

17.03 Introduction to Political Thought  
Lecture Outline: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* II

- I. Relationship between liberty and equality in democracies: equality can endanger liberty
  - A. Why people in democracies prefer equality to liberty
    - 1. Equality of conditions (“predominating fact” of his time) fosters passion for equality
    - 2. Advantages of equality are immediately felt, and its ills are hard to detect
  - B. How equality can lead to despotism
    - 1. Individualism born of equality contributes to despotism
    - 2. Democratic despotism (Vol II, Part 4, ch 6; also Vol I, Part 2, ch 7)
      - a. Different character from imperial despotism: more widespread and milder, “orderly, gentle, peaceful slavery”
      - b. Citizens are like children under perpetual tutelage of the state
      - c. Irresponsible man takes over government (Bonapartism)
  - C. Only effective remedy against the “evils” caused by equality: political liberties
    - 1. Entrust citizens with local administration of minor affairs (“local liberties” which bring people into constant contact and compel them to help one another)
    - 2. Freedom of association (“a dangerous liberty”) key to protecting liberty
      - a. Problem: same social conditions that render associations necessary to democracies also make their formation more difficult
      - b. Relationship between civil and political associations
      - c. Separation of state and civil society
      - d. Government limitations on freedom of association comes at a great cost
    - 3. Americans combat individualism with “self-interest properly understood”
  - D. Tocqueville’s conception of liberty
    - 1. Independence of mind (learn from aristocratic liberty of old French regime)
    - 2. Resistance to government power (“liberty of the moderns” as sphere protected from public interference)
- II. The three races: enslavement of blacks and expulsion of Native Americans (Vol I, Part 2, ch 10)
  - A. These subjects are “like tangents to my subject, being American, but not democratic”
  - B. Race discrimination as example of tyranny of white majority
  - C. Judgments: expresses outrage at American hypocrisy but lament without critique?
  - D. Distinctiveness of the Anglo-American race
- III. Tocqueville’s legacy
  - A. Recent revival in France and America
    - 1. France: after wane of Marxism
    - 2. America: study of associations and civil society (Robert Putnam, Theda Skocpol);
  - B. Limits
    - 1. Overstates equality of conditions in America
    - 2. Overlooks problems of industrial capitalism