

how it can be nurtured, the meaning and fostering of responsible leadership, community, and a vital and noble value consensus." Without being as pedantic as it sounds, one might reply, "Yes, but once you say 'value' you've conceded defeat in advance." Perhaps some such word as 'principles' should replace 'values' in the writings of those who hold that ethics consists of more than convention and feelings.

*The Crisis of Liberal Democracy* testifies to the intricacy and depth of Leo Strauss's political philosophy. The editors have selected essays illustrating two kinds of controversy about Strauss. One controversy consists of attacks on Strauss's thought by non-Straussians and of defenses by Straussians. In this volume as elsewhere, a careful reader will come away impressed with Strauss's ability to anticipate his critic's argument, enabling his students to respond to them merely by explicating some passages in his writings. The other controversy consists of disagreements among Straussians about Strauss's teachings. This controversy takes a longer and more winding road, but the views are better.

Roger Boesche, editor: **Alexis de Tocqueville: Selected Letters on Politics and Society** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 288 pp.; cloth, \$27.50; paper, \$10.95.

John C. Koritansky: **Alexis de Tocqueville and the New Science of Politics** (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1986), 170 pp., \$17.50

MICHAEL P. ZUCKERT  
*Carleton College*

Not too many years ago, J. P. Mayer began his biographical study of Tocqueville with the complaint that politically interested individuals had not paid Tocqueville the kind of careful attention he deserved. Fortunately, that need no longer be said. A new and much improved edition of Tocqueville's complete works (edited by the same J. P. Mayer), new translations of individual books, selections of letters (such as the Boesche volume under review here), and now many serious studies of the French thinker (among them the Koritansky volume), all attest to the fact that Tocqueville is, as they say, back.

Both these books provide insight into the great interest in Tocqueville. Boesche's collection, "the first English translation of a broad selection of his letters," aims to provide "an overview of Tocqueville's political ideas and political life." They do more, providing insight into Tocqueville's person and his personal relations as well. To a reader familiar with Tocqueville exclusively through his writings, Boesche's overview makes visible the great place his po-

litical career took in Tocqueville's life. Boesche has included many letters which reveal Tocqueville the politician, worrying about being elected, sizing up the leaders of the day, mulling over specific policy questions as they arise, fretting over why he and his few political friends had so little impact on French political life. His letters also provide a marvelous instance of a man of great political acumen and thoughtfulness reacting to political events. At the same time, he stands as an example of the highest kind of integrity in politics. Never willing to accept merely vulgar success, but never willing to succumb to the vulgar failure of despising those around him as too impure to deal with, Tocqueville always sought the path of personal honor which was at the same time the path toward the public good as he understood it—a public good sought in France very much in terms laid out in his study of America. He was no great admirer of the July Monarchy, but he attempted to work within it to forge a political third way, different from the petty politics of the main factional leaders. He welcomed the republican possibilities of the Revolution of 1848, although he feared and strongly opposed the “Red” forces which also emerged at that time. Finally, he found the “Empire” of Louis Napoleon so objectionable that he withdrew from political life and devoted himself once again to his writing. To this unfortunate turn of political events, then, we owe Tocqueville's last great work on *The Old Regime and the Revolution*.

Revelatory as Boesche's collection is, not every reader will agree entirely with his selections. Some readers (I must admit to being among them) will find some of the more detailed comments on the passing political scene in France tedious at times—they certainly are often repetitious. Others (or perhaps the same ones) might wish for more letters of a philosophical cast. Tocqueville himself, late in his life, assessed the relative importance of the different sides of his career thusly:

It seems to me that my true worth is above all in the works of the mind; that I am worth more in thought than in action; and that, if there remains anything of me in this world, it will be much more the trace of what I have written than the recollection of what I have done.

However, the collection is by no means devoid of matters of real interest to students of Tocqueville's political philosophy. There is a wonderful series of letters, for example, written while Tocqueville was in America, in which we first see Tocqueville overwhelmed by all he has seen, admitting that “up to this point my ideas are in such state of confusion” that he didn't know what to think of America. But three weeks later, in a letter to his friend Kergorlay, he presented an analysis which clearly anticipated the argument of *Democracy in America*, including the discovery of social state, the inevitability of democracy, the task facing the new world of combining equality of social state with political freedom, and his insights into the surprising (from a French point of view) ways in which the Americans had managed that combination. Of great

interest, too, are letters from later in his life where he developed his reactions to socialism. In short, any serious student of Tocqueville will find much of value and interest in these letters now made easily available by Boesche. And the letters, as they reveal the man, the thinker, the political actor, the friend, the husband, the son, will remind us why we find Tocqueville so worthy an object of our attention.

John Koritansky contributes to that same insight by presenting an original account of Tocqueville's "new political science." In doing so, he brings out the scope, comprehension, and beauty of Tocqueville's *Democracy* while suggesting the depths from which Tocqueville's apparently effortless analyses emerge.

Koritansky captures the overall flavor of his reading when he pronounces that "Tocqueville attempts to rewrite Montesquieu's political science by way of an extension of Rousseau's reinterpretation of human nature." He thus presents the most consistently Rousseauian Tocqueville in the literature, and along the way opposes the variety of "conservative" interpretations. Koritansky argues that Tocqueville "attaches a positive value to equality, and links it more closely with the value of freedom." He sees little of the hesitation some of the more conservative readers see in Tocqueville's commitment to democracy. (In this, by the way, Koritansky is supported by the evidence in Boesche's collection of letters.) Koritansky also credits Tocqueville's arguments about the inevitable coming of democracy as a seriously intended doctrine, and not a matter of rhetoric, as Marvin Zetterbaum treated it. Koritansky finds the grounds for Tocqueville's judgment on the inevitability of democracy in the emergence of "the idea of humanity," an idea lacking in antiquity, but, once emerged, one which pushes inexorably towards democracy.

Koritansky's Tocqueville is not indiscriminately committed, however, to any and all forms of egalitarianism. Tocqueville's task, Koritansky concludes, is to further the "noble love of equality," and to counter as far as possible the other, "debased love of equality." The distinction between these two forms of equality is, says Koritansky, "the fundamental distinction for the entire work." The noble love of equality, he concludes, is identical with that liberty which Tocqueville frequently indicated he wished to preserve from the onslaughts of democratic egalitarianism. Thus understood, Koritansky can also conclude that the problem of democracy for Tocqueville is that of "reconciling nobility and democracy." Tocqueville does not, therefore, seek to counter equality with some other principle, but rather one form of equality with another.

Koritansky's Rousseauian Tocqueville is visible also in his solutions to the problem of democracy. It is, as he suggests, a much less Montesquieuan Tocqueville he presents. Structures, while not without some role, are strongly depreciated. America shows, above all, the limits of structure: structures which are successful in America are unsuited to other places, because they can work only in the special American environment. More fundamentally, Koritansky argues, "American institutions are successful in regulating the democratic passion

because of certain features of American life that are not, in turn, derivative from those institutions.”

One of the most interesting and novel parts of Koritansky's interpretation is his downplaying of “self-interest rightly understood,” the centerpiece of the most powerful previous interpretations. “Tocqueville refuses to join those who would seek to improve and purify democracy by exhorting democratic citizens to think and act upon their own self-interest. . . . The picture of democracy as a society where enlightened men pursue only their material well-being is not only unrealistic but ugly. It is ugly and unrealistic for the same reason—it rests on an incomplete account of the needs of human nature.” Koritansky's Tocqueville does not by any means reject self-interest altogether, however; “the pursuit of self-interest can be either debilitating or it can be the activity through which men assume command over at least part of their own affairs, engage with their fellows, and feel the pleasure in being free. It all depends on the spirit in which it is done.” Thus, the effects of pursuit of self-interest are themselves dependent on something more fundamental.

Koritansky describes the more fundamental feature variously over the course of his book. At some points, he speaks in clearly Rousseauian language: “the final solution to the problem of democracy on the level of democracy is, in a word, the ‘general will.’ If Tocqueville does not use that expression, his whole analysis points to it.” At other times, Koritansky speaks with a more Tocquevillian tongue, as when he emphasizes the role of mores, or of civil religion, or, somewhat less Tocquevillianly, of “public philosophy.” Above all, what Koritansky has in mind here, are certain ways of understanding and acting in the world which “uplift the democratic spirit,” and which develop “the moral strength of democratic citizens.” Tocqueville responds to these needs by pointing out or providing a “poetic description” of democratic life which puts the citizen “within reach of the passionate devotion to political freedom that may redeem the “modern world.” Thus, for example, Tocqueville presents a poetic interpretation of even the materialistic aspects of American life. He emphasized the “heroic spirit with which Americans conduct commerce” rather than the mere material gain to be derived from it. Or, more broadly, Tocqueville interpreted material progress itself “poetically”: “In man an angel teaches a brute how to satisfy its desires.” From this, Koritansky concludes, “rightly interpreted, indefinite progress in the direction of material prosperity can cause individuals to feel the source of greatness in their own souls. It is this that can lead them to make sacrifices.” Commerce and material progress, even if poetically understood, are only second best means, however, to strengthen the souls of democratic men: the noble love of equality proves, on final analysis, to be identical with “the warrior spirit,” and thus healthy democracy “absolutely requires a combination of the roles of democratic citizen and soldier.” A proper provision for a citizen army and for martial elements within democracy are therefore indispensable for the kind of future that Tocqueville hoped would emerge.

Koritansky finds neither this nor the other solution adequate, however, and concludes by rejecting Tocqueville's new political science. Freedom and equality, the central concerns of Tocqueville's politics, are too ambiguous, Koritansky holds, "to inform the common life and rejuvenate society. An inspiration beyond the idea of freedom is needed to capture the imagination and fire the passions of modern men." Koritansky does not explain why he believes that to be so, nor does he suggest any alternative "inspiration" of his own for modern men. His conclusion is disappointingly scanty, it must be said, following on the heels of his thoughtful and sympathetic account of Tocqueville's new political science.

True Tocquephiles may find other features of Koritansky's book with which to take issue. Indeed, Koritansky's study is one of those (few) that one cherishes for the strength and intelligence of its argument, even as one finds much with which one cannot agree. Koritansky focuses, more than any previous writer, on Tocqueville's "new political science," a very fruitful focus, I think, for it provides a thread through Tocqueville's immense and seemingly sprawling project. That new political science has three chief features: (1) it is a "new political science for a new age," that is, a democratic political science for the democratic age, which takes its point of departure in Tocqueville's conviction of the inevitable coming of democracy, and ultimately in his view of the justice of democracy; (2) the central concept of this new political science is "social state"; and (3) the new political science has a particular task—to find a way to combine the new conditions of equality with liberty. I can only briefly indicate aspects of Koritansky's treatment of each of these where he has not persuaded me.

Koritansky comes closer than most to a satisfactory reading of Tocqueville on democracy, but he vacillates in unaccountable ways. He attempts to credit both Tocqueville's claimed neutrality and his commitment to democracy: "When Tocqueville says that he cannot judge whether democracy is ultimately prejudicial or profitable to mankind, he means that he is attached to democracy by [a] *feeling* for the equal rights of all men at birth to liberty, that, however dimly, animates the hearts of modern men. He is, however, under no illusion that he can articulate a defense for that feeling." Koritansky proceeds, however, to attribute to Tocqueville several "defences," if not of that "feeling," then of democracy itself. He has a chapter, for example, titled "The Naturalness of Democracy" in which he sets forth an argument for "the natural superiority of democracy" as "more consistent with nature's ordinances," as more "powerful," or more successful. Or, in another place, Koritansky asserts that the "essence of human nature" corresponds or points to the kind of society at which healthy democracy aims. And in yet another place, he suggests that "democratic virtues are natural," and that the democratic condition is one in which men can "express the goodness in their natures."

Where Koritansky gives too many and conflicting views on Tocqueville's commitment to democracy, he altogether (or nearly so) scants *the* literally cen-

tral feature of Tocqueville's new political science, social state. Koritansky fails to mention what I believe is the single most revealing statement in the whole of *Democracy in America*: "The social state . . . may be considered as the prime cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas which control the nation's behavior; it modifies even those things which it does not cause. Therefore one must first study social state if one wants to understand a people's laws and mores." Tocqueville's book is organized in accordance with this passage, and his analyses constantly take their bearing from social state. But one could read Koritansky's book and miss the idea of social state in Tocqueville altogether. I can recall only a few mentions of it, and none of any importance.

There seem to be two classes of contemporary readers of Tocqueville—sociologists, who tend to miss or depreciate Tocqueville's *political* intentions, and the degree to which he wrote a book meant to guide political action, and thus which recognizes the possibility of semiautonomous (at least) political action. On the other side are political scientists like Koritansky who seem unwilling to concede the immense role Tocqueville attributed to social causation. Zetterbaum, it must be said, presents a more extreme case of the phenomenon, as when he asserts that "one can only conclude that ideas, not social conditions, are primary in Tocqueville's thought, despite his emphasis on the latter." But why should Tocqueville "emphasize the latter" if he means the former? And why does he go to such length to show dominant ideas and attitudes as derivative from social state? The real task in understanding Tocqueville is to see how he combines the sociologist and the political scientist, and not to affirm the one by ignoring or denying the other.

Finally, Koritansky identifies the task of Tocqueville's new political science in an overly narrow way. As he rightly sees, Tocqueville sought a way to combine democracy and liberty. The great threat to that combination, says Koritansky, is the contest between the two forms of love of equality. Tocqueville did mention that contest, as one of the threats, if an admittedly very important one. But Koritansky almost altogether ignores the other main threat—the lack of "intermediate powers," a typically Montesquieuan focus, and thus outside the range of Koritansky's Rousseauian Tocqueville. Yet Volume I is more surely guided by the quest for alternatives to the secondary powers Montesquieu found so central to liberty. True, as Koritansky says, Tocqueville found mores more important than laws, but they are more important precisely as they help Americans fulfill the functions of the secondary associations. Koritansky systematically depreciates the degree to which Tocqueville saw mores as rooted in practices and structures, including social state. Where Koritansky puts a "poetry of liberty" at the center of solutions, Tocqueville himself put the "practice of liberty" within free institutions, and, I must say it, "self-interest rightly understood."