

Alexis de Tocqueville and
the New Science of Politics
An Interpretation of
Democracy in America

Second Edition

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To my wife, Jeanne

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Preface

The sole purpose of this book is to elucidate Alexis de Tocqueville's masterpiece, *Democracy in America*. Whatever value it may have will be to the students of that text, most likely in college courses where Tocqueville is a central figure. To say this is to identify my work as one more statement in a vast array of interpretive material that has been written and still is being written on Tocqueville. There seems to be something about both the form and the content of Tocqueville's writing that permits and even facilitates voluminous commentary. Not all of that commentary, however, has dealt with Tocqueville as a political thinker, one from whom we might not only receive information and judgment about Jacksonian America or even democratic society but also to whom statesmen might repair for broad, practical lessons about how to form a democratic citizenry that is strong souled and free. This book belongs to that latter category of interpretive commentary.

What I have written is very much indebted to Marvin Zetterbaum's *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy*. That book helped me see what sort of thinker Tocqueville was and it caused me to think that I might understand the controlling purpose of *Democracy in America*. In time, though, I came to doubt the adequacy of what Zetterbaum offers as the solution to the problem of democracy, namely the right understanding of self-interest. It seemed to me more and more clear that, while any successful democracy by Tocqueville's standards would have to accommodate self-interest and would have to cause its citizens to understand self-interest rightly, this whole matter was but one aspect of the entire system of sentiment and belief which finds its summation in civil religion. Having then come to stress civil religion as the core of Tocqueville's practical recommendations, I became more per-

sueded that Rousseau was the chief philosophical influence on Tocqueville even so that the very definition of freedom as the ultimate aim of Tocqueville's recommendations should be understood in a Rousseau way, as the active involvement in the general will. Finally, it is especially because the real character of civil religion is not always, perhaps not ever, understood by those whom it civilizes that Tocqueville's work bears and requires elucidation.

I am grateful to my colleagues at Hiram College and to the institution for providing an environment where one can do this sort of work. I have enjoyed two summer grants from Hiram College which I used to prepare my articles in *Publius*, summer 1975, and *The Intercollegiate Review*, fall 1976, anticipating some of what appears here. I want to thank Ralph Lerner in particular for the enormous patience he employed years ago in reading and listening to my early attempts to explain Tocqueville and for the relentlessness of his criticism and encouragement. To my teachers, Allan Bloom and Joseph Cropsey, I owe an inexpressible and unpayable debt.