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Laurence Guellec, Ed., *Tocqueville et l'esprit de la démocratie. The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 2005. 531 pp. €18 (pb). ISBN 2-7246-0963-8.

Review by Jonathan Beecher, University of California, Santa Cruz.

In the early 1960s, when I was a graduate student in Paris, Alexis de Tocqueville seemed to be a non-person in France. In the bookstore editions of *La Démocratie en Amérique* were readily available, but very little else. At the Sorbonne Raymond Aron was virtually the only French scholar who had much to say about Tocqueville. There was no scholarly biography, and the publication by Gallimard of the *Oeuvres complètes* was proceeding in a deliberate manner under the direction of a German.

In the past forty-five years, the situation has changed dramatically. With the decline of the hegemony of academic Marxism and the rise of liberal political theory, Tocqueville has emerged from the shadows. Already in 1963 Michel Crozier was drawing extensively on Tocqueville in elaborating his comparative study of French and American bureaucracies; and by the 1970s François Furet was making the rediscovery of Tocqueville the centerpiece of his assault on the Marxist historiography of the French Revolution. In 1977 the Tocqueville Society was formed, and two years later the bilingual *Tocqueville Review* began to appear. By 1984, when André Jardin's fine biography was published, a dozen first-rate monographs were out or on the way; the *Oeuvres complètes* had reached twenty volumes; and Tocqueville had entered the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. By 1986, a relatively minor work in the Tocqueville canon could serve as the object of a vigorous joust between the President of the Republic and the Garde des Sceaux in the Conseil des Ministres; and in 1993 Françoise Mélonio could publish a major work, *Tocqueville et les Français*, tracing the "querulous conversation" of the French with Tocqueville over 150 years.

So Tocqueville, who had never ceased to be greatly admired in the English-speaking world, has made a triumphant return to prominence in French intellectual life. And the present volume, published to coincide with the bicentennial of Tocqueville's birth in 2005, is a bilingual anthology of articles published in *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville* during its first quarter century. Given these auspices, one might expect the collection to be celebratory, and to a degree it is. In the introduction Tocqueville is described both as a "founder of the modern social sciences" and as "a classic, not in any particular discipline, but beyond disciplines" (p. 15). Among the texts included here there is also scant mention of several topics which would seem to invite criticism of Tocqueville today. For example, apart from some references in Françoise Mélonio's fine article on Tocqueville and the problem of nationalism, there is little discussion of Tocqueville's staunch defense of the violent methods of the French "pacification" of Algeria. Nor is there any consideration of Tocqueville's lamentable tenure as Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's foreign minister in 1849, which began with a series of disingenuous speeches first covering up and then justifying the orders that led to the crushing of the Roman republic by the French army in 1849. Nonetheless, when taken as a whole, this is an admirable collection: the articles are shrewd and illuminating and their general level is high.

Two of the most interesting articles serve as bookends to the entire collection. The book opens with Raymond Aron's "Tocqueville retrouvé," a lucid study of the Tocqueville revival in France by one of its chief instigators; and it concludes with Arthur Goldhammer's fascinating essay on the problems of translating a classic work such as *La Démocratie en Amérique*. Each of these essays delivers more than its

title suggests. In addition to describing the stages in the French rediscovery of Tocqueville, Aron offers his own very personal meditation on the unity of Tocqueville's thought and on his place as a theorist of post-revolutionary society. Likewise, Goldhammer's essay includes--along with a wonderful ten-page riff on the translation of a single phrase ("l'intérêt bien entendu")--a series of fascinating comments on Tocqueville's relation to Pascal and on the general question of what it means to be a classic.

The bulk of the essays can be divided into three groups: those that seek to situate Tocqueville in context; those that focus more narrowly on one aspect of Tocqueville's thought, seeking to formulate explicitly ideas and assumptions that remain implicit in Tocqueville's writings; and those that use Tocqueville's work as a means of engaging issues of contemporary relevance. Of the contextual essays two of the richest and most interesting are those by François Furet and Guillaume Bacot. The brief but pithy piece on "The Intellectual Origins of Tocqueville's Thought" shows Furet at his best--less engaged in slaying the Marxist dragon than in identifying and investigating the questions that preoccupied the young Tocqueville. In his reading Tocqueville emerges not as the great observer and theorist of American society but rather as a man obsessed with the exploration of an idea--equality--and determined to explore "all the consequences of the concept of democracy, understood as the dominant and ineluctable organizing principle of modern society" (p. 131).

Another illuminating contextual approach to Tocqueville's work can be found in Guillaume Bacot's article on "L'Apport de Tocqueville aux idées décentralisatrices." Here Bacot situates Tocqueville with reference to the debate among Restoration liberals on the importance of administrative decentralization. Whereas Thiers, Guizot and others asserted that representative institutions were in themselves a sufficient guarantee of political liberty, Barante and Royer Collard argued (following Montesquieu) that local self-government was also necessary if citizens were not to fall into attitudes of passive obedience with regard to authority. But for Montesquieu and other aristocratic thinkers it was always assumed that local institutions would have to remain in the hands of an independent aristocracy if they were to be an effective defense against the tyranny of kings. Tocqueville's contribution, according to Bacot, was to move the discussion of local self-government into an entirely democratic context, arguing that local institutions were necessary to prevent the onset of majority tyranny. Thus Tocqueville's originality, according to Bacot, was to see in decentralization "an essential means of preserving...personal liberty in democracy" (p. 221).

Two other studies also manage thoughtfully and imaginatively to place Tocqueville's ideas in context. Laurence Guellec's "Tocqueville à travers sa correspondance familiale" is a review article in which Guellec shows delicately and subtly how Tocqueville's family correspondence provides "le décor intime" for some of the paradoxes and apparent contradictions that pervade his work. And in Sonia Chabot's "Education civique, instruction publique et liberté de l'enseignement dans l'oeuvre d'Alexis de Tocqueville" an analysis of Tocqueville's views on education is neatly framed within a fairly detailed discussion of French institutions and arguments concerning education in the first half of the nineteenth century.

A second group of essays consists of efforts to "think with" Tocqueville by formulating explicitly ideas or problems that remain implicit in Tocqueville's writing. This effort is central to François Bourricaud's thoughtful essay on the "Convictions de Tocqueville." "I would like to paint a portrait that gets as close as possible to the model," writes Bourricaud, "a portrait which, by capturing his convictions and his private motives, might permit us to go beyond an analysis of his works to pose some of the questions implied in his intellectual project" (p. 105). Likewise much of Arthur Kaledin's fascinating long commentary on the somber conclusion of *La Démocratie en Amérique* consists of efforts to spell out explicitly Tocqueville's analysis of the "democratic imagination" and the psychological disorders endemic to democracy. At the center of Tocqueville's picture of the culture of democracy, argues

Kaledin, stands Tocqueville's profile of "democratic man," which Kaledin describes as "an unflattering portrait of a mistrustful, jealous, and anxious being, dangerously uncertain of his identity" (p. 65).

Something similar is going on in the essays by Jean-Claude Lamberti on "La Liberté et les illusions individualistes selon Tocqueville" and by Daniel Jacques on "Tocqueville et le problème de la cloture politique." Each has an original and illuminating point to make about Tocqueville's work as a whole. Lamberti argues that "all of Tocqueville's work" can be considered as "an immense effort" to find a way of adapting aristocratic values to democratic and egalitarian conditions. And Jacques presents an image of Tocqueville as torn between his sense of the possibilities and the perils of democratic society. But both writers take pains to spell out, more systematically than Tocqueville ever did, his conceptions of "democratic man" and "democratic liberty," of "l'imaginaire démocratique" and of "individualist illusions"—illusions concerning the self-sufficiency of the individual—which, arising in democratic societies, can spell the end of a truly democratic politics.

A third preoccupation of the contributors is to use Tocqueville's work as a means of engaging issues of contemporary relevance. The case for the continuing relevance of Tocqueville's analysis of democratic and egalitarian societies is stated bluntly in the editors' introduction: "Thanks to Tocqueville, a new diagnosis of the present was possible, a diagnosis which could be formulated in terms other than those of the class struggle and the capitalist mode of production" (p. 16). And the editors go on to pay tribute to Raymond Aron for his role in putting Tocqueville back on the intellectual map of France after a long period of Marxist hegemony. What is interesting here, however, is that Aron himself was actually at pains to qualify his praise of Tocqueville. Far from treating Tocqueville as a "maître à penser" and his work as a "modèle à suivre," Aron concludes his essay on the "rediscovery" of Tocqueville by suggesting that what is of lasting value in Tocqueville's work is not his methods or his conclusions but rather his questions: "L'actualité de Tocqueville devrait inciter avant tout à reprendre, avec des connaissances élargies, les questions qu'il a posées" (p. 46).

Several of the articles in this collection are written in this spirit. Thus, Daniel Bell, in a lucid and strongly argued essay on "At the Crossroads of History," makes use of Tocquevillian categories and insights to help formulate a vision of the tensions at work in contemporary America between "the recurrent cry for reduced national government" and the need for a stronger state "to mobilize the entire society, resources and men, for a unified national effort" (p. 427). Claude Lefort, in his article on "La Menace qui pèse sur la pensée," is also concerned with the contemporary relevance of Tocqueville's ideas, but his focus is on Tocqueville's text—on the tragic character of Tocqueville's vision of democracy and on the irony inherent in his picture of a democratic man who is at once jealous of his independence and easily swayed by the ideas and prejudices of the majority.

There is no article in this collection in which Tocqueville's work is subjected to a wide-ranging critique from the left. But the collection does include an attack on such a critique. This is Melvin Richter's long article defending Tocqueville against Sheldon Wolin's critique in *Tocqueville between Two Worlds* of what he sees as Tocqueville's "attempt to legitimize aristocracy as vital to preserving liberty in the age of mass politics." Richter argues convincingly, I think, that Tocqueville's concern was precisely to find *substitutes* for aristocracy and, more broadly, that Wolin's effort to use Tocqueville's work as a means of grasping "the postmodern political predicament" leaves little room for understanding "what Tocqueville saw himself as seeking to achieve in his theory and his political career" (p. 463). But it is disappointing and a bit strange that the editors did not see fit to include at least a brief excerpt from Wolin's book.

There are several other articles in this collection that do not fit into the rubrics above. Agnès Antoine and Paul Thibaud consider Tocqueville's views on the relation of religion and politics. Franklin Ankersmit offers a stylistic analysis concentrating especially on what he describes as Tocqueville's

“abandonment of metaphor in favor of paradox” (p. 182). And Mohamed Cherkaoui focuses on the particular paradox and the question that lies at the heart of Tocqueville’s final work: how could the economic growth and political reform of the eighteenth century have culminated in the destruction of the regime that made both possible?

In all of this there is a vast amount of food for thought. And if a strong critic of Tocqueville like Sheldon Wolin is only heard at second hand, through the summaries and quotations provided by Richter, this does not mean that the contributors to this volume speak with anything like a single voice. Indeed, the chief impression one gets in reading the collection straight through is of the extraordinary variety of approaches and interpretations that Tocqueville’s work has inspired. It is, as the editors suggest in the introduction, “un Tocqueville au pluriel” that one encounters in reading this fine collection.

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- Le Comité de rédaction de la *Revue Tocqueville*, “Introduction”
- Raymond Aron, “Tocqueville retrouvé” (1979)
- Arthur Kaledin, “Tocqueville’s Apocalypse: Culture, Politics and Freedom in *Democracy in America*” (1985-1986)
- François Bourricaud, “Les Convictions de Tocqueville” (1985-1986)
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- Jean-Claude Lamberti, “La Liberté et les illusions individualistes selon Tocqueville” (1986-1987)
- Franklin R. Ankersmit, “Tocqueville and the Sublimity of Democracy” (1994)
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- Agnès Antoine, “Politique et religion chez Tocqueville” (1997)
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- Melvin Richter, “The Deposition of Alexis de Tocqueville” (2002)
- Mohamed Cherkaoui, “L’État et la révolution: logique du pouvoir monopoliste et mécanismes sociaux dans l’*Ancien Régime* de Tocqueville” (2003)
- Arthur Goldhammer, “Translating Tocqueville: The Constraints of Classicism” (2004)

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