

Tyranny in the Americas: Sarmiento's Tocquevillian Science and the Argentine Civil Wars

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Tocquevillian Science in South America

In *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* (1845),¹ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888) summoned from the ashes the specter of the caudillo Facundo Quiroga (1788–1835) to reveal the “hidden life and inner convulsions that tear at the bowels of a noble people.”² In trying to make sense of the Argentine civil wars (1814–1880), Sarmiento laments that “South America in general, and the Argentine Republic above all, has lacked a Tocqueville who, previously equipped with a knowledge of social theory . . . would have penetrated the interior of our political life as a vast field still unexplored and undescribed by science, and revealed to Europe and France. . . . [T]his new way of being that has no well-marked or known precedent.”³ The invocation of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) signals the influence of the French aristocrat on Sarmiento's interpretation of Argentina.⁴ However, this passage and close textual analysis also suggest something that has been overlooked by scholarship.⁵ Rather than seeing “Latin America as a wastebasket and recycling machine of plagiarized ideas,”⁶ as some critics propose, Sarmiento believed that by applying to the South American

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context the Tocquevillian “new political science,”⁷ he had discovered some new political phenomenon that might interest men of science in Europe and elsewhere.⁸ But what was this new way of being that had no well-known precedent? Which political phenomenon did Sarmiento want to reveal to modern science? In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville unveils the guiding principle of the great democratic revolution, the providential process of equalization of conditions, and searches for the best mechanisms to maintain the delicate balance between equality and liberty but also dreads the possibility of a mild democratic despotism, which “would degrade men without tormenting them.”⁹ In Argentina, however, Sarmiento witnessed that democratic revolution had produced a different form of democratic pathology, a pathology Tocqueville was unaware of and was yet unmarked by political science. Rather than reveal Tocqueville’s “mild despotism,”¹⁰ Sarmiento’s dissection of the rule of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877) uncovers a modern form of tyranny, or despotism,¹¹ that systematizes terror and oppression.

To illuminate this new phenomenon, Sarmiento applies Tocqueville’s new political science and begins his *Facundo* by looking at the configuration of the land and the customs of the people. Moreover, he investigates the old mores (the Spanish tradition of absolutism) but also the new ideas that have been disturbing the political world in Europe and the Americas (democracy and equality, “whose dogmas penetrated down to the lowest levels of society”¹²). The coexistence of equality and its dogmas side by side with Rosas’s tyranny compelled Sarmiento to write a book “born in the struggle for liberty.”¹³ However, whereas Tocqueville found in the United States a “social state”¹⁴ that permitted a balance between democracy and freedom, Sarmiento observed in Argentina a social state that provided the conditions for a new form of tyranny. *Facundo*’s vivid depiction of the gaucho’s saga goes beyond his dichotomy of the “civilized” cities versus the “barbaric” Pampas. In a book that fuses history, political theory and cultural criticism, Sarmiento presents his readers with two distinct forms of tyranny: the primitive cruel personalism of Facundo Quiroga, as the

representative of the classical tyranny; and the cold bureaucratic impersonalism of Juan Manuel de Rosas, as a prototype of modern tyranny. Sarmiento portrays Quiroga as a whimsical and lustful man who can never rule over his own desires, remaining enslaved to his own passions,¹⁵ and like a Renaissance condottiere is unable to create a new ordering of human things. Rosas, in contrast, applied all his cold rationalism to subjugate all social interests and create the seeds of a centralized state based on terror.

To understand the social-political conditions of tyranny and the means to avoid it, Sarmiento had to abandon a certain dogmatic liberalism that influenced the early days of the Argentine political experiment. Infused by European ideas, the first generation of Argentine liberals believed that the new republic should implement the modern ideas that France had failed to implement.¹⁶ These elites envisioned that the Americas, free from the historical and political burden of Europe, provided a *tabula rasa* on which to test the new theory of political liberalism. However, Sarmiento abandons the naivete of political theories conceived a priori to focus on the study of the particular history, national customs, mores, constitutions, races,¹⁷ and beliefs, drawing intellectual inspiration from the historiographical works of François Guizot, Augustin Thierry, Jules Michelet, and, especially, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.¹⁸ By using Tocqueville's science, Sarmiento wanted to understand the impact of the unprecedented equality of conditions in the political world and forecast whether its political outcomes would be free or despotic.¹⁹ Tyranny, generally perceived as a faulty political regime, necessarily has two parts to its study: a "pathology" (to uncover its shortcomings) and a "therapeutics" (to show how these shortcomings can be mitigated).²⁰ By reflecting on the abuses of power and the ways to limit its unjust use, Sarmiento participates in the long tradition of Western political thought that embraces a wide variety of thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Montesquieu, the Federalists, and, obviously, Tocqueville. Sarmiento wanted not only to unveil the causes and types of tyranny but also to propose the mechanisms to prevent it. Here, however, he departs from Tocqueville: whereas the Frenchman

believed that the absence of administrative centralization tempers the possibility of tyranny of the majority,²¹ the Argentine considered it possible, and even necessary, to combine a strong central authority with the rule of law to keep the caudillos in check and contain their arbitrary use of power.

The Land, People, Customs, and Mores

Following Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, *Facundo*'s first chapter investigates how climate, geography, and environment affect the temperament, customs, and character of a people. The physical aspect of the Argentine Republic is marked by an agglomeration of navigable rivers that meet to form Rio de La Plata.²² If, for Tocqueville, the Mississippi Valley is "the most magnificent dwelling that God has ever prepared for the habitation of man,"²³ the Rio de la Plata basin is considered by Sarmiento the "greatest favor that providence grants to a people."²⁴ However, the Argentine gaucho disdains that magnificent gift, seeing it as an obstacle to his horsemanship rather than a powerful medium of transportation and industry. At its mouth are two major port cities, Montevideo and Buenos Aires; the former is "destined one day to be the most gigantic city of both Americas,"²⁵ but beyond the outskirts of civilized Buenos Aires lies the wilderness of the Pampas. This immense plain has no limits, no clear borders, no cities, no human habitation, just a vast empty space without any vestiges of civilization. While Buenos Aires receives European influence and civilization by exploiting the monopoly over foreign commerce, the Pampas and the provinces repay Buenos Aires's greed by sending back hordes of barbarians led by their little tyrants, the caudillos. Tocqueville identified a similar condition in the new states of the American west, a region that, even though already inhabited, had no society or civilization, just a vast plain drained by the Mississippi basin.²⁶

However, despite the similarities in the physical configuration of the United States and Argentina, geography and climate alone do not fully explain differences in human societies. Culture and mores are essential. Therefore, Tocqueville found the seeds, or "the point of departure,"²⁷ of the North American social state in the

Puritan settlements of New England. The Pilgrims who arrived at the shores of North America were equipped not only with an austere religious doctrine but also with the “most absolute democratic and republican theories,”²⁸ which they implemented in order to live as they wished and to pray in freedom. This allowed the marvelous combination of the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom. By tightening up the religious bonds, they were free to experiment in politics.²⁹ In North America, the Christian religion preserved genuine powers over the soul of men by influencing the mores, regulating the family, and making its way up the political hierarchy by indirectly regulating the state, politicians, and public opinion.³⁰ By creating such inner restraints, it allowed the coexistence of a democratic social state and political liberty. Thus, religion, which among North Americans never mixes directly with the government, should be considered their first political institution.³¹ For political bonds to be relaxed, moral bonds must be tightened. As a result, for Tocqueville, a republican government cannot survive without faith, only despotism can.³²

In the Pampas, however, religion suffers the consequences of centuries of isolation. Even though during the civil wars religion was used to justify violence, Sarmiento denied that there was a religious issue in the Argentine Republic. On the contrary, he emphatically maintained that “the more barbarous and therefore less the religious a people is, the more susceptible it is to fanaticism and prejudice.”³³ The religiosity of the Argentine people is manifested, not in rituals and ceremonies of organized religion, but in a form of natural religion. In the countryside, Sarmiento witnessed a scene that reminded him of a primitive religion “before the establishment of the priesthood.”³⁴ He was sojourning in the home of a rancher in the Sierra of San Luis, who had built a chapel on this property for his family and workers. In the absence of a priest and holy services, the paterfamilias prays a Rosary and asks “God for rain for the fields, fertility for the livestock, peace for the Republic, safety for travels.”³⁵ For Sarmiento, this scene brought to mind the times of Abraham and the ancient Israelites. “This, then, is what religion is reduced to in the pastoral countryside: to natural religion.

Christianity exists, like the Spanish language, as a sort of tradition that is carried on, but corrupted, embodied in coarse superstitions, with no instruction, rites, or convictions.”³⁶ Under the austere circumstances of rural life, there is no organized religion, no schools, no civilization. The moral character of the gaucho is forged not by religion or books but in his struggle and triumph over nature. “Add to this that from earliest childhood [gauchos] are accustomed to slaughtering cattle, and that this act of necessary cruelty familiarizes them with the spilling of blood and hardens their hearts against the victims’ moans.”³⁷

As a result, life in the countryside “imprints upon the Argentine character . . . a certain stoic resignation to violent death, . . . and perhaps this may explain, in part, the indifference with which death is given and received.”³⁸ The daily confrontation with the hardship of the natural world, however, also leaves some positive marks on the gaucho’s moral character. The gaucho’s disposition is forged by a sense of independence from society and dominion over the powers of nature. Amid material and cultural privations, the gaucho finds contentment, self-realization, and freedom by riding his horse through the boundlessness of the Pampas. Having the habit of resisting and triumphing over nature, the gauchos developed “a prodigious feeling of individual importance and superiority” that created a “higher awareness of their worth as a nation.”³⁹ There is no great nation without a sense of faith in itself. Sadly, this common man with physical vigor but no understanding would be the main “victim and executioner, actor and witness”⁴⁰ of the gloomy pages of the history of the Americas. Why was the gaucho’s love for freedom incapable of preventing the worst form of tyranny?

The Lack of Civil Associations

Tocqueville identified the United States as a country that had “taken the most advantage of association and where they have applied that powerful mode of action to a greater diversity of objects.”⁴¹ The inhabitants of the United States had learned from birth to rely on themselves in the face of the hardships of life

without appealing to the powers of social authority. When facing a challenge requiring broader cooperation, however, North Americans unite divergent minds to achieve common goals. Politically, "freedom of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority."⁴² In a democracy the dominant party amasses all the public power in its hands; thus, the minority party must be able to establish itself outside the state apparatus and counter the material force of the majority with the moral force of the minority. By merely forming a minority party, those citizens establish their number, which in itself weakens "the moral empire of the majority."⁴³ If aristocratic societies can rely on secondary bodies as a natural barrier against the abuse of power, in democratic societies voluntary forms of association become necessary to prevent despotism.

"Despotism, which in its nature is fearful, sees the most certain guarantee of its own duration in the isolation of men, and it ordinarily puts all its care into isolating them."⁴⁴ Here is when the democratic principle of equality and despotism favor each other: "[e]quality places men beside one another without a common bond to hold them. Despotism raises barriers between them and separates them."⁴⁵ Therefore, democratic societies are particularly prone to despotism as men become more and more isolated. To counter this tendency, Tocqueville saw that a democratic age needs a particular type of freedom, the freedom of association. To preserve their liberty and avoid tyranny, the citizen of a democratic society must "learn the art of uniting with those like him."⁴⁶ Therefore, the "science of association" becomes the mother science, and citizens must perfect it "in the same ratio as equality of conditions increases."⁴⁷

In Argentina, however, Sarmiento found an utterly distinct experience. "The Argentine peasant sees himself as a man independent of all needs, free from subjections, with no idea of government."⁴⁸ He is shaped by nature and the lack of true society. Unlike sedentary and agricultural people, who have to live close to each other and establish relationships, pastoral people form a different kind of human association. In the Pampas, property limits are not

marked, families are spread over an immense territory, fortune is made without the need for work and intelligence (just the spontaneous procreation of the livestock), and the habit of riding horses creates another stimulus for rootlessness among the young gauchos. Under these physical and cultural conditions, "society has completely disappeared; all that is left is the feudal family, isolated, enclosed within itself, and with no collective society; all forms of government are made impossible, the municipality does not exist, the police cannot do their work, and civil justice has no means of catching delinquents."⁴⁹ Even ranchers do not need to meet together: "they have no public needs to satisfy; in a word, there is no *res publica*."⁵⁰

In contrast to New England's town hall meetings and churches,⁵¹ in the Pampas the only meeting point of the male gaucho is in the tavern, where the inhabitants of the surroundings assemble to share news, gamble, and fraternize under the influence of drinks and music. In the tavern the gaucho's quarrelsome habits of mind have entered the inner life of the Argentine Republic, creating its peculiar honor code and rules for knife playing. The tavern, an "assembly without public objective, without any social purpose,"⁵² would be the cradle of the *montonera*, the provincial militia led by a local caudillo that irrigated the land with human blood during the civil wars. "Within this society, then, in which a culture of the spirit is useless and impossible; where municipal affairs do not exist; where public good is a word without meaning, because there is no public,"⁵³ eminent and ambitious men have two options: to become a bandit or a caudillo.

The caudillos that emerged after the democratic revolution of 1810 took advantage of the social organization of the tavern, where "valiant, ignorant, free, and unemployed gauchos"⁵⁴ met together, to create their private armies. Despite representing an illiberal reaction to the liberalism of the educated class, the caudillos emerged from the democratic desire of the people to choose their own rulers from among their own ranks.⁵⁵ Thus, the caudillos reorganized the popular masses, which had been dispersed after the collapse of the colonial order, becoming the champions of the

people's values and traditions.⁵⁶ In Argentina, equality that spread to all levels of society combined with this unique system of association, the lack of any intermediary form of association, established the perfect conditions for despotism. So, Facundo's ultimate triumph over the Andean provinces and Rosas's centralized and impersonal despotic government in Buenos Aires were not accidents but the order of things.

Facundo Quiroga and the Ancient Tyranny

In the final chapters of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville investigates the influence of democratic ideas in government matters and government's natural tendency to concentrate power. The idea of secondary powers, such as the clergy and the aristocracy, placed between the sovereign and the people, which was the hallmark of societies based on the principle of inequality, is naturally absent from the "minds of men in centuries of equality."⁵⁷ In democratic societies, those intermediary institutions can only be artificially produced at great effort through the intentional creation of associations. This lack of natural intermediary institutions produces a tendency of ever-increasing unity, ubiquity, and uniformity. As a result, democratic people are naturally drawn to the centralization of power. Under these circumstances, a new kind of despotism should be feared. Although in the predemocratic despotism of the ancient empires all the power was concentrated in the hands of one emperor, who was the arbiter of all things, "the details of social life and of individual existence ordinarily escaped his control."⁵⁸ Because of the imperfections of administrative methods, the old despots had to rely on personal relationships and the assistance of secondary powers to rule over a vast territory. "[T]heir 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."⁵⁹

Sarmiento had this ancient tyranny in mind when he described the rise and fall of the caudillo Facundo Quiroga. The Revolution of May 1810 was born from the circulation of the European ideas

infusing the dogma of equality,⁶⁰ as well as the collapse of the Old European order based on the dogma of inequality. During the May Revolution, the dogma of equality triumphed over the dogma of inequality, which had supported Spanish rule for over three centuries, destroying with it the old colonial order and its intermediary institutions. As Tocqueville noticed, democratic revolutions tend to unfold differently from each other and are contingent on the particular circumstances of the social state.⁶¹ In the English settlements in North America, freedom was introduced in the early days, and equality came only later. In France, equality was introduced through a violent revolution, fully overthrowing freedom. In Argentina, without a deep-seated tradition of political liberty and responsibility for power, the democratic revolution was prone to violence, like the French one. The consequence of introducing equality was not the creation of a new regime dedicated to the idea of liberty but rather anarchy and the war of caudillos. Thus, the Argentine civil wars could be resolved only by either territorial fragmentation or concentration of power.

For Sarmiento, Facundo Quiroga is the character who exemplifies the Argentine civil wars and Argentina's natural inclination toward despotism. In a sense, he is not simply a caudillo but is the "true expression of the way of being of a people, of its prejudice and instincts."⁶² Born into a family of modest means in the province of La Rioja, Quiroga was endowed by nature with the capacity to lead others but also an incapacity to rule over himself, as his "ardent passion" for gambling and tempestuous concupiscence toward the fairer sex testify.⁶³ The combination of his leadership qualities with the latter vice engendered a unique type of "bad gaucho" who fervently hated civil authority and society and, at the same time, desired growing fame.⁶⁴ "He felt himself called to lead, to rise in one jump, to create for himself, in spite of civilized society and with hostility towards it, his own kind of career, combining valor and crime, government and disorganization."⁶⁵ This mixture of valor and crime is behind Quiroga's entry into public life. After he had deserted the army and joined a group of filibusterers, the government authority arrested him. While Facundo was in jail, a

group of Spanish officers captured during the War of Independence were transferred to stay with the common prisoners. When the Spaniards revolted and released the ordinary criminals to gather their support, Facundo, once freed from his chains, split with his shackles the head of the Spaniard who had liberated him. In a moment worthy of Cesare Borgia,⁶⁶ Facundo boasted of having killed a total of fourteen Spaniards who had helped him to escape prison. This deed covered him in "glory," reconciled him with society, and cleansed and ennobled his name.⁶⁷

Violence, terror, and lack of self-restraint defined Quiroga and accompanied him into public life. When overcome by anger, "the man showed himself to be still a beast, although not stupid and not lacking in lofty goals."⁶⁸ Because of his outbursts of rage, the respect he garnered as a leader was based on fear and violence rather than on esteem and admiration. However, he had a superior knowledge of human nature, which allowed him the foreknowledge of certain events and created a reputation of supernatural power among the vulgar.⁶⁹ His barbaric means and lack of compassion made him the perfect campaign commander amid the anarchy that followed independence. Not bound by any government decision or authority, he did not wait for orders but "operated by his own will."⁷⁰ He quickly triumphed over the old aristocratic families in La Rioja and became its absolute master. His system of government was to spread terror over the citizens and the gauchos so that they would give up everything to his army. As the absolute ruler, Facundo was interested in promoting only his private interest, not the public good. As when Attila conquered Rome or Tamerlane spread his hordes throughout Asia, when Facundo's "barbaric genius" took over La Rioja, displacing the traditional government, "nothing was replaced, nothing was created."⁷¹

After seizing control in La Rioja, Quiroga led his war machine against the Unitarian army, dragging the surrounding provinces into the war. As he pushed the remnants of the Unitarian Party outside Argentina's borders and his Federalist Party triumphed, his conquests had the paradoxical consequence of destroying any sense of independence in the provinces. "Facundo's name filled the

vacuum of the law, freedom and the spirit of the city had ceased to exist, and for this part of the Republic, all provincial caudillos had been subsumed into one.”⁷² In the Andean provinces, the Federation had fused into the most complete hegemonic authority under Quiroga. There was just one voice, one will. After his victory over the Unitarians in the Andean region, Quiroga decided to establish himself in Buenos Aires, where another chief of the Federalist faction, Rosas, had also triumphed over the Unitarians in the La Plata basin. The tension between the two Federalist caudillos began to mount. However, this time Argentina’s fate would be decided not on an open battlefield, but through “ambushes, snares, and betrayals.”⁷³

Quiroga’s pride and overconfidence in his leadership led him into a bloody catastrophe.⁷⁴ In one of his voyages to the north, an ambush was prepared by the bad gaucho Santos Pérez. When Quiroga left his carriage to see what was happening, he received a bullet in the eye and was left dead on the ground. That was the end of ancient tyranny. His fall was quicker than his ascent. His actions left no enduring institutions; no centralized institution was consolidated during his conquest. His ideas did not contribute to any civilizational achievement. Like Tamerlane’s in central Asia, Quiroga’s bloodshed—the blood with which he fertilized the Argentine soil—did not bear any fruit. When Santos Pérez was arrested, he was brought to Buenos Aires in front of the government palace for a public execution. While the masses cried, “Death to Santos Pérez!” he gazed at them and shouted repeatedly, “Death to the Tyrant!”⁷⁵ His public execution was organized by the government of Buenos Aires full of pomp and ceremony. In the end, the people were satisfied and terrified by the spectacle. However, the murder of Quiroga was not the end of the bloody drama on the Argentine plains. It was, rather, the birth of a new kind of despotism. “Facundo—provincial, barbarous, brave, bold—was replaced by Rosas, son of cultured Buenos Aires without being so himself; by Rosas, traitorous, cold-hearted, calculating soul, who does evil without passion, and slowly organizes despotism with all the intelligence of a Machiavelli. Tyrant without rival on earth.”⁷⁶

Juan Manuel de Rosas and Modern Tyranny

After five years of new meditations between the first and the second volumes of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville changed his original reflections on the democratic social state and its inclination toward despotism. In the second volume, he believed that the equality of conditions would come to establish a despotism that “would more be extensive and milder [*plus doux*], and it would degrade men without tormenting them.”⁷⁷ The despotism from the ancient world would be insufficient to explain this new phenomenon. “The thing is new, therefore I must try to define it, since I cannot name it.”⁷⁸ The increasing equality of conditions could produce “an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who resolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their soul,”⁷⁹ creating, as Sarmiento also recorded, a tiresome “monotonous uniformity.”⁸⁰ Above this mass of self-centered individuals “an immense tutelary power is elevated.”⁸¹ The danger of this power is to render the use of our free will rare, as it deliberates only on which of the many vulgar pleasures the soul will want to satiate. As individuals indulge in little pleasures, the prerogative of the central power will increasingly expand to regulate over secondary things and destroy every vestige of self-government.⁸² Tocqueville’s fear of political centralization contrasts with Sarmiento’s defense of a strong liberal republic able to concentrate power to protect individual liberties, promote the public good, and restrain the caudillos’ arbitrary power.⁸³ This difference suggests that Sarmiento was facing a different form of modern despotism.

Right after the assassination of Quiroga and the execution of Santos Pérez, the specter of political anarchy haunted Argentina once again, increasing demands for peace and security. Rosas, who at that point was commanding the Desert Campaign with dictatorial powers, was requested to accept the position of governor of the province of Buenos Aires to pacify the land once again. Differently from our contemporary political science, Sarmiento is well aware of the historical origins of the Roman office of *dictator* and how it is distinct from the Greek tyrant. In the Roman Republic, *dictator*

refers to a magistrate with extraordinary powers appointed for a limited term during an emergency.⁸⁴ This distinction is behind Sarmiento's endorsement of a strong executive during his presidency (1868–1874) as well as in his positive assessment of Lincoln's measures during the Civil War, including the proclamation of martial law and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.⁸⁵ Despite all those exceptional measures, the exception remains part of the legal framework. Even though Lincoln may be called by some a "constitutional dictator,"⁸⁶ none of his supporters in the Union would have called him a tyrant.⁸⁷ For Sarmiento, the prerogative of a strong executive is a necessary instrument to safeguard the constitution and its liberties;⁸⁸ thus, for Sarmiento a strong executive, and even a dictatorship in the Roman sense, is essentially different from Quiroga's lawless tyranny and the terror of the Rosas regime. However, Rosas did not want dictatorial power for a limited time. Instead, he proposed different conditions to the people in Buenos Aires. He wanted the "Sum of Public Power": "what he requested was what the phrase expressed: traditions, customs, accepted forms, rights, laws, religion, ideas, conscience. Lives, possessions, concerns—sum up everything that has power over society and the result will be the Sum of Public Power he requested."⁸⁹ To legitimize his new political regime, he convened an election to decide whether the province of Buenos Aires would give him the Sum of Public Power. When the ballot was opened, he was acclaimed with 9,316 votes in favor and only 4 votes against him.⁹⁰ Sarmiento lamented that the people encountered their fatal moment in history when, tired of struggling, they willfully gave up liberty for a moment of peace, and tyranny was voluntarily founded.⁹¹

As the provinces surrendered everything to Rosas, "the state was a *tabula rasa* upon which he could write something new, original; he was a poet, a Plato who would realize his ideal republic."⁹² However, he had only one plan of government: "he who is not with me is my enemy." He nourished the cult of his personality and idolatry. "[P]ortraits of the Restorer were placed on the altar of the principal churches."⁹³ He claimed the right of patronage over the

Church, appointed only Federalists in the parishes, and kept papal jurisdiction out of Argentina.⁹⁴ People were compelled to dress uniformly and perform public demonstration of loyalty by wearing a red ribbon with the inscription “Long live the Argentine Confederation. Death to the savage Unitarians.”⁹⁵ He ordered the creation of an opinion census where all the inhabitants of the city and countryside were classified as Unitarian, Indifferent, Federalist, or Pure Federalist, which provided a clear distinction between friends and enemies of the regime. He was the creator, interpreter, and executioner of the laws, holding total authority.⁹⁶ As he explained in a letter to the provinces, “the only method of government remaining was that of ‘purging everything not in conformity with the general will of the Republic.’”⁹⁷

Beyond combining personal cult, public rituals of loyalty, uniformity of thought, and political slogans against a common enemy, Rosas’s despotic rule innovated by implementing a realm of terror led by his own “security agency,” the Sociedad Popular Restauradora (Popular Restorer Society), or *Mazorca*. The *Mazorca* was initially created as a militia group used as a political instrument to extort, pressure, and kill opponents of Rosas. Later it became a terrorist agency, a death squad loyal to Rosas, which organized killing and kept a knife on the throat of his opponents.⁹⁸ In the years following the death of Quiroga, Argentina experienced waves of terror led by the *Mazorca*. By creating a rule of terror and inculcating “the idea of slaughter into the very heart of his vassals,”⁹⁹ the regime portrayed by Sarmiento would exhibit one of the distinct features of “the essence of totalitarian domination,”¹⁰⁰ as Hannah Arendt would classify a century later her political experience with total terror. Of course, it would be anachronistic to describe the Rosas regime as totalitarian. Even though, for Sarmiento, it was based on state terrorism, it did not profess a totalitarian ideology and did not have the technological means to conquer nature and men, which would be the other distinct features of the totalitarian experience in the twentieth century.¹⁰¹ The outcome of Rosas’s realm of terror was that Buenos Aires became his estancia, its people his cattle branded with the red ribbon.

The paradox of Rosas's and the Federalists' triumph over the Argentine Confederation was that it produced the opposite political principle: the most absolute unity, a unity of fear. Because of that, Sarmiento was able to see in Rosas "a great and powerful instrument of Providence, which accomplishes everything important for the future of our homeland."¹⁰² He extinguished the spirit of independence in the provinces and created a Unitarian system. "The Unitarists' idea has been carried out; only the tyrant is unneeded."¹⁰³ Because Sarmiento identifies the tyrannical rule of Rosas as the more pressing concern, his final analysis of the future of the Argentine nation is much more optimistic than Tocqueville's darker prospects for the democratic age.¹⁰⁴ Sarmiento believes that Rosas's atrocities had inculcated the importance of two opposing principles in Argentine hearts: the need for a strong authority to fight against the tyranny of the caudillos and the need to contain the arbitrariness of power by ensuring a free press, religious freedom, freedom of association, and political freedom.¹⁰⁵ Sarmiento's therapeutics to prevent another tyrant after Rosas follows Tocqueville's science of association, but adds the necessity of a strong executive. Sarmiento observed that in exile, Argentine public life began to flourish, with new productions of poetry, arts, and sciences and the creation of schools, literary salons, magazines, printing presses, and secret societies. By implementing the "science of association," the émigrés forged new bonds of loyalty. Moreover, to promote a flourishing civil society willing to safeguard those basic freedoms, the Argentine Republic must be capable of instilling virtue in the hearts of its citizens by means of civic and public education.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

This paper shows that Sarmiento was not merely emulating Tocqueville but believed his historical account and political analysis of the Argentine civil wars and the bloody struggle of the caudillos could reveal to men of science a new political phenomenon that "has no well-marked or known precedent." In *Facundo*, he expands the Tocquevillian "new political science" to understand the potential

outcomes that equality and democracy could have for the Argentine social state and South America in general. Whereas Tocqueville identified a social state in North America that could balance the new democratic condition with freedom, Sarmiento saw in the south that the lack of civil association and different mores could lead to a different outcome, a different form of tyranny. Whereas Tocqueville distinguished the tyrannies of the ancient world and warned his readers against the new and softer form of democratic despotism that would not rule over men's bodies but would degrade their souls, Sarmiento identified in the Rosas regime another form of modern despotism. By comparing the whimsical tyranny of Quiroga with the systematic reign of terror of Rosas, Sarmiento contrasts an ancient form of tyranny characterized by lawlessness with a new form of modern tyranny that makes terror the essence of its domination. In this sense, his analysis anticipated one of the defining features of a new political regime that would take full form in the following century with the creation of totalitarian ideologies and the improvement of the technological means of control. So, the democratic age should fear not only Tocqueville's mild despotism that emerges from growing individualism and centralization but also another despotism that systematizes terror and, when infused with a totalitarian ideology, could produce the tragedy that devastated the twentieth century. As Tocqueville rightly recognized that "a new political science is needed for a world altogether new,"¹⁰⁷ the close reading of Sarmiento's *Facundo* reveals that the Argentine intellectual and statesman gives his own contribution to this new science by gazing at the specter of Facundo Quiroga and disclosing the inner logic of the Argentine civil wars and its outcome, the tyranny of Juan Manuel de Rosas.

Notes

1. *Facundo* was originally published serially in the journal *El Progreso* during Sarmiento's exile in Chile.
2. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*, trans. Kathleen Ross, intr. Roberto González Echeverría (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 31.
3. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 32–33.

4. Sarmiento lists Tocqueville as one of his formative authors (see his *Recollections of a Provincial Past*, ed. Elizabeth Garrels, trans. Elizabeth Garrels and Asa Zatz [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 165).
5. On the vast literature on the influence of Tocqueville on Sarmiento, see José Luis Bendicho Beired, "Tocqueville, Sarmiento e Alberdi: Três visões sobre a democracia nas Américas," *História* 22, no. 2 (2023): 59–78; José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, "Democracy in the (Other) America," in *The Cambridge Companion to Democracy in America*, ed. Richard Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 204–29; Pablo Ferrara, "Educar para la democracia. Tocqueville y Sarmiento: Dos visiones de la educación para una democracia republicana," *Temas de Historia Argentina y Americana* 18 (2011): 47–89; Susana Villavicencio, "Sarmiento lector de Tocqueville," in *Repensando el siglo XIX desde América Latina y Francia: Homenaje al filósofo Arturo A. Roig*, ed. Arturo Andrés Roig and Yamandú Acosta (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2009), 315–22; Darío Roldán, "Sarmiento, Tocqueville, los viajes y la democracia en América," *Revista de Occidente* 289 (2005): 35–60; Esther Allen, "Paradoxes of Admiration: Sarmiento, Tocqueville, and the United States," *Annals of Scholarship* 11, no. 1–2 (1996): 61–81; Natalio R. Botana, *La tradición republicana: Alberdi, Sarmiento y las ideas políticas de su tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1984), 270, 288–91. This literature generally focuses on what both authors have in common but does not engage with the novelty that Sarmiento wants to reveal.
6. For this opinion, see Ilan Stavans, "Introduction," in Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), xxxii; and Katherine A. Gordy, "No Better Way to Be Latin American: European Science and Thought, Latin American Theory?," *Postcolonial Studies* 16, no. 4 (2013): 359.
7. See Catherine H. Zuckert, "Tocqueville's 'New Political Science,'" in *Tocqueville's Voyages: The Evolution of His Ideas and Their Journey beyond His Time*, ed. Christine Dunn Henderson (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2014), 142–76.
8. Sarmiento's intention to reach readers outside Latin America is clear by *Facundo's* translation in France in 1853 and in the United States in 1868. On *Facundo's* international reception, see Diana Sorensen Goodrich, *Facundo and the Construction of Argentine Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 83–98.
9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

- 2000), 662. On Sarmiento's account of this democratic revolution and the equality of condition in North America, see Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Sarmiento's Travels in the United States in 1847*, trans. Michael Aaron Rockland (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 117, 131.
10. Paul A. Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 185–89.
11. Sarmiento uses “tyranny” and “despotism” interchangeably to describe the Rosas regime (see *Facundo*, 32, 242). Moreover, to describe Spanish colonial rule, he uses “Hispanic absolutism,” suggesting its distinct nature from the tyranny of the caudillos (*Facundo*, 33). According to Aristotle, tyranny is a corrupted form of monarchy, in which the ruler seeks his own self-interest rather than the common good. A king rules according to the law, whereas the tyrant rules according to his will. Moreover, the rule the tyrant exercises over his people is despotic (i.e., based on force like the relation of master and slave) and is fundamentally different from the rule over free men. This implies that all tyrannical rulers are despots, but not all despots are tyrants. See Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: The Heritage Press, 1964), 3.3–14; 7.3.
12. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 33; *Recollections of a Provincial Past*, 144–45.
13. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 40.
14. Tocqueville considers the social state “as the first cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas that regulate the conduct of nations; what it does not produce, it modifies” (*Democracy in America*, 45). See Michael P. Zuckert, “On Social State,” in *Tocqueville's Defense of Human Liberty*, ed. Peter Augustine Lawler and Joseph Alulis (New York: Garland, 1993), 3–19.
15. On the definition of the tyrant as a slave of his own passions, see Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 2016), VI–VII.
16. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 122–23.
17. On the evolution of Sarmiento's ideas about race and how they were later influenced by North American scientific racism, see Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 67–109. This influence of scientific racism in Sarmiento's ideas largely contrasts with other Latin American statesmen such as Simón Bolívar and José Bonifácio, who recognized the political potential of the idea of *mestizaje*

- (see Eduardo Schmidt Passos, “*Race and State*: Voegelin, Bolívar, and Bonifácio on Race and Latin American Political Thought,” *Eric Voegelin Studies Yearbook* 3 [2024], 137–54).
18. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 123.
 19. Zuckert, “Tocqueville’s ‘New Political Science,’” 145.
 20. See Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 66.
 21. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 250.
 22. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 46.
 23. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 21. On Sarmiento’s description of the United States’ privileged geography as a gift from Providence, see Sarmiento, *Sarmiento’s Travels*, 119–26.
 24. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 47.
 25. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 47.
 26. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 50.
 27. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 29. Sarmiento also recognizes the Pilgrims’ settlements as the starting point of the United States (*Recollections of a Provincial Past*, 14; *Travels to the United States in 1847*, 197–99).
 28. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 32.
 29. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 43.
 30. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 278.
 31. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 280.
 32. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 282.
 33. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 138.
 34. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 55.
 35. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 56.
 36. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 56.
 37. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 58.
 38. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 46.
 39. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 57.
 40. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 41.
 41. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 180.
 42. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 183.
 43. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 185.
 44. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 485.
 45. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 485.
 46. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 489. Sarmiento calls this the “constitutive principle of association” (*Sarmiento’s Travels*, 171–75, 206–8).

47. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 493.
48. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 73.
49. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 54.
50. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 55.
51. Sarmiento, *Sarmiento's Travels*, 175, 191, 196.
52. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 74.
53. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 75.
54. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 77.
55. José Luis Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought*, trans. Thomas F. McGann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 99–100.
56. Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought*, 109–12.
57. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 640.
58. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 661.
59. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 662.
60. On the idea of equality as “dogma” and its opposition to the “dogma of inequality,” see Richard Avramenko, “Tocqueville and the Religion of Democracy,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 41, no. 3 (2012): 125–37.
61. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 646.
62. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 38.
63. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 94–95, 114, 155–56, 159.
64. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 96.
65. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 97.
66. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), chap. 7.
67. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 99.
68. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 100.
69. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 101–2.
70. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 106.
71. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 109–10.
72. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 188.
73. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 193.
74. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 197.
75. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 204.
76. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 31–32.
77. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 662.
78. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 662.
79. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 663.
80. Sarmiento, *Sarmiento's Travels*, 139.
81. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 663.

82. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 250–51. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, trans. John Bonner (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), vi.
83. Natalio R. Botana, “Sarmiento and Political Order: Liberty, Power and Virtue,” in *Sarmiento: Author of a Nation*, ed. Tulio Halperín Donghi et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 101.
84. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 207. For the origins of this office, see Livy, *The Early History of Rome: Books I–V of The History of Rome from Its Foundations*, trans. Aubrey Sélincourt (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 2.18.
85. Abraham Lincoln, “Proclamation Suspending the Writ of *Habeas Corpus*,” in *The Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Steven B. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 368–69.
86. On the assessment of Lincoln’s use of executive powers during the Civil War, see Benjamin Kleinerman, “Executive Power and Constitutional Necessity,” in *The Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, 461.
87. Naturally, the Rebels would have a different judgment on this subject. That is why civil wars are a recurring political phenomenon.
88. Natalio R. Botana, “Sarmiento and Political Order,” 108–9; Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Vida de Abraham Lincoln* (Barcelona: Desván de Hanta, 2018), 38–39, 42.
89. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 206.
90. John Lynch, *Argentine Caudillo: Juan Manuel de Rosas* (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 2006), 80.
91. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 207.
92. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 209.
93. Lynch, *Argentine Caudillo*, 80.
94. Lynch, *Argentine Caudillo*, 84.
95. Lynch, *Argentine Caudillo*, 83.
96. Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought*, 122.
97. Juan Manuel de Rosas in Lynch, *Argentine Caudillo*, 82.
98. The *mazorqueros* conducted “house-to-house searches, destroying everything blue and intimidating owners; they acted on police reports such as ‘he has not given any service to the Federation and dresses like a “unitarian”’; they arrested; they tortured; and they killed” (Lynch, *Argentine Caudillo*, 100–101).
99. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 242.
100. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new ed. with added preface (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1976), 464.
101. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 468–72; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 23.

102. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 238–39.
103. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 239.
104. Arthur Kaledin, *Tocqueville and His America: A Darker Horizon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 355–58.
105. Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 243–48.
106. Natalio R. Botana, “Sarmiento and Political Order,” 110–13.
107. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 7.

