

ÉTICA E FILOSOFIA POLÍTICA

The Tyranny of the Majority: Revisiting the Debate

A tirania da maioria: revisitando o debate

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Abstract: Tocqueville is one of the great masters of political science and political philosophy, along with John Stuart Mill. Indeed, one could say that we are all disciples of both authors. On the one hand, Tocqueville was the first author to reflect upon the democratic paradigm understood as modern political constellation. On the other hand, the concept or ideal of liberty plays a central role in Tocqueville and Mill. Liberty, or freedom, is one of the foundations of every democratic project, and despite the recognition of the vital importance of the concept of equality, which after all affirmed itself as a necessary condition for future political developments of Tocqueville's and Mill's era, liberty was at the core of their concerns. In this paper I will revisit the arguments advanced by Tocqueville and Mill to warn us about the dangers of democracy, and more precisely, the tyranny of the majority. In order to do so, first, I will give a brief sketch of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and Mill's *On Liberty*. Then, I will reflect upon the implications of the tyranny of the majority today. Finally, I will propose a set of measures that can counter-balance the anti-democratic tendencies of contemporary democracies.

Keywords: Democracy. Equality. Liberty. Tyranny of the Majority.

Resumo: Tocqueville e John Stuart Mill são dois dos grandes mestres de ciência política e filosofia política. Com efeito, poderíamos dizer que somos todos discípulos destes autores. Por um lado, porque Tocqueville foi o primeiro autor a refletir sobre o paradigma democrático, entendido como constelação política especificamente moderna. Por outro lado, o conceito ou ideal de liberdade desempenha um papel central nos dois autores. Liberdade é um dos pilares fundadores de qualquer projeto democrático e apesar do reconhecimento da importância igualmente vital do conceito de igualdade, que se vem afirmando como condição necessária para o desenvolvimento político na era de Tocqueville

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e de Mill, a liberdade permanece central nas suas preocupações. Neste artigo irei revisitar os argumentos avançados pelos autores, argumentos estes que nos alertam para os perigos da democracia, e mais precisamente, a tirania da maioria. Começarei por retratar o contexto das obras de *Democracia na América* de Tocqueville e *Sobre a Liberdade* de Mill. De seguida, ofereço uma reflexão sobre as implicações da tirania da maioria hoje. Por fim, proponho um conjunto de medidas que nos poderão ajudar a contrabalançar as tendências antidemocráticas das democracias contemporâneas.

Palavras-chave: Democracia. Igualdade. Liberdade. Tirania da Maioria.

1 Setting the Stage

Each book of each author tries to capture a specific question, of a set of specific questions. What is the question behind *Democracy in America*? If we take a look at the seventeen and eighteen century political philosophy, one identifies the harmony (even if postulated) between the ideals of freedom and equality. These appear as two sides of the same coin, parts of the same reality. Even Hobbes stated that we are all born free and equal. Only in the nineteen-century do thinkers start questioning the nature of this relationship. Why in the nineteen century and not before? Only from this moment on does the question about the limits of the relationship between equality and freedom comes up and stands for itself as a pertinent and crucial question of the time.

One could answer by showing how the 19th century has the structural components (or a set of conditions that make up the 'historical a priori') that allow a specific proto-democratic political configuration of the regimes of the time.

One of the conditions that allowed to formulate this question – namely, what is the nature of the relationship between equality and freedom and to what extent does the adoption of one ideal limit the practice and instantiation of the other – was, of course, the famous “equality of conditions”, which Tocqueville acknowledges as inevitable historical event. “Equality of conditions” was, according to Tocqueville, the social fact, the starting point to think a proto-democratic regime. Equality was the trigger for social and political changes; it was the necessary condition for other structural transformations in Europe to take place. He tells us that “[t]he first and more lively passion that the equality of conditions creates [...] is the love for this equality.”¹

¹ TOCQUEVILLE, A., *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, Paris, Institut Coppet, 2012, p. 453. We follow the original text, side by side with the English translation of Henry Reeve (*Democracy in America*, NY, A Bantam Classic, 2000).

While America seems, on the one hand, to embody the democratic project, and on the other hand, to do so by representing the radical rupture with the European society supported in traditional customs, hierarchical divisions, etc., one cannot forget that America represents, in its paradoxical nature, the European heritage. The difference, however, lies in the role “change” has in political and institutional development. The American openness to change was visible in the ways individuals (as citizens) portrayed themselves as political subjects, economic beings and moral agents. It was this openness, more than anything else, that was so appealing and seductive to Tocqueville.

Nonetheless, Tocqueville's goal was to demonstrate that democracy was not a specific trait of America. Democracy was, according to his view, the process of democratization, insofar it was a process open to transformation. It was obvious to him that Europe ought to follow the American path. Therefore, the key issue was to understand the shift from the Ancient Regime towards a democratic regime. The revolution brought a new concept of state, of government, more centralized, more administrated, supported by the ideology of individualism and entrepreneurship. What were the consequences of this shift? How was this shift going to affect the way individuals constituted themselves in their individuality, in their autonomy and in their freedom? How should one understand progress and human development under such conditions?

1.1 *The individual and the ideology of individualism*

Tocqueville tells us that ‘[a]lthough men cannot become absolutely equal unless they be entirely free, and consequently equality, pushed to its furthest extend, may be confounded with freedom, yet there is good reason for distinguishing the one from the other.’² The subject matter of Democracy in America is the shift from the pursuit of liberty to the pursuit of equality. Curiously, Tocqueville never thought that it was necessary to justify the pursuit for liberty in the first place. Either in Tocqueville or Mill one can see how liberty is obviously taken as an essential part of being a fully developed human being, therefore, not needing justification. However, both authors saw how the pursuit for equality could endanger the pursuit of freedom and ultimately, it could even tend to exclude it. As Tocqueville clearly states ‘in order to lose political freedom, one just needs not to hold on to it, and it will escape from him.’³ As he continues,

² In the original text, p. 454; English translation, p.619.

³ The longer quotation in the original is: “Quoique les hommes ne puissent devenir absolument égaux sans être entièrement libres, et que par conséquent l'égalité, dans son degré le plus extrême, se confonde avec la liberté, on est donc fondé à distinguer l'une de l'autre.

I think democratic communities have a natural taste for freedom: left to themselves, they will seek it, cherish it, and view any privation of it with regret. But for equality, their passion is ardent, insatiable, incessant, invincible: they call for equality in freedom; and if they cannot obtain that, they still call for equality in slavery. They will endure poverty, servitude, barbarism – but they will not endure aristocracy. This is true of all times, and especially true in our own.⁴

In this passage it is clear the tension between equality and freedom. Not only are equality and freedom different concepts, as they also may conflict. He tells us that the task to sustain equality is relatively straightforward: one can live in an equal society by having one single master. It is possible, therefore, to conceive a society of equals without any freedom. But a democracy must articulate both ideals and dimensions. A democratic society has, as its condition of possibility, equality. The challenge, however, is that equality does not assure, by itself, the necessary and essential freedom to sustain a truly democratic regime. How can one conceive democracy without freedom?⁵

The nineteenth-century Europe was a mix between a new social class and a new social and political constellation that ultimately led to a consolidation of a hegemony, reflected in the specific ideology of individualism. Individuals in America, Tocqueville argues, are distinctive by their independence of spirit and thought. This independence of spirit, while it reveals its strength in the pursuit for equality, also manifests its greatest weakness; individuals become isolated and by becoming more isolated, individuals become more attached to material things, and they

Le gout que les hommes ont pour la liberté, et celui qu'ils ressentent pour l'égalité, sont, en effet, deux choses distinctes, et je ne crains pas d'ajouter que, chez les peuples démocratiques, ce sont deux choses inégales. [...] Mais, *pour perdre la liberté politique, il suffit de ne pas la retenir, et elle s'échappe.*

Les hommes ne tiennent donc pas seulement à l'égalité parce qu'elle leur est chère; ils s'y attachent encore parce qu'ils croient qu'elle doit durer toujours." (ibidem, p. 454, my italics).

⁴ Ibidem, Engl. transl. p. 619. The original says: 'Je pense que les peuples démocratiques ont un goût naturel pour la liberté ; livrés à eux-mêmes, ils la cherchent, ils l'aiment, et ils ne voient qu'avec douleur qu'on les en écarte. Mais ils ont pour l'égalité une passion ardente, insatiable, éternelle, invincible ; ils veulent l'égalité dans la liberté, et, s'ils ne peuvent l'obtenir, ils la veulent encore dans l'esclavage. Ils souffriront la pauvreté, l'asservissement, la barbarie, mais ils ne souffriront pas l'aristocratie. Ceci est vrai dans tous les temps, et surtout dans le nôtre.' In ibidem, original text, p. 456-457

⁵ That is why it is so relatively easy to identify violations of freedom (since everyone can feel it) but harder to identify the evils brought by an extreme equality. When extreme equality is at play, people don't notice it, habit takes over and gradually equals can easily become slaves. As Tocqueville says 'Les maux que la liberté amène quelquefois sont immédiats ; ils sont visibles pour tous, et tous, plus ou moins, les ressentent. Les maux que l'extrême égalité peut produire ne se manifestent que peu à peu; ils s'insinuent graduellement dans le corps social; on ne les voit que de loin en loin, et au moment où ils deviennent les plus violents, l'habitude a déjà fait qu'on ne les sent plus.' (original text, p. 454)

become unrestful and open to thousand accidents. At the same time individuals loose their ties to the community they simultaneously become aware that only with others can they fulfill their own interests and goals. So we arrive at a democratic constellation that becomes simultaneously too strong (as a general political system) and too weak, since their members lose the ties with the community. One can see how the pursuit for equality leads to a proto-mass society and mass-culture that threatens the core of aristocratic ideals. Indeed, Tocqueville warn us that

Of all the political effects produced by the equality of conditions, this love of independence is the first to strike the observing, and to alarm the timid; nor can it be said that their alarm is wholly misplaced, for anarchy has a more formidable aspect in democratic countries than elsewhere. [...] I am, however, persuaded that anarchy is not the principal evil which democratic ages have to fear, but the least. For the principle of equality begets two tendencies: the one leads men straight to independence, and may suddenly drive them into anarchy; the other conducts them by a longer, more secret, but more certain road, to servitude. Nations readily discern the former tendency, and are prepared to resist it; they are led away by the latter, without perceiving its drift; hence it is peculiarly important to point it out.⁶

What kind of servitude can democracy produce, in such a way that individuals don't even notice it?

So far I spoke of the specific ideology of individualism, as triggering the new social democratic construction, allied to a commercial spirit, and consequently, a social atomization deriving from that; now it is time to look at specific modes of governance and means utilized in order to create and sustain or transform public opinion(s).

2 The danger of the tyranny of the majority – before and after

In the beginning of *On Liberty*, Mill tells us that his goal is to study 'the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately

⁶ English translation in p.837. The original says: 'De tous les effets politiques que produit l'égalité des conditions, c'est cet amour de l'indépendance qui frappe le premier les regards et dont les esprits timides s'effraient davantage, et l'on ne peut dire qu'ils aient absolument tort de le faire, car l'anarchie a des traits plus effrayants dans les pays démocratiques qu'ailleurs. [...] Je suis convaincu toutefois que l'anarchie n'est pas le mal principal que les siècles démocratiques doivent craindre, mais le moindre.

L'égalité produit, en effet, deux tendances: l'une mène directement les homes à l'indépendance, et peut les pousser tout à coup jusqu'à l'anarchie; l'autre les conduit, par un chemin plus long, plus secret, mais plus sûr, vers la servitude. Les peuples voient aisément la première et y résistent; ils se laissent entraîner par l'autre sans la voir; il importe donc particulièrement de la montrer.' TOCQUEVILLE, 2012, p. 586.

exercised by society over the individual.”⁷ When we think of Mill we generally tend to associate the author to the belief of progress through enlightenment. Indeed, Mill was extremely influenced by Tocqueville, as Mill confronts the same challenges brought by a new proto-democratic order. At his time, in 1859, it became imperative to understand the shifts and conceptual transformations of sovereignty, autonomy and individuality.

He tells us

*A time, however, came in the progress of human affairs, when men ceased to think it a necessity of nature that their governors should be an independent power, opposed in interest to themselves. It appeared to them much better that the various magistrates of the State should be their tenants or delegates, revocable at their pleasure. In that way alone, it seemed, could they have complete security that the powers of government would never be abused to their disadvantage. By degrees, this new demand for elective and temporary rulers became the prominent object of the exertions of the popular party, wherever any such party existed; and superseded, to a considerable extent, the previous efforts to limit the power of rulers. As the struggle proceeded for making the ruling power emanate from the periodical choice of the ruled, some persons began to think that too much importance had been attached to the limitation of the power itself. That (it might seem) was a resource against rulers whose interests were habitually opposed to those of the people. What was now wanted was, that the rulers should be identified with the people; that their interest and will should be the interest and will of the nation. The nation did not need to be protected against its own will. There was no fear of its tyrannizing over itself. Let the rulers be effectually responsible to it, promptly removable by it, and it could afford to trust them with power of which it could itself dictate the use to be made. Their power was but the nation's own power, concentrated, and in a form convenient for exercise. This mode of thought, or rather perhaps of feeling, was common among the last generation of European liberalism, in the Continental section of which, it still apparently predominates. Those who admit any limit to what a government may do, except in the case of such governments as they think ought not to exist, stand out as brilliant exceptions among the political thinkers of the Continent. A similar tone of sentiment might by this time have been prevalent in our own country, if the circumstances which for a time encouraged it had continued unaltered.*⁸

And he continues

⁷ MILL, J. S. “On Liberty” in *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*, London, Everyman Ed., 1993, p. 69.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 71-72, my italics.

In time, however, a democratic republic came to occupy a large portion of the earth's surface, and made itself felt as one of the most powerful members of the community of nations; and elective and responsible government became subject to the observations and criticisms which wait upon a great existing fact. It was now perceived that such phrases as "self-government," and "the power of the people over themselves," do not express the true state of the case. The "people" who exercise the power, are not always the same people with those over whom it is exercised, and the "self-government" spoken of, is not the government of each by himself, but of each by all the rest. The will of the people, moreover, practically means, the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people; the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority; the people, consequently, may desire to oppress a part of their number; and precautions are as much needed against this, as against any other abuse of power. The limitation, therefore, of the power of government over individuals, loses none of its importance when the holders of power are regularly accountable to the community, that is, to the strongest party therein. This view of things, recommending itself equally to the intelligence of thinkers and to the inclination of those important classes in European society to whose real or supposed interests democracy is adverse, has had no difficulty in establishing itself; and in political speculations "the tyranny of the majority" is now generally included among the evils against which society requires to be on its guard. Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived that when society is itself the tyrant – society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it – its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism.⁹

⁹ Ibidem, p. 73, my italics.

See how the challenge included in the famous expression of ‘tyranny of the majority’ encompasses several forms of domination, which may be direct and indirect. Direct, through an official majority (regardless of whether it stands for a ‘real’ or a ‘fictional’ majority); indirect, through the rules of conduct, customs, public ideologies and public opinion.

At this point we could step back and notice that the tyranny of the majority is conceptualized in both authors in a horizon where ‘equality of conditions’ is granted. What about today? What kind of tyranny of majorities can we pinpoint, and how do they differ from previous ones? Indeed, the question today becomes: if the necessary condition for the democratic building is no longer assured – namely, the ‘equality of conditions’ – how can we a) retain democratic aspirations and ideals?; b) conceptualize new forms of domination through political despotism (under democratic labels) and (pseudo)cultural imperialism (or what Adorno and Horkheimer would name as culture industry)?

3 Characterizing our historical *a priori*

When Tocqueville and Mill denounced the dangers of the tyranny of the majorities, the authors had a specific agenda, namely, to understand how in a new historical setting where equality became the necessary (although not sufficient) condition for a new (proto-democratic) political regime, could one rescue the importance of the ideal of freedom, understood as a) individuality (self-determination as autonomous being) and b) progress (collective conscious self-determination).

Individuality played a key role for both authors and it is deeply tied to the concept of freedom. Freedom can be understood as a) absence of coercion or absence of ‘interference’, as Mill names it (and here freedom is perceived from the political perspective in its relation to government)¹⁰; but it can also be understood in a deeper sense, as freedom b) to express oneself, to constitute oneself as an autonomous being in the public sphere. As Mill says,

[The] appropriate region of human liberty [consists of] first, the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological. [...] Second, the principle requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit one own character; of

¹⁰ The famous passage where Mill says “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.” In *ibidem*, p. 78.

doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow; without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived.

No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected, is free, whatever may be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified.¹¹

Here, one envisions how the dangers of democracy lie not only in the form of government, but also in the social structure where government implements its several tactics and means of governance and domination. In other words, the danger of democracy, as a form of government that vests ultimate power in the people, resides in the simple fact that democracy's success ultimately remains hostage of the level and quality of citizenship of its members. A regime of the masses is dangerous not only because it can easily lead to anarchy (although that is not the greatest danger, as we will see), but also because it can become an ossified system supported by the development of the wrong path of citizens' character (when the masses are basically mediocre, unqualified and incapable to produce sound political judgments and therefore make the best political decisions) and ultimately leading to an oligarchic form of government, where only Few actually have a say. He says,

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others. There is a greater fullness of life about his own existence, and when there is more life in the units there is more in the mass which is composed of them.¹²

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 80-81.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 130-131.

And he continues

[...] Individuality is the same thing with development, and that it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings [...]¹³

The danger of democracy, or a numerous aristocracy, is that

[...] either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities, and tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few.¹⁴

The problem with democracy as government by the Many is exactly that it tends to undermine the natural development of Individuality that can push humanity forward. Mill even goes further, warning us that we already have a current example of what may happen to us in the future (and what is actually happening today). He says

We have a warning example in China – a nation of much talent, and, in some respects, even wisdom, owing to the rare good fortune of having been provided at an early period with a particularly good set of customs, the work, in some measure, of men to whom even the most enlightened European must accord, under certain limitations, the title of sages and philosophers. They are remarkable, too, in the excellence of their apparatus for impressing, as far as possible, the best wisdom they possess upon every mind in the community, and securing that those who have appropriated most of it shall occupy the posts of honor and power. Surely the people who did this have discovered the secret of human progressiveness, and must have kept themselves steadily at the head of the movement of the world. On the contrary, *they have become stationary* – have remained so for thousands of years; and if they are ever to be farther improved, it must be by foreigners. *They have succeeded beyond all hope in what English philanthropists are so industriously working at – in making a people all alike, all governing their thoughts and conduct by the same maxims and rules; and these are the fruits. The modern regime of public opinion is, in an unorganized form, what the Chinese educational and political systems are in an organized; and unless individuality shall be able successfully to assert itself against this yoke, Europe, notwithstanding its noble antecedents and its professed Christianity, will tend to become another China.*¹⁵

¹³ Ibidem, p. 131-132.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 134.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 140, my italics.

Let us step back and look at where we are now. Globalization brought new pressures for democracy. Indeed, not only do we face political challenges – for instance, how to think about the representative relationship in a global scale, where nations seem to play a minor role – but also social and economic challenges – how to respond to the new poverty that is taking over the world, and how to define the new global social structure that is being put into place (with a tiny plutocracy and an increasing precariat).¹⁶ It would be easy for me to say that today, more than ever before we are witnessing new forms of tyranny of new majorities that constitute themselves beyond the political scope where the traditional representative relationship happens. It would also be easy for me to point new types of political and apolitical participation that is reconfiguring the political landscape at a global scale, by identifying, for instance, the crucial role new social media have in spreading news, events, and at the end, acting as a (pseudo) subversive platform that may counterbalance the hegemonic consensus of the traditional media.

However relevant and pertinent these topics may be – as they are – I want to focus on a small detail that I mentioned previously, but which perhaps remained unnoticed. Namely, the fact that we don't longer have the basic starting point of 'equality of conditions' that allowed Tocqueville and Mill to make a critique of their own state of affairs. There is no starting-point; rather, our starting-point is quite different from Tocqueville's and Mill's: we start from an evident inequality of conditions. Therefore, to reflect upon the type of tyrannies of the XXI century and its impact in the task of rescuing (if possible, after all) democratic idea(l)s, implies to acknowledge that democracy is already suspended in most Western countries, and more precisely, European countries.

What to do, then, to counterbalance these anti-democratic tendencies, which constitute, after all, the core definition of democracy as utopia and work-in-progress?

Along the critique or exposure of the tyranny of the majority, Tocqueville denounces another danger that generally goes along with it, namely, the danger brought by centralization (of powers, of bureaucracies, of governance). He says

I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest – his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for

¹⁶ STANDING, Guy, *The Precariat – The New Dangerous Class*, NY, Bloomsbury, 2011.

the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not – he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country. Above this race of men stands an *immense and tutelary power*, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate. *That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood:* it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness: it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their inheritances – what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living? Thus it everyday renders the exercise of free agency less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range, and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself. The principle of equality has prepared men for these things: it has predisposed men to endure them, and oftentimes to look on them as benefits.

After having thus successively taken each member of the community in its powerful grasp, and fashioned them at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. [...] The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent and guided: men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting: *such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.*"¹⁷

¹⁷ English translation, p. 869-870. My italics. The original says: "Je veux imaginer sous quels traits nouveaux le despotisme pourrait se produire dans le monde: je vois une foule innombrable d'hommes semblables et égaux, qui tournent sans repos sur eux-mêmes pour se procurer de petits et vulgaires plaisirs, dont ils remplissent leur âme. Chacun d'eux, retiré à l'écart, est comme étranger à la destinée de tous les autres, ses enfants et ses amis particuliers forment pour lui toute l'espèce humaine; quant au demeurant de ses concitoyens, il est à côté d'eux; mais il ne les voit pas; il les touche et ne les sent point; il n'existe qu'en lui-même et pour lui seul, et s'il lui reste encore une famille, on peut dire du moins qu'il n'a plus de patrie. Au-dessus de ceux-là, s'élève un pouvoir immense et tutélaire, qui se charge seul d'assurer leurs jouissances, et de veiller sur leur sort. Il est absolu, détaillé, régulier, prévoyant et doux. Il ressemblerait à la puissance paternelle, si, comme elle, il avait pour objet de préparer les hommes à l'âge viril; mais il ne cherche, au contraire, qu'à les fixer irrévocablement dans l'enfance; il aime que les citoyens se réjouissent, pourvu qu'ils ne songent qu'à se réjouir. Il travaille volontiers à leur bonheur; mais il veut en être l'unique agent et le seul arbitre; il pourvoit à leur sécurité, prévoit et assure leurs besoins, facilite leurs plaisirs, conduit leurs principales affaires, dirige leur industrie, règle leurs successions, divise leurs héritages; que ne peut-il leur ôter entièrement le trouble de penser et la peine de vivre? C'est ainsi que tous les jours il rend moins utile et plus rare l'emploi du libre arbitre; qu'il renferme l'action de la volonté dans un plus petit espace, et dérobe peu à peu à chaque citoyen jusqu'à l'usage de lui-même. L'égalité a préparé les hommes à toutes ces choses; elle les a disposés à les souffrir et souvent même à les regarder comme un bienfait.

The question of the tyranny of the majority converges with the question of centralization. Does the majority have the right to do what she pleases, politically and socially speaking? I.e., is the majority enough to legitimize political decision-making and social and cultural homogenization and uniformization of thought and conduct? Boldly put, are we capable of rescuing democracy, or reinventing democracy and humanity, bringing it closer to a more just, balanced and equitable model of society, where freedom and equality can support each other?

For Tocqueville and Mill, the answers to the dangers brought by centralization, individualism, social atomization and social and cultural homogeneity could be counter-balanced by traditional liberal values: liberty (or freedom), individuality, diversity and humanity. Tocqueville, in the first book of *Democracy in America*, spells out the virtues of democracy that should be fostered to counter-balance its intrinsic dangers. I will conclude by mentioning them and pointing out how, despite our different starting-points, we can converge in the solutions to democratic crises.

First, Tocqueville acknowledges the importance of local governance. He speaks of the 'spirit of the city', i.e., showing how important are the local initiatives of local institutions that bring individuals together for a common good. Tocqueville announces the virtuous cycle between virtuous citizens and virtuous institutions. One produces the other and vice-versa.

Second, Tocqueville tells us that associations are the mother-science and that progress relies in them. When individuals come together and *share* they gain a taste for freedom in their *togetherness*. Associations allow the development of what was later called 'social capital'.

Finally, the spirit of religion was central for Tocqueville's argument and his characterization of the American experience. A free society must respect others' beliefs. He tells us clearly that despotism can do without faith, but freedom cannot. Therefore, religion is more necessary in a democratic society than in any other. Only religion can resist the

Après avoir pris ainsi tour à tour dans ses puissantes mains chaque individu, et l'avoir pétri à sa guise, le souverain étend ses bras sur la société tout entière; il en couvre la surface d'un réseau de petites règles compliquées, minutieuses et uniformes, à travers lesquelles les esprits les plus originaux et les âmes les plus vigoureuses ne sauraient se faire jour pour dépasser la foule; il ne brise pas les volontés, mais il les amollit, les plie et les dirige; il force rarement d'agir, mais il s'oppose sans cesse à ce qu'on agisse; il ne détruit point, il empêche de naître; il ne tyrannise point, il gêne, il comprime, il énerve, il éteint, il hébète, et il réduit enfin chaque nation à n'être plus qu'un troupeau d'animaux timides et industrieux, dont le gouvernement est le berger.

J'ai toujours cru que cette sorte de servitude, réglée, douce et paisible, dont je viens de faire le tableau, pourrait se combiner mieux qu'on ne l'imagine avec quelques unes des formes extérieures de la liberté, et qu'il ne lui serait pas impossible de s'établir à l'ombre même de la souveraineté du peuple." in original text, p. 606-607. My italics

tendency towards materialism and accumulation of capital. When religion is destroyed, doubt takes over, having a paralyzing effect in the will and in our capacity to act. When this happens, we are one step closer to nihilism. Therefore, democracy requires faith. Faith is what holds the individual together in his past, his present and his longing for a better future, for a utopia made real.

I therefore must conclude with a warning already spelled out by Tocqueville, when he says

The nations of our time cannot prevent the conditions of men from becoming equal; but it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or to wretchedness.¹⁸

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Data de recebimento: 03/01/14

Data do aceite: 17/12/14

¹⁸ English translation, p. 888. The original says: "*Les nations de nos jours ne sauraient faire que dans leur sein les conditions ne soient pas égales; mais il dépend d'elles que l'égalité les conduise à la servitude ou à la liberté, aux lumières ou à la barbarie, à la prospérité ou aux misères.*" in the original text, p. 616.