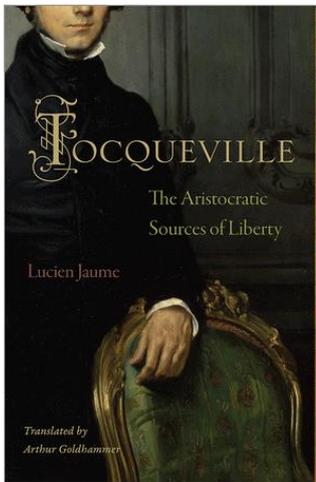


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72. EPS - EconomiaPoliticaSocietà Tocqueville, l'aristodemocratico*



Lucien Jaume

Tocqueville: The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty

Princeton University Press
2013
pp. 360

In 2009 Aureliano Craiutu reviewed, for the journal *History of European ideas* (Volume 35, Issue 3, 2009), Lucien Jaume's work on Tocqueville, which had been published the previous year and had received the prestigious Guizot Award from the Academie Francaise. According to the reviewer, Jaume 'offers an intellectual biography of Tocqueville which will undoubtedly be required reading for any serious interpreter of Democracy in America'; he then added that 'one hopes that an English edition will follow soon'. (ivi, p. 385) Craiutu's wish has finally been granted by the Princeton University Press.

The book definitively deserves the attention of historians of political ideas and of liberalism, but also of philosophers and experts of democracy since, here, we are faced with something more than an intellectual biography. Jaume dedicates almost three hundred and fifty pages to the genesis of the two volumes of *Democracy in America*, questioning why and how they differ from one another. The subtitle of the book might have well been 'the genesis and development of the Tocquevillian idea of democracy'. The main theme is, in fact, a comparison of the sociological, political, institutional and cultural differences between France and the United States.

Jaume is one of those historians of ideas who, since the 1990s, have helped uncover the complex ideological and literary humus in the background of which the two volumes of *Democracy in America* take on a purely French meaning. By such a token, a more in-depth comparative reading of the two volumes, published in 1835 and in 1840 respectively, is offered, confirming that the latter is much more 'gloomy' than the first one. There is much psychological insight in the analysis conducted by Jaume, who can rely on the fact that Tocqueville is much less wary and cautious in his correspondence and in his notebooks than he is in the works published during his lifetime. Tocqueville, heir of two noble dynasties persecuted during the Terror, had no intention of adopting a 'scientific' and aseptic perspective in his political, religious and moral study of American society and institutions. In this new kind of geopolitical entity born on the other side of the Atlantic, this French gentleman of ancient lineage sought, behind the detached style of the sociologist, a clarification over the democratic path chosen by France in 1792 – not without violence and rejection.



Honoré Daumier, Tocqueville (1849)

To an extent, Jaume confirms what Nicola Matteucci had already fully understood and, with him, a whole school of Italian historians of political thought, from Vittorio de Caprariis to Anna Maria Battista, Francesco Maria De Sanctis, Dino Cofrancesco and Regina Pozzi. With many of these, the French scholar has long established a fruitful dialogue. Tocqueville's favorable idea of American democracy and the lessons that he draws for France are impregnated by his most intimate longings, hopes and anxieties. This also explains a certain ambiguity of some of the terms used in the two volumes, often at odds with the prevalent use by contemporary writers and scholars.

Through an in-depth analysis of primary sources, cleverly combined with the vast collection of letters and handwritten notes yet unpublished, and paying a remarkable attention to the context, Jaume can convincingly prove that Tocqueville's sympathy towards the American idea of citizenship does not come from a modern form of republicanism. Much less does it come the American tradition, which, if anything, represents simply a stimulus to resume and deepen the tradition of French moralists – in turn fed by Aristotelian and Ciceronian notions filtered by an aristocratic environment, as the one of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France essayists. From La Bruyère to Voltaire. Jaume shows how Tocqueville 'took to heart the Ciceronian axiom that 'everything honorable is useful', deploring the fact that the French understood it less well than the Americans'. (p. 152) Consequently, the Norman thinker hoped to transfer to the politically ascendant bourgeoisie an ethos that would unite its own pursuit of self-interest with costumes and lifestyles inspired by the idea of virtue. In the French tradition the mœurs indicate the constellation of ideas, opinions, passions and habits of a society. In the Democracy the costumes are therefore understood as concrete expressions of social guidelines, and are explicitly related to institutions and laws.

The overall meaning of Jaume's meticulous archeological work might be grasped through a passage contained in the penultimate chapter of the second volume of the *Democracy*: "I am firmly convinced that democracy cannot be reestablished in the world. But ordinary citizens, by associating, can constitute very opulent, very influential, and very powerful entities – in a word, they can play the role of aristocracy. In this way one could obtain several of the most important political advantages of aristocracy without its injustices or dangers". Hence the particularly enlightening subtitle of Jaume's work: 'the aristocratic sources of liberty'.

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Autorizzazione dell'autore