

Insertion of sources of quotations. From Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

The prescience of Alexis de Tocqueville

Alexis de Tocqueville 170 years ago had anticipated the underlying political and sociological bases of the AIDS Blunder. Below I quote from his masterpiece *Democracy in America*. Here is Tocqueville's illuminating analysis of the tyranny of conformity.

(from pages 244-245)

"I do not know any country where, in general, less independence of mind and genuine freedom of discussion reign than in America."

"In America the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Inside those limits, the writer is free; but unhappiness awaits him if he dares to leave them. It is not that he has to fear an auto-da-fé, but he is the butt of mortification of all kinds and of persecutions every day. A political career is closed to him: he has offended the only power that has the capacity to open it up. Everything is refused him, every glory. Before publishing his opinions, he believed he had partisans; it seems to him that he no longer has any now that he has uncovered himself to all; for those who blame him express themselves openly, and those who think like him, without having his courage, keep silent and move away. He yields, he finally bends under the effort of each day and returns to silence as if he felt remorse for having spoken the truth."

"Chains and executioners are the coarse instruments that tyranny formerly employed; but in our day civilization has perfected even despotism itself, which seemed, indeed, to have nothing more to learn."

"Princes had so to speak made violence material; democratic republics in our day have rendered it just as intellectual as the human will that it wants to constrain. Under the absolute government of one alone, despotism struck the body crudely, so as to reach the soul; and the soul, escaping from those blows, rose gloriously above it; but in democratic republics, tyranny does not proceed in this way; it leaves the body and goes straight for the soul. The master no longer says to it: You shall think as I do or you shall die; he says: You are free not to think as I do; your life, your goods, everything remains to you; but from this day on, you are a stranger among us. You shall keep your privileges in the city, but they will become useless to you; for if you crave the vote of your fellow citizens, they will not grant it to you, and if you demand only their esteem, they will pretend to refuse it to you. You shall remain among men, but you shall lose your rights of humanity. When you approach those like you, they shall flee from you as being impure; and those who believe in your innocence, even they shall abandon you, for one would flee them in their turn. Go in peace, I leave you your life, but I leave it to you worse than death."

"[T]he power that dominates in the United States does not intend to be made sport of.... The slightest reproach wounds it, the least prickly truth alarms it; and one must praise it from the forms of its language to its most solid virtues. No writer, whatever his renown may be, can escape the obligation of singing the praises of his fellow citizens. The majority, therefore, lives in perpetual adoration of itself; only foreigners or experience can make certain truths reach the ears of the American."

(from page 247)

"It is true that courtiers in America do not say 'Sire' and 'Your Majesty'—a great and capital difference; but they speak constantly of the natural enlightenment of their master; they do not hold a competition on the question of knowing which one of the virtues of the prince most merits being admired; for they are sure that he possesses all the virtues, without having acquired them and so to speak without wanting to do so; they do not give him their wives and their daughters so that he may deign to elevate them to the rank of his mistresses; but in sacrificing their opinions to him, they prostitute themselves."

(from pages 611-612)

"Two things are astonishing in the United States: the great mobility of most human actions and the singular fixity of certain principles. Men move constantly, the human mind seems almost immobile."

"When once an opinion has extended over the American soil and has taken root, one would say that no power on earth is in a position to extirpate it. In the United States, general doctrines in the matter of religion, of philosophy, of morality, and even of politics do not vary, or at least they are modified only after a hidden and often insensible travail; the coarsest prejudices themselves are effaced only with inconceivable slowness in the midst of this friction of things and men repeated a thousand times."

"What struck me in the United States is the trouble one experiences in disabusing the majority of an idea it has conceived and of detaching it from a man whom it adopts. Writings or discourses can scarcely succeed at this; experience alone overcomes it; sometimes it must be repeated."

Anyone who knows my friend and colleague Peter Duesberg, and what he has endured and suffered simply because he persists in exercising not only his constitutional rights but also his rights as a human being, can't help but think of him when reading Tocqueville's words.

I plagiarize Alexis de Tocqueville shamelessly in the next three paragraphs by replacing religion with science, but I hope to honor his genius in the process.

(from page 285)

As long as a science finds its force in the sentiments, instincts, and passions that one sees reproduced in the same manner in all periods of history, it defies the effort of time, or at least it can only be destroyed by something that is its superior. But when science is slave to a particular fashion of thought or the interests of government and industry, it becomes almost as fragile as all the other powers on earth. Alone, science can hope for immortality; bound to ephemeral powers, it follows their fortune and often falls with the passions of the day that sustains them.

In uniting with different political powers, science can therefore contract only an onerous alliance. It does not need their assistance to live, and in serving them it can die. When governments seem so strong and laws so stable, men do not perceive the danger that science can risk by uniting with power.

Insofar as a nation takes on a democratic social state, and societies are seen to incline toward republics, it becomes more and more dangerous for science to unite with authority; for the time approaches when power is going to pass from hand to hand, when political theories will succeed one another, when men, laws, and constitutions themselves will disappear or be modified daily—and this lasting not only for a time, but constantly.