the only means worthy of them for showing themselves as such is to be such: the success of their holy enterprise depends on it.

Thus there is no question of reconstructing an aristocratic society, but of making freedom issue from the bosom of the democratic society in which God makes us live.

These two first truths seem to me simple, clear and fertile, and they naturally lead me to consider what kind of free government can be established in a people where conditions are equal.

It results from the very constitution of democratic nations and their needs that the power of the sovereign must be more uniform, more centralized, more extended, more penetrating, and more powerful in them than elsewhere. Society there is naturally more active and stronger, the individual more subordinated and weaker: the one does more, the other less; that is mandatory.

One must therefore not expect that the circle of individual independence will ever be as large in democratic lands as in aristocratic countries. But that is not to be wished; for in aristocratic nations, society is often sacrificed to the individual and the prosperity of the greatest number to the greatness of a few.

It is at once necessary and desirable that the central power that directs a democratic people be active and powerful. There is no question of rendering it weak or indolent, but only of preventing it from abusing its agility and force.

What contributed most to securing the independence of particular persons in aristocratic centuries is that the sovereign alone did not take charge of governing and administering citizens; it was obliged to leave this care in part to members of the aristocracy, so that the social power, since it was always divided, never weighed as a whole and in the same manner on each man.

Not only did the sovereign not do everything by itself, but most of the officials who acted in its place, drawing their power from the fact of their birth and not from it, were not constantly in its hands. It could not create them or destroy them at each instant according to its caprices or bend them all uniformly to its least will. That also guaranteed the independence of particular persons.

I well understand that in our day one cannot have recourse to the same means, but I do see democratic procedures that replace them.

Instead of handing over to the sovereign alone all the administrative powers that one takes away from corporations or from the nobles, one can entrust a part of them to secondary bodies formed temporarily of plain citizens; in this manner the freedom of particular persons will be surer without lessening their equality.

Americans, who do not hold to words as much as we do, have preserved the name of county for the largest of their administrative districts; but they have replaced the county in part by a provincial assembly.

I shall admit without difficulty that in a period of equality like ours it would be unjust and unreasonable to institute hereditary officials; but nothing prevents their substitution, in a certain measure, by elective officials. Election is a democratic expedient that secures the independence of the official vis-à-vis the central power as much as and more than heredity can do in aristocratic peoples.

Aristocratic countries are filled with rich and influential particular persons who know how to be self-sufficient and whom one does not oppress easily or secretly; and they maintain power with their general habits of moderation and restraint.

I know well that democratic lands do not naturally present individuals like these; but one can artificially create something analogous there.

I firmly believe that one cannot found an aristocracy anew in the world; but I think that when plain citizens associate, they can constitute very opulent, very influential, very strong beings—in a word, aristocratic persons.

In this manner one would obtain several of the greatest political advantages of aristocracy without its injustices or dangers. A political, industrial, commercial, or even scientific and literary association is an enlightened and powerful citizen whom one can neither bend at will nor oppress in the dark and who, in defending its particular rights against the exigencies of power, saves common freedoms.

In times of aristocracy, each man is always bound in a very tight manner to several of his fellow citizens in such a way that one cannot attack him without having the others rush to his aid. In centuries of equality, each individual is naturally isolated; he has no hereditary friends from whom he can require cooperation, no class whose sympathies are assured him; one easily sets him apart and rides roughshod over him with impunity. In our day a citizen who is oppressed has therefore only one means of defending himself; it is to address the nation as a whole, and if it is deaf to him, the human race; he has only one means of doing it, which is the press. Thus freedom of the press is infinitely more precious in democratic nations than in all others; it alone cures most of the ills that equality can produce. Equality isolates and weakens men, but the press places at the side of each of them a very powerful arm that the weakest and most isolated can make use of. Equality takes away from each individual the support of his neighbors, but the press permits him to call to his aid all his fellow citizens and all who are like him. Printing hastened the progress of equality, and it is one of its best correctives.

I think that men who live in aristocracies can do without freedom of the press if they must; but those who inhabit democratic lands cannot do so. To guarantee the personal independence of the latter, I do not trust in great political assemblies, in parliamentary prerogatives, or in a proclamation of the sovereignty of the people.

All those things are reconcilable, up to a certain point, with individual servitude; but that servitude cannot be complete if the press is free. The press is the democratic instrument of freedom par excellence.

I would say something analogous of judicial power.

It is of the essence of judicial power to be occupied with particular interests and willingly to fix its regard on small objects that are exposed to its view; it is also of the essence of this power not to come of itself to the assistance of those who are oppressed, but to be constantly at the disposition of the most humble among them. However weak one supposes him, he can always force the judge to listen to his complaint and to respond to it: that is due to the very constitution of judicial power.

A power like this is therefore especially applicable to the needs of freedom in a time when the eye and hand of the sovereign are constantly introduced into the slightest details of human actions, and when particular persons, too weak to protect themselves, are too isolated to be able to count on the assistance of their peers. The force of the courts has in all times been the greatest guarantee that can be offered to individual independence, but that is above all true in democratic centuries; rights and particular interests are always in peril then if the judicial power does not grow and extend itself as conditions are equalized.

Equality suggests to men several penchants very dangerous for freedom to which the legislator ought always to keep his eye open. I shall recall only the principal ones.

Men who live in democratic centuries do not readily comprehend the utility of forms; they feel an instinctive disdain for them. I have spoken elsewhere of the reasons for this. Forms excite their scorn and often their hatred. As they ordinarily aspire only to easy and present enjoyments, they throw themselves impetuously toward the object of each of their desires; the least delays make them despair. This temperament, which they carry into political life, disposes them against the forms that slow them down or stop them every day in some of their designs.

The inconvenience that men in democracies find in forms is, however, what renders them so useful to freedom, their principal merit being to serve as a barrier between strong and weak, he who governs and he who is governed, to slow down the one and to give the other time to recollect himself. Forms are more necessary as the sovereign is more active and more powerful and as particular persons become more indolent and debilitated. Thus democratic peoples naturally have more need of forms than other peoples, and they naturally respect them less. That merits very serious attention.

There is nothing more pathetic than the haughty disdain of most of our contemporaries for questions of form; for the smallest questions of form have acquired an importance in our day that they had not had up to now. Several of the greatest interests of humanity are linked to them.

I think that if statesmen who lived in aristocratic centuries could sometimes scorn forms with impunity and often rise above them, those who lead peoples today must consider the least of them with respect, neglecting it only when an imperious necessity obliges them to do so. In aristocracies, they had a superstition of forms; we must have an enlightened and reflective worship of them.

Another instinct very natural to democratic peoples and very dangerous is the one that brings them to scorn individual rights and hold them of little account.

Men are generally attached to a right and show respect for it because of its importance or the long use they have made of it. The individual rights that are encountered in democratic peoples are ordinarily of little importance, very recent, and quite unstable; this makes one sacrifice them often without difficulty and violate them almost always without remorse.

Now, it happens that at the same time and in the same nations in which men conceive a natural scorn for the rights of individuals, the rights of society are naturally extended and strengthened; that is to say that men become less attached to particular rights at the moment when it would be most necessary to retain and defend the few that remain to them.

It is therefore above all in the democratic times we are in that the true friends of freedom and human greatness must constantly remain on their feet and ready to prevent the social power from lightly sacrificing the particular rights of some individuals to the general execution of its designs. In these times there is no citizen so obscure that it is not very dangerous to allow him to be oppressed, nor are there individual rights of so little importance that one can deliver them with impunity to arbitrariness. The reason for this is simple: when one violates the particular right of an individual in a time when the human spirit is pervaded by the importance and sanctity of rights of this kind, one does harm only to whomever one strips of it; but to violate a right like this in our day is to corrupt national mores profoundly and to put society as a whole in peril, because the very idea of these sorts of rights constantly tends to be distorted and lost among us.

There are certain habits, certain ideas, and certain vices that are proper to a state of revolution and to which a long revolution cannot fail to give birth and make general, whatever else its character, its object, and its theater may be.

When any nation whatever has changed chiefs, opinions, and laws several times in a short space of time, the men who compose it in the end contract a taste for movement and become habituated to the fact that all movements occur rapidly with the aid of force. They then naturally conceive a scorn for forms, whose impotence they see each day, and only with impatience do they tolerate the empire of a rule that has been evaded so many times before their eyes.

As ordinary notions of equity and morality no longer suffice to explain and justify all the novelties to which the revolution gives birth every day, one becomes attached to the principle of social utility, one creates the dogma of political necessity, and one willingly becomes accustomed to sacrificing particular interests without scruple and to riding roughshod over individual rights in order to attain more promptly the general end that one proposes.

These habits and ideas, which I shall call revolutionary because all revolutions produce them, are displayed within aristocracies as well as in democratic peoples; but in the former, they are often less powerful and always less lasting, because there they encounter habits, ideas, faults, and foibles contrary to them. They therefore fade away by themselves when the revolution is ended, and the nation comes back from them to its former political aspect. It is not always so in democratic lands, where it is always to be feared that revolutionary instincts, mellowing and being regularized without being extinguished, will gradually be transformed into governmental mores and administrative habits.

I therefore do not know of any country in which revolutions are more dangerous than in democratic countries, because independent of the accidental and passing evils that they can never fail to do, they always risk creating permanent and so to speak eternal ones.

I believe that there are honest resistances and legitimate rebellions. I therefore do not say in an absolute manner that men in democratic times ought never to make revolutions; but I think that they have reason to hesitate more than all others before undertaking them and that it is better for them to suffer many discomforts in their present state than to recur to such a perilous remedy.

I shall finish with a general idea that includes within it not only all the particular ideas that have been expressed in this present chapter, but also most of those that this book has the goal of setting forth.

In the centuries of aristocracy that preceded ours, there were very powerful particular persons and a very feeble social authority. The very image of society was obscure and was constantly being lost in the midst of all the different powers that regulated citizens. The principal effort of men in those times should have been brought to enlarging and fortifying the social power, to increasing and securing its prerogatives, and, on the contrary, to compressing individual independence within the narrowest of bounds and subordinating particular interest to the general interest.

Other perils and other cares await men of our day.

In most modern nations, the sovereign, whatever its origin, its constitution, and its name may be, has become almost all-powerful, and particular persons sink more and more into the last degree of weakness and dependence.

All was different in former societies. Unity and uniformity were encountered nowhere in them. In ours, everything threatens to become so alike that the particular shape of each individual will soon be lost entirely in the common physiognomy. Our fathers were always ready to misuse the idea that particular rights are respectable, [whereas] we are naturally brought to exaggerate [the idea] that the interest of one individual ought always to bend before the interest of several.

The political world is changing; henceforth one must seek new remedies for new ills.

To fix extended, but visible and immovable, limits for social power; to give to particular persons certain rights and to guarantee them the uncontested enjoyment of these rights; to preserve for the individual the little independence, force, and originality that remain to him; to elevate him beside society and to sustain him before it: this appears to me to be the first object of the legislator in the age we are entering.

One might say that sovereigns in our time seek only to make great things with men. I should want them to think a little more of making great men; to attach less value to the work and more to the worker, and to remember constantly that a nation cannot long remain strong when each man in it is individually weak, and that neither social forms nor political schemes have yet been found that can make a people energetic by composing it of pusillanimous and soft citizens.

Among our contemporaries, I see two contrary but equally fatal ideas.

Some perceive in equality only the anarchic tendencies to which it gives birth. They dread their free will; they are afraid of themselves.

Others, fewer in number, but more enlightened, have another view. Next to the route that, departing from equality, leads to anarchy, they have finally discovered the path that seems to lead men invincibly toward servitude. They bend their souls in advance to this necessary servitude; and despairing of remaining free, at the bottom of their hearts they already adore the master who will soon come.

The first abandon freedom because they deem it dangerous; the second because they judge it impossible.

If I had had this latter belief, I would not have written the work you have just read; I would have limited myself to groaning in secret about the destiny of those like me.

I wished to expose to broad daylight the perils that equality brings to human independence because I firmly believe that these perils are the most formidable as well as the least foreseen of all those that the future holds. But I do not believe them insurmountable.

Men who live in the democratic centuries we are entering have the taste for independence naturally. They naturally tolerate rule with impatience: the permanence of the very state they prefer tires them. They love power; but they are inclined to scorn and hate whoever exercises it, and they easily escape from its hands because of their very pettiness and mobility.

These instincts will always be found because they come from the foundation of the social state, which will not change. For a long time they will keep any despotism from being able to settle in, and they will furnish new arms to each new generation that wants to struggle in favor of men's freedom.

Let us therefore have that salutary fear of the future that makes one watchful and combative, and not that sort of soft and idle terror that wears hearts down and enervates them.

Chapter 8: General View of the Subject

I should wish, before leaving forever the course I have just traveled, to be able to embrace with one last regard all the diverse features that mark the face of the new world, and finally to judge the general influence that equality will exert on the lot of men; but the difficulty of such an undertaking arrests me; confronted with so great an object I feel my sight becoming blurred and my reason wavering.

The new society that I sought to depict and that I wish to judge is only being born. Time has not yet fixed its form; the great revolution that created it still endures, and in what is happening in our day it is almost impossible to discern what will pass away with the revolution itself and what will remain after it.

The world that is arising is still half entangled in the debris of the world that is falling, and in the midst of the immense confusion that human affairs presents, no one can say what will remain standing of aged institutions and old mores and what of them will in the end disappear.

Although the revolution operating in the social state, the laws, the ideas, the sentiments of men is still very far from being completed, already one cannot compare its works with anything previously seen in the world. I go back century by century to the furthest removed antiquity; I perceive nothing that resembles what is before my eyes. With the past no longer shedding light on the future, the mind advances in darkness.

Nevertheless, in the midst of this picture so vast, so new, so confused, I already glimpse some principal features being sketched and I point them out:

I see that goods and evils are split equally enough in the world. Great wealth is disappearing; the number of small fortunes is increasing; desires and enjoyments are multiplying; there is no

longer extraordinary prosperity or irremediable misery. Ambition is a universal sentiment, there are few vast ambitions. Each individual is isolated and weak; society is agile, far-seeing, and strong; particular persons do small things and the state does immense ones.

Souls are not energetic; but mores are mild and legislation humane. If one encounters few great devotions, few very lofty, very brilliant, and very pure virtues, habits are orderly, violence rare, cruelty almost unknown. Men's existence is becoming longer and their property surer. Life is not much adorned, but very easy and very peaceful. There are few very delicate and very coarse pleasures, little politeness in manners, and little brutality in tastes. One scarcely encounters very learned men or very ignorant populations. Genius becomes rarer and enlightenment more common. The human mind is developed by the combined small efforts of all men, and not by the powerful impulsion of some of them. There is less perfection, but more fruitfulness in works. All the bonds of race, of class, of native land slacken; the great bond of humanity draws tighter.

If among all these diverse features I seek the one that appears to me the most general and the most striking, I come to see that what may be remarked in fortunes is represented in a thousand other forms. Almost all extremes become milder and softer; almost all prominent points are worn down to make a place for something middling that is at once less high and less low, less brilliant and less obscure than what used to be seen in the world.

I let my regard wander over this innumerable crowd composed of similar beings, in which nothing is elevated and nothing lowered. The spectacle of this universal uniformity saddens and chills me, and I am tempted to regret the society that is no longer.

When the world was filled with very great and very small men, very rich and very poor, very learned and very ignorant, I turned my regard away from the second and attached it only to the first, and these delighted my view; but I understand that this pleasure was born of my weakness: it is because I cannot see all that surrounds me at the same time that I am permitted to choose in this way and to set apart among so many objects those it pleases me to contemplate. It is not the same with the all-powerful and eternal Being whose eye necessarily envelops the sum of things and who sees distinctly, though at once, the whole human race and each man.

It is natural to believe that what most satisfies the regard of this creator and preserver of men is not the singular prosperity of some, but the greatest well-being of all: what seems to me decadence is therefore progress in his eyes; what wounds me is agreeable to him. Equality is perhaps less elevated; but it is more just, and its justice makes for its greatness and its beauty.

I strive to enter into this point of view of God, and it is from there that I seek to consider and judge human things.

No one on earth can yet assert in an absolute and general manner that the new state of societies is superior to the former state; but it is already easy to see that it is different.

There are certain vices and certain virtues that were attached to the constitution of aristocratic nations and that are so contrary to the genius of the new peoples that one cannot introduce them into their hearts. There are good penchants and bad instincts that were foreign to the first and that are natural to the second; ideas that present themselves to the imagination of the one that the mind of the other rejects. They are, as it were, two distinct humanities, each of which has its particular advantages and inconveniences, its goods and evils that are proper to it.

One must therefore take care in judging the societies being born by ideas one has drawn from those that are no longer. That would be unjust, for these societies, differing enormously between themselves, are not comparable.

It would scarcely be more reasonable to demand of men of our time the particular virtues that flowed from the social state of their ancestors, since that social state itself has fallen and has confusedly carried away in its fall all the goods and all the evils it brought with it.

But these things are still badly understood in our day.

I perceive many of my contemporaries who undertake to make a choice among the institutions, the opinions, the ideas born of the aristocratic constitution of the former society; they willingly abandon some, but they would wish to retain others and carry them into the new world with them.

I think that they are consuming their time and their strength on an honest and sterile work.

It is no longer a question of retaining the particular advantages that inequality of conditions procures for men, but of securing the new goods that equality can offer them.

We ought not to strain to make ourselves like our fathers, but strive to attain the kind of greatness and happiness that is proper to us.

As for myself, having come to the final stage of my course, to discover from afar, but at once, all the diverse objects that I had contemplated separately in advancing, I feel full of fears and full of hopes. I see great perils that it is possible to ward off; great evils that one can avoid or restrain, and I become more and more firm in the belief that to be honest and prosperous, it is still enough for democratic nations to wish it.

I am not unaware that several of my contemporaries have thought that peoples are never masters of themselves here below, and that they necessarily obey I do not know which insurmountable and unintelligent force born of previous events, the race, the soil, or the climate.

Those are false and cowardly doctrines that can never produce any but weak men and pusillanimous nations: Providence has not created the human race either entirely independent or perfectly slave. It traces, it is true, a fatal circle around each man that he cannot leave; but within its vast limits man is powerful and free; so too with peoples.

Nations of our day cannot have it that conditions within them are not equal; but it depends on them whether equality leads them to servitude or freedom, to enlightenment or barbarism, to prosperity or misery.