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# Tocqueville and the Continuation of the Theological-Political

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**Oliver Hidalgo** *Unbehagliche Moderne: Tocqueville und die Frage der Religion in der Politik. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2006.*

**Agnès Antoine** *L'Impensé de la Démocratie: Tocqueville, la Citoyenneté et la Religion. Paris: Fayard, 2003.*

**Andreas Kinning** *Geografie van Goed en Kwaad: Filosofische Essays. Utrecht: Spectrum, 2005.*

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Scholarship on Tocqueville's political thought has developed rapidly during the past few decades. Hundreds of books and articles have appeared. Tocqueville is presented in different ways, as a political philosopher, sociologist, historian or statesman. Different themes in his moral and political thought are highlighted, such as democracy, civil society, republicanism and constitutionalism. Different ideas and commitments are attributed to him, from liberal to communitarian and from romantic to classical. Different scholars have placed him in different intellectual traditions, such as Aristotelianism and Augustinianism. Some have identified him as a student of Montesquieu, others as an heir of Rousseau, Pascal, Constant or Guizot. Still others have seen in him no more than a child of his time, the 19th century. In recent debates, the prominence of the relationship between politics and religion, between the city of man and the city of God, in Tocqueville's thought, has received considerable attention.

In Oliver Hidalgo's book, we encounter Tocqueville as an 'uncomfortable modern'. Tocqueville's thoughts are guided by an Augustinian vision firmly rooted in French thought – particularly, in Pascal's *Pensées* and in Bossuet, also called the 'French Augustine'. According to Hidalgo, the key theme in Tocqueville's thought, that is, *modern* thought, is how to reconcile religion and democracy, after the French Revolution. Agnès Antoine argues that Tocqueville has developed a new humanism, that is close to Pascal and Rousseau, for a new world. Andreas Kinning sees him as a political philosopher who analyses and criticizes some of the major features of modern, democratic man and society.

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These authors, writing within different national settings of European scholarship (Germany, France and the Netherlands, respectively), recognize the religious dimension in Tocqueville's ideas, but they disagree about whether religion is essential to all his reflections, on all themes – ranging from science to democracy. In other words, the interpretations diverge when it comes to ascertaining whether religion is at the root of Tocqueville's political and moral thoughts.

Oliver Hidalgo 'wants to demonstrate that Tocqueville not only poses an overlooked question, but also that his proposed therapy concentrates on a fundamental problem, that in the research literature is usually neglected: the continuation of the theological-political' (p. 12). For Hidalgo, 'the continuation of the theological-political' in Tocqueville's thought is a response to the problematic relationship between liberty and equality (this may be called the problem of republicanism). Hidalgo considers this relationship to be a 'cardinal problem' in the religious sense, following St Ambrose who reinterpreted the classical political virtues (prudence, justice, moderation and courage) as religious *cardinal* virtues. In other words, according to Hidalgo, the relationship between liberty and equality is a religious-political theme that can only be understood theologically or politically. For, as Tocqueville himself has made perfectly clear, he attempts to stand from the 'point of view of God, and it is from there that I [Tocqueville] seek to consider and judge human things'.<sup>1</sup> In sum, Hidalgo seeks to reconstruct 'the answers to the cardinal problem – Freedom and Equality – as a dependent variable of the religious-political theme', arguing that 'the roots of the problem lie already in the "City of God" of Augustine' (p. 13). Thereby, Hidalgo states that Tocqueville takes issue with an Augustinian theme. In pointing out that Tocqueville's understanding of religion is Pascalian, Hidalgo implies that Tocqueville is an Augustinian.

Hidalgo introduces, in the first section of his book (pp. 23–164), the uneasy or tense relationship between equality and liberty as the key to understanding Tocqueville's new science of politics. He thereby correctly understands that the democratic equality of living conditions and self-government of citizens are very difficult to reconcile in any science of politics and that it is particularly difficult to preserve liberty in the modern age. However, by claiming that Tocqueville constructs democracy as an 'ideal type' (pp. 15, 23, 249), Hidalgo forgets the Augustinian in Tocqueville, namely, his perspective that democracy is an actual social reality whose coming to being has been *providentially* guided. Hidalgo, thereby, (unintentionally) reconstructs the new science as a romantic or Fichtian *Wissenschaftslehre*. Hidalgo states that Tocqueville is committed to ideals, such as the personality ideal of *Bildung* (pp. 77–80), rather than to natural law principles, norms or fixed standards of thought and action. Hence, Tocqueville is depicted more as a romantic idealist who seeks *Verstehen* (like Ferdinand Tönnies or Max Weber) and who, like Kant, searches for 'meaningful order' (p. 273), than as a realist who employs classical ideas. According to Hidalgo, Tocqueville's constructed ideal type of democracy, which is based on his empirical research in America, is characterized by ideal features, such as equality, popular sovereignty, individualism, conformism, public opinion and majority rule. Hidalgo rightly points out that these elements can indeed be a democratic threat to freedom, as understood by Tocqueville, but he does not attempt to reconstruct the latter's metaphysical/theological understanding of equality and freedom and of its (possible) antagonists.

The religious dimension in Tocqueville's new science of politics cannot be traced back in the first part of Hidalgo's book. In the end, he does not reconstruct the continuation of

the theological-political in the new science. Within the romantic tradition of *Verstehen* and *Bildung*, the relationship between liberty and equality is not a cardinal problem. In romantic thought, the theological-political does not continue but comes to an end: the world has become, to speak with Friedrich Schiller, nostalgically or melancholically disenchanted. Augustinians do not embrace this romantic thesis. Their vision, instead, as Arthur Kaledin points out, is classical and 'apocalyptic'.<sup>2</sup> The Augustinian, apocalyptic vision in Tocqueville's thought means that democracy, if it is not prudently guided towards a fixed purpose, or in accord with its *telos*, might in the end prove itself to be self-destructive. That inevitably happens if salvation history, or providential history, is not well understood.

In the second chapter of the first part on democracy (pp. 93–164), Hidalgo breaks with the romanticism of the new science and now reconstructs Tocqueville as a classicist. He argues that, for Tocqueville the classicist, hierarchy inheres in the nature of things. Hierarchy is therefore unchangeable: resistance to the hierarchical order of things, for instance, through levelling, generates chaos or revolution. In a penetrating analysis, Hidalgo contrasts popular sovereignty and subsidiarity. He convincingly argues that 'Tocqueville interprets the dogma of popular sovereignty according to the principle of subsidiarity' (p. 107) and attempts to show that, for Tocqueville, democracy is not an act of the romantic imagination or will, but is conformity to nature. Hidalgo shows that, for Tocqueville, reconciliation between equality and freedom (a free democracy) is hierarchically ordered since democratic equality is also in accordance with nature. An unfree or 'despotic democracy' (p. 50) (like mass democracy or populism, pp. 66–73) either generates an 'artificial hierarchy' (p. 102), 'artificial aristocracy' (p. 127) or abolishes subsidiary authorities and intermediary powers, such as the clergy, aristocracy and the guild system, through centralization of administrative powers (pp. 113–19). This, thereby, violates the principle of subsidiarity, causing chaos and revolution (p. 137).

Hidalgo's analysis of hierarchy is a very worthwhile contribution to our understanding of Tocqueville's political thought. It reveals Tocqueville's classical understanding of liberty as self-government,<sup>3</sup> how self-government is sustained by hierarchy (rather than equality or autonomy), why enlightened and moral elites are needed in a free society, and how liberty is lost in an unnatural horizontal ordering of things (which is not conformity to, but mastery of, the nature of things). Individualism, conformism and centralization (Hidalgo could have included romanticism<sup>4</sup>) do not support but threaten liberty (p. 113). It is only in a hierarchically ordered society that men can be transformed into citizens; it is through intermediary powers that they are able to resist concentrated powers and enabled to practise their citizenship in self-government. In arguing that Tocqueville interprets democracy hierarchically, according to the principle of subsidiarity, Hidalgo implies, without mentioning it, that Tocqueville's ideas are part of the classical (Aristotelian or Thomist) natural law tradition, to which the natural law principle of subsidiarity belongs.

In the second part, in his discussion of the uncomfortable modern (pp. 201–74), Hidalgo introduces Tocqueville as a 'new liberal' (p. 232), as Tocqueville indeed called himself. Though Hidalgo clearly grasps the fact that in Tocqueville's classicism, 'democracy is the objective truth, the *telos* of history' (p. 210), he decides not to define his 'new liberalism' in such classicist terms. Nor does he recognize in the new liberalism the continuation of the theological-political. Hidalgo does not attribute a religious dimension to the new liberalism. Instead, like Alan Kahan,<sup>5</sup> he identifies Tocqueville's new liberalism as an 'aristocratic liberalism' (pp. 250–62). In reconstructing new liberalism as aristocratic liberalism,

Hidalgo compares, in a history of ideas, Tocqueville's new liberalism with several thought structures and social movements of the 19th century. Such movements include the bourgeois liberalism of the Doctrinaires (Royer-Collard, Guizot), aristocratic revisionism, proletarian socialism and anarchism. According to Hidalgo, Tocqueville's new liberalism is aristocratic liberalism because it is characterized by hierarchy, whereas the bourgeois liberalism of his contemporaries is characterized by autonomy.

In identifying hierarchy as aristocratic, rather than as religious, Hidalgo implies that liberty, in Tocqueville's new liberalism, is aristocratic liberty. If Tocqueville's new liberalism is aristocratic liberalism, then his understanding of liberty must be an expression of his aristocratism, rather than of his Augustinianism. It means that, for Tocqueville, the nature of liberty is not spiritual, but purely political. In Tocqueville's aristocratic liberalism, liberty is not sacred or related to God, and, accordingly, does not need faith and grace: liberty is an aristocratic privilege. In other words, Hidalgo implies that the theological-political does not continue in Tocqueville's new liberalism. It is aristocratism that continues, in order to safeguard the natural order of hierarchy – for liberty.

And yet, even though religion seemingly plays no vital role in the new science of politics and in the new liberalism, Hidalgo nevertheless states that 'religion in modern times is Tocqueville's key theme' (p. 275). It is only in the third part of his book that Hidalgo introduces this theme. He rightly points out that, for Tocqueville, religion is an existential condition that is characterized by universal doubt. Hidalgo convincingly argues that Tocqueville takes his cue from 'Pascal's anthropology' of the misery of man without God (p. 302). In this section on the relationship between religion and politics, Hidalgo does point to Tocqueville's religious political thoughts on democracy and civil society. He shows how, for Tocqueville, the religious spirit (*esprit de religion*) is coeval with the spirit of liberty (*esprit de liberté*), against democratic or bourgeois despotism. He reconstructs, with intellectual craftsmanship, Tocqueville's important argument that despotism can govern without faith, but that liberty cannot (pp. 317–22). Yet, this particular argument, the continuation of the theological-political, Hidalgo implies, is not a constitutive part of Tocqueville's new liberalism.

In the fourth and final part of his book (pp. 365–432), Hidalgo compares two uncomfortable moderns: Nietzsche and Tocqueville. For Nietzsche, Tocqueville had been, with Hume, abbé Galiani and Stendhal, one of the greatest modern minds (p. 366). Hidalgo retraces what Nietzsche liked in Tocqueville. Both had a hierarchical view of society, they both tried to combat the smallness of modern man. Both argued for a sense of heroism and grandeur in the midst of the bourgeois mediocrity that suffocated them so much. Though Nietzsche himself had declared that he had been through 'the school of Tocqueville and Taine' (p. 366), Hidalgo perspicaciously shows how Nietzsche's diagnosis of democracy, his understanding of liberty, his valuation of Christianity and liberalism, and the cures for the ills of his time, radically differ from Tocqueville's. Hidalgo concludes that 'it makes an immense difference, to observe modern society with the eyes of Nietzsche or those of Tocqueville' (p. 426). The theological-political certainly does not continue in Nietzsche's thought.

Hidalgo's book is a most welcome contribution to the current state of Tocqueville scholarship. He understands the Tocquevillian questions well, identifying them as 'cardinal', which, in itself, makes this book worthwhile for Tocqueville scholars, as well as for a wider public of political theorists who recognize the cardinal problem of modern times: the

conflict between liberty and equality. Hidalgo's reconstruction of the continuation of the theological-political in Tocqueville's thought, however, is not systematic enough and remains too implicit. If the roots of the cardinal problem of liberty and equality indeed lie in Augustine's *City of God*, and if the theological-political indeed continues in Tocqueville's thoughts on democracy, then Hidalgo could, and perhaps should, have dealt with Tocqueville's Augustinian preoccupations, such as the questions of providential history, nature, capricious will, faith and reason.

Agnès Antoine's book is an attempt to reveal the complexities, diversities and nuances of Tocqueville's moral and political thought – in particular, his idea of humanity. Unlike Hidalgo, she does not introduce a particular problem or challenge (like the continuation of the theological-political, the cardinal problem, the new science or new liberalism). Her interpretation is not a systematic elaboration of Tocqueville's philosophy, but rather a well-learned eclectic representation of a wide variety of aspects of his reflections, without going to a root, intellectual foundation or set of key principles. Yet, even though Antoine provides not a single but many keys to make Tocqueville's mind accessible to political theorists, she does recognize that the continuation of the theological-political is crucial for understanding Tocqueville. Antoine (p. 215) states that 'more than a political science, be it new, or even, more than a sociology of democracy, which it is however, the work of Tocqueville is a reflection upon the human destiny and upon its possible future, it pertains to a metaphysical preoccupation'.

Antoine introduces her first part (pp. 25–62) as a 'phenomenology of the democratic condition'. She argues that Tocqueville, like a sociologist, seeks to discern the relationship between man and society. Her analysis starts with the issue of individualism that, according to Tocqueville, is natural to the mind, heart and soul of humans living in democratic society. Modern philosophies, such as Cartesian rationalism, Baconian empiricism, romanticism, utilitarianism and positivism, easily take hold of the mind of democratic man. Individualist religion (Protestantism) typically enters the heart of democratic man. And materialism generally affects the soul of democratic man, as 'a dangerous disease of the human spirit' (p. 161), thereby creating restlessness. Antoine repaints Tocqueville's portrait of 'the drama of democratic man' (p. 38), democratic 'softness of heart' (p. 52), democratic 'coldness of reason' (p. 52) and democratic 'lukewarm souls' (p. 56). She points to 'the democratic hell' (p. 59), to show that if democratic society is left to its brutal, individualistic inclinations, then democratic man is reduced to nothingness. The point that Antoine so convincingly makes is that Tocqueville so vividly depicts the dangers or evils of democracy, not because he rejects democracy and longs for the old regime, but because he wants to rescue souls *in* a democratic world.

In her second section (pp. 65–125), Antoine suggests that Tocqueville's project of rescuing souls in a democratic world begins with a conversion of the bourgeois into the citizen. The Pascalian doctrine of 'self-interest well understood' (pp. 86–91) plays a vital part in this project. She (pp. 79–83) argues that Tocqueville, in direct opposition to Benjamin Constant, seeks to 'recover the Rousseauist intuition' (p. 83). In contrast with Hidalgo, Antoine holds that Tocqueville is not an 'aristocratic liberal', but 'the Rousseau of the nineteenth century' (p. 118). Like Rousseau, Tocqueville presents the citizen (rather than the aristocrat) as the antithesis of the bourgeois. Like Rousseau's citizen, Tocqueville's democratic citizen is inspired by the great political passion for grandeur in his civic, patriotic heart. Like Rousseau's bourgeois, Tocqueville's democratic bourgeois is

ruled by the desire for well-being and for the petty comforts of civilization. The bourgeois has a mediocre, calculating and narrow mind. The bourgeois thinks in terms of private interests in his restless, civil, industrious mind (pp. 108–9). The bourgeois is the anti-citizen.

Thereafter, Antoine (pp. 129–211) deals with the religious dimension of Tocqueville's new science, thereby emphasizing that, in Tocqueville's Augustinian vision of science, the city of man is always intimately related to the city of God. Antoine rightly stresses that the new science of politics, in Tocqueville's classical view, cannot be emancipated from theology, inasmuch as democratic man and democratic society cannot be separated from Christianity (p. 177). Hence, for Tocqueville, the scientific or political theological issue of all times is 'to harmonize world with heaven' (p. 194). In this section, Antoine (pp. 171–3) skilfully reconstructs Tocqueville's argument of why democracy, as a providential and natural order for man and society, is limited to the Christian world. She provides a penetrating analysis of how Tocqueville's personal state of existential doubt is related to the continuation of the political-theological in his key idea that there can be no political liberty without religious faith (pp. 174–7). The modern political challenge for Christianity is to democratize its religion, to reconcile itself with political modernity (democracy and bourgeois rule) – not to dominate it, but to keep bourgeois political indifference, bourgeois individualism and bourgeois materialism in check.

Throughout the second and third parts, Antoine interprets Tocqueville's politico-religious ideas as classical. She rightly points out that Tocqueville believes, as a classical thinker, with his classical education and cultivated affinity for the ancients and the classical intellect, that there is an overarching order of democracy. This pre-given order has its own divine and natural laws that are not man-made. For Tocqueville, reason and justice always refer to the intellectual comprehension and the moral conformity to, and never mean the anthropocentric mastery of, those pre-given natural laws (pp. 77–8, 254). The overarching, pre-given order of democracy is characterized by the New England township, the French commune (p. 96), patriotic instinct (p. 123), faith (p. 135), and the natural law principle of subsidiarity which regulates the natural order of hierarchical authority (pp. 116, 148). These features of a pre-given order of providential democracy provide the 'model for political society' (pp. 96, 156). A genuine or free democracy of citizens, therefore, for Tocqueville, is a democracy of townships, communes, hierarchy and patriots. A democracy that is left to its brutal instincts, on the other hand, is a bourgeois democracy or may even degenerate into a proletarian democracy that does not conform to nature or providential will.

Antoine, though she recognizes, with some of her great insights, Tocqueville's classical criticisms of his romantic contemporaries, sometimes makes the mistake of attributing romantic tendencies to his ideas. Antoine claims twice (pp. 96, 227) that Tocqueville constructs 'ideal types' of democratic man, while in her conclusion (p. 349) she explicitly states that he adopts the Schillerian thesis of the disenchanting world. Yet, Tocqueville's vision of modernity does not appear to be a romantic one of disenchantment and disillusion, but seems rather, like Augustine and Rousseau, apocalyptic. It is an apocalyptic vision of the world, in which intellectual and moral degeneration become awkward realities as a result of disobedience to providential will and natural laws – when the course of human affairs is left to brutal instincts. Antoine clearly recognizes Tocqueville's dialectical, perhaps even Socratic, reasoning (p. 257), for instance, when it comes to the dialectic between the

bourgeois and the citizen or between the Christian and the citizen. Yet, she fails to recognize the dialectic between romanticism and classicism. This dialectic, however, clearly manifested itself in 19th-century France, in which Tocqueville appears as a classicist, not as a romantic.

The final part of Antoine's book is titled 'Humanism or Barbarism?'. Antoine (pp. 215–334) discusses Tocqueville's critique of the Enlightenment bourgeois notion of progress (Condorcet) (pp. 217–34), Hegelian historicism (pp. 239–47) and modern pantheism (pp. 273–80), which she, among other things, identifies as 'barbarism of reflection' (p. 320). In this section, Antoine clearly grasps the continuation of the theological-political in Tocqueville's understanding of liberty (pp. 302–5). She convincingly emphasizes that liberty, for Tocqueville, is always 'a sacred thing', the most precious divine gift, which constitutes the first of goods and an end in itself. However, she confines herself to a description and does not provide a further political-theological analysis of *why* Tocqueville believes that liberty is sacred. She does not relate liberty to providence. The idea of providence only plays a minor role in Antoine's interpretation of Tocqueville's new liberalism. It is limited to a paragraph in her book (pp. 254–6). Even though Antoine recognizes that Tocqueville, in *Democracy*, begins and ends with the Augustinian language of providence, for her, providence is not *the* key, but one of the keys to comprehending Tocqueville.

Antoine's book is a great contribution to understanding different aspects of the continuation of the theological-political in Tocqueville's moral and political thought. This well-written, well-documented and well-argued work shows how politics and religion are distinguished, yet not separated, which makes Tocqueville so relevant today. However, Antoine's own eclectic approach gives rise to some intellectual confusion. Antoine explicitly mentions, in different places in the book, that Tocqueville must be understood as an Aristotelian (p. 118), Augustinian (pp. 129, 266), Thomist (p. 267), Pascalian (pp. 88, 90) and Rousseauian (pp. 83, 118). In the last analysis, she concludes that 'Tocqueville is often a preweberian, or preheideggerien, or prearendtien' (p. 335). How she is able to reach these conclusions is not clear from her foregoing analysis. She unfortunately fails to grasp the fundamental distinction between Tocqueville and Nietzsche, which Hidalgo, on the other hand, does discern. Furthermore, Antoine makes no attempt to reconcile Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal and Rousseau in Tocqueville's new liberalism. She skilfully points to the many-sidedness and nuances of his thoughts, but she thereby gives the impression that Tocqueville was an eclectic thinker. Yet, his thought structure does not seem eclectic. As a classical thinker, who believes in the unity of the intellect, he rather appears to be a synthetic thinker, who, like Augustine and Aquinas, always attempts to reconcile things – like earth and heaven, ancients and moderns, Christianity and democracy, history and future, nature and society.

Andreas Kinneging's chapter on Tocqueville (pp. 399–443) is part of a wider collection of essays, titled *Geography of Good and Evil*. This chapter also served as the introduction to the latest Dutch edition of *Democracy in America* (2004).<sup>6</sup> Kinneging introduces Tocqueville as a political philosopher who analyses and criticizes modern man and modern society, without omitting the religious dimension *in* man and *in* society. For Kinneging, however, the key to understanding Tocqueville's political philosophy does not lie in a reconstruction of the continuation of the theological-political. Instead, he believes that Tocqueville can be understood by reconstructing the *pre-modern* in him. Indeed, according to Kinneging, Tocqueville's political philosophy is to a great extent determined



by this pre-modern element, which makes it a relevant case-study in the current context of globalization. He argues that, while until recently pre-modernity could no longer be recognized in contemporary Europe, 'the rest of the world has not been or hardly influenced by this westernization and is pre-modern in character' (p. 402).

Kinneging's introduction to Tocqueville's analysis of modernity somewhat surprises by its anachronism. He argues that the best way to understand modernity, that is, democratic man and society, is to compare it with its antithesis, pre-modernity or aristocracy (p. 400). But, instead of referring to Tocqueville, who, throughout his work, compares the *ancien régime* with democracy, Kinneging points to Ferdinand Tönnies's ideal types of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and Louis Dumont's comparison between *homo equalis* and *homo hierarchicus*. Kinneging uses *their* observations, rather than Tocqueville's, to show that they agree with Tocqueville's reconstruction of pre-modernity or aristocracy in terms of features such as unity, hierarchy and *noblesse oblige*. In a biographical history, derived from André Jardin's great book,<sup>7</sup> Kinneging argues that the source of Tocqueville's comprehension of aristocracy must be found in his original, aristocratic and Roman Catholic conditioning, rather than in his political philosophy, new liberalism or deliberations: 'much of what Tocqueville has to tell us, is somehow related to this family background, to the *ancien régime*, to the aristocracy' (pp. 407–8).

Yet, for Kinneging, Tocqueville is not merely a pre-modern aristocrat who finds himself historically situated after the massacre of the French Revolution. He also has his modern, democratic side, which signifies a problematic break with his family. Tocqueville is Janus-faced. Though aristocratic by birth, upbringing and education, he is unmistakably a modern thinker, as well as a modern man. Kinneging points out that Tocqueville, as a modern man, refuses to use his aristocratic title and marries an English bourgeoisie (Mary Mottley). As a modern thinker, who, as a young student, had studied the ideas of the Enlightenment, he knows that the days of aristocracy are over for good. At the same time, Tocqueville realizes, in his religious consciousness, that democracy is a 'providential fact' (pp. 408, 415). Democracy is therefore law (and order). It is precisely in Tocqueville's religious understanding of democracy as a providential fact that Kinneging retraces the continuation of the pre-modern in Tocqueville's thought. Kinneging, in a rather positivist or Saint-Simonian fashion, believes that religion is essentially a historical pre-modern, rather than a natural, phenomenon. Kinneging argues that 'pre-modern man is a believer, society is usually filled with religiosity, modern man and society are mostly secular' (p. 401). Hence, when Tocqueville discovers that democracy is guided by providence in history, the pre-modern continues in his thought.

Kinneging's reconstruction of Tocqueville's history of democracy as being providentially guided is illuminating. For Tocqueville, providence means that besides, and in spite of, the conscious will of men (a capricious will), history has been tending towards equality of living conditions, which would finally become the norm. Democracy is divinely willed. Hence, democracy is just because it conforms to divine will. Pre-modernity or aristocracy had been unjust or a passing stage in the providential history of democracy. It is therefore unreasonable, an act of wickedness or despotic will, to resist democracy. The real question, a statesman's question, is to try to understand how democracy will work out in, and for, Europe or France (p. 415). In order to prevent democracy being left to its blind instincts in an age of revolution (19th-century France), Tocqueville went to America to observe the workings of providence in the tendencies, character, habits, prejudices and passions of the

Americans, to develop the prudence that revolutionary France so badly needed (p. 416). The romantic and positivist France had failed to understand providential history. As a result, it had been subject to chaos and revolution, naturally culminating in centralization, materialism, individualism, mass democracy and, ultimately, despotism.

Kinneging's reconstruction of 'wild democracy', manifested in events like the French Revolution and the February Revolution, as the consequence of imprudence is excellent (pp. 416–25). He correctly points out that Tocqueville praises the prudent government of America's democracy, where a social state of equal living conditions prevails, in which citizens govern themselves in and through their own representation, administration and organization. Hence the relation between prudence and liberty, which seems so important for understanding Tocqueville. However, Kinneging who does discern the religious dimension in Tocqueville's interpretation of democracy, excludes the Puritan or New England township from the providential and natural orders. According to him, Tocqueville saw the Puritan township as a purely man-made 'political-administrative organ' (p. 426). This seems an unfortunate misrepresentation of Tocqueville's thinking. Tocqueville explicitly states that the Puritan township is not a social or political institution, or a creative act of sovereign will, but a divine gift that seems to come directly from the hand of God.<sup>8</sup>

This misrepresentation has further consequences for Kinneging's analysis of the continuation of the pre-modern in Tocqueville's moral and political thought. In his attempt to reconstruct the continuation of the pre-modern, Kinneging not only overlooks the religious meaning of the Puritan township as the locus of sacred liberty, but he also cannot grasp the religious meaning of self-government as such. That is, Kinneging considers American self-government as 'autonomy'. He identifies this 'autonomy' historically, as an 'aristocratic life ideal'. Hence, he concludes that Tocqueville's providentially guided democracy is 'some sort of aristocracy for everyone' (p. 417). Yet, when we read Tocqueville more carefully, we find that, for him, the Puritan township, that is liberty, comes *prior* to the American state. The township does not issue from the state, which would have made it a local or municipal autonomy granted by the state. On the contrary, the American state is constituted through the townships that are in accordance with providential will and hence nature. This implies that Tocqueville thinks that the Puritans were in fact on a divine mission, exposing themselves to the sufferings of the wilderness and exile from Europe, to make the democratic idea triumph.<sup>9</sup>

As Kinneging does not recognize the continuation of the theological-political, he is unable to place religion anywhere in Tocqueville's 'new liberalism'. He convincingly argues that Tocqueville interprets religion 'political-philosophically' (p. 428), from a human standpoint. He shows that Tocqueville emphasizes with Plato the moral and political importance of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul,<sup>10</sup> rather than resurrection. Tocqueville employs this doctrine with the deliberate aim of raising the standards of action, beyond the bourgeois individualism and materialism which characterized his age. Kinneging's argument, that Tocqueville uses Christianity for moral purposes, 'from a social perspective' (p. 430), however, is unconvincing. He seems to confuse Tocqueville's Augustinian or Pascalian understanding of religion with Erastianism or even bourgeois utilitarianism. In contrast with Antoine, Kinneging believes that the Christian religion serves as a civil religion, for social purposes. He believes this because Tocqueville indeed states that the Gospel, in contrast with the Koran, only speaks about the general relations between man and God and between men themselves.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Kinneging, in failing to grasp

the theological-political, does not realize that, for Tocqueville, 'truth lives',<sup>12</sup> that faith, being natural to man as a creature, is necessary to grasp this living truth, and that faith, though terrible and never giving certainty, is a necessary condition for liberty.

In short, in reconstructing the continuation of the pre-modern, Kinneging is unable to grasp the supernatural character that Tocqueville recognizes in the township. Kinneging does not recognize that, for Tocqueville, liberty is not a human creation or means to some political end, but is a sacred end in itself. As a result, he does not see that, for Tocqueville, liberty presupposes faith, and that, consequently, liberty cannot be explained to faithless thinkers or materialists, including positivists and utilitarians.<sup>13</sup> Kinneging is also seriously mistaken by claiming that, for Tocqueville, both Protestantism and Catholicism may serve as a civil religion, because 'they preach more or less the same' (p. 430). Indeed, the continuation of the theological-political in Tocqueville's thought, as both Hidalgo and Antoine realize, is Catholic *tout court*: his new liberalism is Catholic liberalism.<sup>14</sup> Though Tocqueville greatly admires the Puritans for their religious passion for liberty, he appears to be an ardent critic of Protestantism, arguing that Protestant preachers 'speak of morality; of dogma not a word, nothing that could in any way shock a neighbour, nothing that could reveal the hint of dissidence', stating that 'this so-called tolerance is nothing but a huge indifference'.<sup>15</sup>

The three books are all sympathetic readings of Tocqueville, capturing his political and religious ideas in different ways. They are, without doubt, of great interest to both Tocqueville scholars and political philosophers. Hidalgo's book has the great merit of shedding light on how Tocqueville sees the cardinal (and therefore religious) problem of modernity, making Tocqueville highly relevant for today's world. Hidalgo's aspiration to grasp Tocqueville's remedy through the continuation of the theological-political is certainly convincing on many points, but not fully developed on some others. The theological and the political do not fully converge in his analysis. Antoine provides an excellent reconstruction of the many-sidedness of Tocqueville's politico-religious ideas, but, in her eclecticism, she does not establish the synthesis between the diverse parts that constitute a whole. Kinneging's continuation of the pre-modern, most relevant for contemporary Europeans, is certainly interesting and inspiring, even though this worthy approach does not always seem faithful to Tocqueville's ideas. All these authors remind us that philosophical reflection takes its own liberty, and by offering different perspectives on Tocqueville, it provides us, at the same time, with new insights to reflect on today's complex political and religious world.

## Notes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) *Democracy in America*, tr. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, p. 675. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Arthur Kaledin (2005) 'Tocqueville's Apocalypse: Culture, Politics, and Freedom in Democracy in America', in Laurence Guellec (ed.) *Tocqueville et l'esprit de la démocratie*, pp. 47–102. Paris: Sciences Po Les Presses.
3. Tocqueville equates liberty with self-government: 'free in any real sense, that is to say, self-governing'. Alexis de Tocqueville (1983) *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, tr. Stuart Gilbert, p. 32. New York: Anchor Books.
4. Tocqueville recognizes the relationship between romanticism and democracy, arguing that 'the writers who in our day have so admirably reproduced the features of Childe,

Harold, René and Jocelyn have not claimed merely to relate one man's actions; they wished to illuminate and enlarge certain still obscure sides of the human heart. These are the poems of democracy'. Tocqueville (n. 1), p. 463.

5. Alan S. Kahan (1992) *Aristocratic Liberalism: the Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville*, p. 89. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also Hidalgo (2006) *Unbehagliche Moderne: Tocqueville und die Frage der Religion in der Politik*, p. 89. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
6. Alexis de Tocqueville (2004) *Democratie: Wezen en Oorsprong*. Kampen: Kok.
7. André Jardin (1988) *Tocqueville: A Biography*. London: Peter Halban.
8. 'The township appears to issue directly from the hands of God.' Tocqueville (n. 1), p. 57.
9. *Ibid.* p. 32.
10. *Ibid.* p. 520.
11. *Ibid.* pp. 419–20.
12. Tocqueville, letter to Gustave de Beaumont, 8 March 1855.
13. Tocqueville, apparently echoing Pascal, says: liberty is 'something one must feel and logic has no part in it. It is a privilege of noble minds which God has fitted to receive it, and it inspires them with a generous fervour. But to meaner souls, untouched by the sacred flame, it may well seem incomprehensible.' Tocqueville (n. 3), p. 169.
14. M.R.R. Ossewaarde (2004) *Tocqueville's Moral and Political Thought: New Liberalism*, pp. 33–8. London: Routledge.
15. Tocqueville, letter to Louis de Kergorlay, 29 June 1831.