Tyranny usually makes use of arbitrariness, but if necessary it knows how to do without it.

In the United States, the omnipotence of the majority, at the same time that it favors the legal despotism of the legislator, also favors the arbitrariness of the magistrate. Because the majority has absolute control over making the law and supervising its execution, and has equal control over those governing and those governed, it regards public officials as its passive agents and willingly relies on them to take care of serving its designs. So the majority does not enter in advance into the details of the duties of public officials and scarcely takes the trouble to define their rights. It treats them as a master would treat his servants, if, having their behavior always in view, he could direct or correct their conduct at every moment.

In general, the law leaves American officials much more free than ours within the circle that is drawn around them. Sometimes the majority even allows them to go outside of this circle. Guaranteed by the opinion of the greatest number and strong because of their support, they then dare things that a European, accustomed to the spectacle of arbitrariness, still finds astonishing. In this way, habits being formed within liberty that, one day, will be able to become destructive to it.

Of the Power Exercised by the Majority in America over Thought

In the United States, when the majority has irrevocably settled on a question, it is no longer discussed.—Why.—Moral power that the majority exercises over thought.—Democratic republics immaterialize despotism.

When you come to examine how thought is exercised in the United States, you notice very clearly to what extent the power of the majority surpasses all the powers that we know in Europe.

Thought is an invisible and almost imperceptible power that scoffs at all tyrannies [that scoffs amid chains and executioners. You could say of it what Malherbe said of death: it does not stop at the gates of the Louvre any more than at the door of the poor man]. Today, the most absolute sovereigns of Europe cannot prevent certain ideas hostile to their authority from circulating silently within their States and even within their courts. It is not the same in America; as long as the majority is uncertain, people speak; but as soon as the majority has irrevocably decided, everyone is silent, and friends as well as enemies then seem to climb on board together. The reason for this is simple. There is no monarch so absolute that he can gather in his hands all of society's forces and vanquish opposition in the way that a majority vested with the right to make and execute laws can [at will, vested with the right and the force].

A king, moreover, has only a physical power that acts on deeds and cannot reach wills; but the majority is vested with a strength simultaneously physical and moral, which acts on the will as well as on actions and which at the same time prevents the deed and the desire to do it.

I know of no country where, in general, there reigns less independence of mind and true freedom of discussion than in America.

There is no religious or political theory that may not be freely preached in the constitutional States of Europe and that does not penetrate into the others [and I do not know of ≠a European people so powerful and so strong that it is not forced from time to time to hear hard truths. It is not this way in America. ≠]; for there is no country in Europe so subject to a single power that someone who wants to speak the truth does not find some support capable of insuring him against the results of his independence. If he has the misfortune to live under an absolute government, he often has the people for him; if he lives in a free country, he can find shelter, as needed, behind royal authority. The aristocratic part of society sustains him in democratic countries, and democracy in the others. But within a democracy organized as that of the United States, only a single power

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commercial rights [doubtful reading (ed.)] of his subjects, he committed an arbitrary but not a tyrannical act.

"When the National Assembly ordered [blank space in the manuscript (ed.)], it committed a tyrannical act but not an arbitrary act. ≠"
is found, a single element of strength and success, and nothing outside of it.²

In America, the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Within these limits, the writer is free; but woe to him if he dares to go beyond them. It isn’t that he has to fear an auto-da-fé, but he is exposed to all types of distasteful things and to everyday persecutions. A political career is closed to him; he has offended the only power that has the ability to open it to him. Everything is denied him, even glory. Before publishing his opinions, he believed he had some partisans; it seems to him that he has them no longer, now that he has revealed himself to all; for those who censure him speak openly, and those who think as he does, without having his courage, keep quiet and distance themselves. He gives in; finally, under the daily effort, he yields and returns to silence, as though he felt remorse for having told the truth.

Chains and executioners, those are the crude instruments formerly used by tyranny; but today civilization has perfected even despotism itself, which seemed however to have nothing more to learn.

Princes had, so to speak, materialized violence; the democratic republics of today have made violence as entirely intellectual as the human will that it wants to constrain. Under the absolute government of one man, despotism, to reach the soul, cruelly struck the body; and the soul, escaping from these blows, rose gloriously above it; but in democratic republics, tyranny does not proceed in this way; it leaves the body alone and goes right to the soul. The master no longer says: You will think like me or die; he says: You are free not to think as I do; your life, your goods, everything remains with you; but from this day on you are a stranger among us. You will keep your privileges as a citizen, but they will become useless to you. If you aspire to be the choice of your fellow citizens, they will not choose you, and if you ask only for their esteem, they will still pretend to refuse it to you. You will remain among men, but you will lose your rights to humanity. When you approach your fellows, they will flee from you like an impure being. And those who believe in your innocence, even they will abandon you, for people would flee from them in turn. Go in peace; I spare your life, but I leave you a life worse than death.

Absolute monarchies had dishonored despotism. Let us be careful that democratic republics do not rehabilitate it, and that, while making despotism heavier for some, they do not, in the eyes of the greatest number, remove its odious aspect and its degrading character.

Among the proudest nations of the Old World, books have been published that intended faithfully to portray the vices and absurdities of their contemporaries. La Bruyère lived at the palace of Louis XIV when he composed his chapter on the great, and Molière criticized the court in the plays that he had performed before the courtiers. But the dominating power in the United States does not understand being played in this way. The slightest reproach wounds it; the smallest biting truth shocks it, and everything from the forms of its language to its most solid virtues must be praised. No writer, no matter how famous, can escape this obligation to heap praise upon his fellow citizens. So the majority lives in perpetual self-adoration; only foreigners or experience can bring certain truths to the ears of Americans.

If America has not yet had great writers, we do not have to look elsewhere for the reasons: literary genius does not exist without freedom of the mind, and there is no freedom of the mind in America.a

The Inquisition was never able to prevent the circulation in Spain of books opposed to the religion of the greatest number. The dominion of the majority does better in the United States: it has removed even the thought of publishing such books. Unbelievers are found in America, but unbelief finds, so to speak, no organ there.b

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² In the margin: "<# Base circumlocutions of the Federalists. #>"

a. Cf. chapter XIII of the first part of the second volume.
b. The ideas of this paragraph were suggested to Tocqueville by a doctor in Baltimore, Mr. Stuart (non-alphabetic notebooks 2 and 3, YTC, Bla, and Voyage, OC, V, 1, p. 113).

A note on a slip of paper attests to Tocqueville’s dissatisfaction concerning this part of the chapter:

I have put two distinct ideas within the same expressions, which is a great defect./ That tyranny in America acts directly on the soul and does not torment the body results from two causes:
You see governments that strive to protect morals by condemning the authors of licentious books. In the United States, no one is condemned for this kind of work; but no one is tempted to write them. It is not that all citizens have pure morals, but the majority is steady in its morals.

Here, the use of power is undoubtedly good. I am, consequently, speaking only about the power itself. This irresistible power is an unrelenting fact, and its good usage is only an accident. [Doesn't the majority in Paris acquire a taste for the filth that sullies our theatres daily?]

**Effect of Tyranny of the Majority on the National Character of the Americans; Of the Courtier Spirit in the United States**

*Until now the effects of tyranny of the majority are felt on mores more than on the running of society. — They arrest the development of men of great character. — Democratic republics organized like those of the United States put the courtier spirit within reach of the greatest number. — Evidence of this spirit in the United States. — Why there is more patriotism among the people than among those who govern in their name.*

The influence of what precedes is still felt only weakly in political society; but its harmful effects are already noticeable on the national character of the Americans. I think that the small number of outstanding men who appear today on the political stage must be attributed, above all, to the

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1. Because it is exercised by a *majority* and not by a *man*. A man, never able to obtain the voluntary support of the mass, cannot inflict on his enemy the moral torment that arises from isolation and public scorn. He is forced to act *directly* in order to reach his enemy.

2. Because in fact mores have become milder and that despotism has been perfected and *intellectualized*.

This same note also exists in YTC, CVh, 3, p. 59; (the copyist indicates that the original is not in Tocqueville’s hand).

always increasing action of the despotism of the majority in the United States.

When the American Revolution broke out, outstanding men appeared in large number; then public opinion led and did not tyrannize over wills. The famous men of this period, freely joining the movement of minds, had a grandeur of their own; they shed their brilliance on the nation and did not derive it from the nation.

In absolute governments, the great who are near the throne flatter the passions of the master and willingly bow to his caprices. But the mass of the nation does not lend itself to servitude; it often submits out of weakness, habit or ignorance, sometimes out of love of royalty or the king. We have seen peoples take a type of pleasure or pride in sacrificing their will to that of the prince and, in this way, give a kind of independence of soul to the very act of obedience. Among these peoples much less degradation than misery is found. There is, moreover, a great difference between doing what you do not approve or pretending to approve what you do; the one is done by a weak man, but the other belongs only to the habits of a *valet*.c

In free countries, in which each person is more or less called to give his opinion on matters of State; in democratic republics, in which public life is constantly mingled with private life, in which the sovereign is approachable from all sides, and in which it is only a matter of raising one’s voice to reach the sovereign’s ear, many more people are found who seek to bank on the sovereign’s weaknesses and to live at the expense of the sovereign’s passions, than in absolute monarchies. Not that men there are naturally worse than elsewhere, but temptation is stronger and is offered to more people at the same time. A much more general debasing of souls results.

Democratic republics put the courtier spirit within reach of the greatest number and make it penetrate into all classes at the same time. It is one of the principal reproaches that can be made against them.

c. The manuscript says "lackey."

Hervé de Tocqueville: “Trivial expression that, moreover, attacks an entire class that at present is no less proud than another” (YTC, CIIIb, 1, p. 87).
That is true, above all, in democratic states organized like the American republics, in which the majority possesses such absolute and irresistible dominion, that, in a way, you must renounce your rights as a citizen and, so to speak, your position as a man when you want to deviate from the road marked out by the majority.

Among the immense crowd, in the United States, that pushes into a political career, I saw very few men who showed this virile candor, this manly independence of thought, that often distinguished Americans in former times and that, wherever it is found, forms the salient feature of great characters. At first view, you would say that in America minds have all been formed on the same model because they so exactly follow the same paths. Sometimes, it is true, the foreigner will encounter some Americans who deviate from the rigor of the formulas; these Americans happen to deplore the vice of the laws, the variability of democracy and its lack of enlightenment; often they even go so far as to notice the defects that are spoiling the national character, and they indicate the measures that could be taken to correct those defects. But no one, except you, is listening to them; and you, to whom they confide these secret thoughts, you are only a passing foreigner. They willingly give you truths that are useless to you, and, coming into the public square, they use another language.

If these lines ever reach America, I am sure of two things: first, that readers will all raise their voices to condemn me; second, that many among them will absorb me deep down in their conscience.

I have heard country spoken about in the United States. I have encountered true patriotism among the people; I have often searched in vain for these two things among those who lead the people. This is easily understood by analogy: despotism depraves the one submitted to it much more than the one who imposes it. In absolute monarchies, the king often has great virtues; but the courtiers are always vile.

[The above text is interrupted, and the beginning of a new paragraph is found.]

It is true that courtiers, in America, do not say: Sire and Your Majesty, a grand and capital difference; but they talk constantly about the natural enlightenment of their master. They do not raise the question of knowing which one of the virtues of the prince most merits adoration; for they assert that he possesses all virtues, without having acquired them and, so to speak, without wanting to do so. They do not give him their wives and daughters so that he would deign to elevate them to the rank of his mistresses; but by sacrificing their opinions to him, they prostitute themselves.

Moralists and philosophers in America are not forced to envelop their opinions in veils of allegory; but, before hazarding an annoying truth, they say: We know that we are speaking to a people too far above human weaknesses ever to lose control of itself. We would not use such language, if we did not address men whose virtues and enlightenment make them alone, among all others, worthy of remaining free.

How could those who flattered Louis XIV do better?

As for me, I believe that in all governments, whatever they are, baseness will attach itself to strength and flattery to power. And I know only one way to prevent men from degrading themselves: it is to grant to no one, with omnipotence, the sovereign power to debase them.

d. Democracy.

The greatest moral evil that results from the dominion of democracy is that it puts the courtier spirit within reach of everyone.

[In the margin: Here the character of courtiers.]

In democratic republics the number of courtiers is immense; the only difference from monarchies is that these are courtiers with bad taste.

The Americans have only two means to gain the truth, the voice of foreigners and experience (YTC, CVe, pp. 62–63).