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Reply to Our Critics
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Source: *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 139-147
Published by: Berghahn Books
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/42843272
Accessed: 14-03-2017 18:00 UTC

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REPLY TO OUR CRITICS

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Seymour Drescher is a fine economic and social historian and Tocqueville scholar; Arthur Goldhammer is among the best translators of French working today; Melvin Richter is a distinguished scholar of the history of European political thought; Cheryl Welch is a judicious analyst of French political thought. We are grateful to them for the generous spirit in which they have called to our attention some errors and difficulties in our translation of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*—and, of course, chagrined that they should have been there to find. Some of the corrections are of careless errors, for which there is no excuse. Others are of confusions caused either by our occasional failure to supply a noun to replace a pronoun whose referent is clear in French, but unclear in English, or by our inconsistent translation of the French indefinite pronoun *on*. These, too, we should have caught. Still other criticisms identify different choices they would have made. We respect each sort of criticism. But the corrections do not dispose of the issue of what principles should be brought to bear in translating.

Seymour Drescher criticizes us chiefly for what we have not included in our book. We do not translate the *Pléiade* notes (on this issue, see below), and in our introduction we do not make several points he thinks must be made. Recent historical scholarship, he notes, has shown that Tocqueville was wrong in at least three respects. In the first volume of *Democracy*, Tocqueville does not take seriously American industrialization. This despite his remark (*DA* I 2.9) about the "great industrial zone that extends the length of the [Atlantic] ocean." Second, Drescher says that Tocqueville fails to appreciate the economic viability of slavery. Yet his objection to a slave economy—leaving aside its gross injustice—is that it affects the character of slave and especially of master in such a way as to discourage the activity of work, the spirit of commerce, and industrial entrepreneurship. Have recent economic historians really shown this assessment to be incorrect? Third, the two volumes of *Democracy* do not

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form a coherent whole. We quote the passage in which Tocqueville acknowledges that the object of his fears had changed by the time he published the second volume (*DA* II 4.6). He nonetheless contends at the beginning of the volume that "the two parts complete one another and form a single work" (*DA* II, Notice). It may possibly be that Tocqueville scholars have better access to what makes for coherence, or better minds than Tocqueville's. But we thought it worthwhile to explore his claim as fully as possible before rejecting it. Finally, Drescher contends that our interpretation devalues Tocqueville's teaching about associations. If twelve pages of discussion in a 69-page general introduction to Tocqueville's life and writing and the place of these in the history of political thought constitute devaluation, then we are guilty as charged.

Welch, Richter and Goldhammer focus on our translation rather than on our introduction. Cheryl Welch's interesting and intelligent criticism selects one crucial and difficult word (*inquiet*) from our translation to illustrate two points. We have not avoided importing interpretation as much as we wish to, she says, and our attempt at using consistent translations of the same term sometimes serves us ill. She offers an alternative translation, supported by arguments grounded in linguistic analysis and sustained by her own broad interpretation of Tocqueville's thought. We have a few objections to her characterization of our explanation in the introduction of the place Tocqueville finds for religion and family and to some aspects of her own interpretation of these matters, but we respect her position. Since her criticism would require a longer reply than is appropriate here, we shall limit ourselves to a few brief remarks.

It is doubtful that Tocqueville would have relied on *rétif* rather than *inquiet* had he wanted to be understood as saying "restive," since that adjective in its primary, non-figurative sense applies to animals, not humans. And *inquiet* can have a connotation of rebellion or resistance. We nonetheless concede that in choosing either "restive" or "restless," one must interpret for the reader. Despite our best efforts not to interject ourselves between author and reader, we were compelled to do so in some degree. We announced this choice and explained it briefly; we did not simply assume that, as translators, we had license to interpret. If all translation inevitably requires interpretation, one can still make a distinction among approaches to interpretation in translation. We use consistent translations of terms throughout the book, as much as is possible, rather than always opting for the formulation that sounds best in the immediate context. We do this with the intent of allowing the reader to formulate his or her own interpretation of Tocqueville's book as a whole—and to evaluate us, as well as an anglophone can, as interpreters and thus as translators. If "restive" cannot be made sense of, we are wrong.

As we also indicate in our Note on the Translation, we are well aware that the meaning of *inquiet* is far broader than restive, and at times we do alter our translation of it. Welch's characterization of our view notwithstanding, we are in agreement with her that Tocqueville's exploration of *inquiétude* is broader and deeper than political analysis. Ultimately, however, we think it fair to say that restive is the better principal translation because for Tocqueville, the restlessness of the modern, or democratic, soul is a *consequence* of its restiveness. He makes clear especially in the first chapters of the second volume of *Democracy* and also in the last chapter of the first volume, that the modern soul finds itself in a limitless, normless world because of a series of deliberate, even dogmatic, or, so to speak, tyrannical rejections of the limits and norms that had previously bounded and guided human thought and politics. Welch, we think, errs in saying that for Tocqueville, democracy is "naturally" hospitable to religious beliefs—however much the democratic soul might benefit from them. The democratic revolution began in the sixteenth century when "reformers submitted to individual reason some of the dogmas of the ancient faith" (*DA* II 1.1); when they set out to emancipate all humans from a "salutary servitude that permits [one] to make good use of [one's] freedom" (*DA* II 1.2). Democrats have thus acquired an "instinctive incredulity about the supernatural and a very high and often much exaggerated idea of human reason" (*DA* II 1.2). What remains of religion in modern life is a "precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries" (*DA* II 2.15). Insofar as Tocqueville finds religion still vigorous in America, he attributes its vigor far more to habit and regard for public opinion than to belief (*DA* I 2.9, II 1.2). The democratic soul is restless or homeless because, justifiably or not, it ran away from home.

Even where restless would seem to be the obvious choice, as in the chapter "Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restive in the Midst of Their Well-Being" (*DA* II 2.13), restive still makes better sense. Tocqueville's Americans are not in perpetual motion because they are bored or do not know their minds. Rather, they are ever in stubborn pursuit of the same two goals, thus far (and of necessity) imperfectly attained: material enjoyment and equality.

Melvin Richter demands that translation at all times convey the sense of what Tocqueville must have meant, given the mid-nineteenth-century French language and political context in which he wrote, and that it do so in a manner that is crystal clear to the contemporary reader. He would have a translator abandon literalness not in the name of creativity, but of historical accuracy. Arthur Goldhammer urges that a translation be not just technically correct, but above all attentive to contemporary English style. How could anyone deny that historical awareness, clarity, and good style are desirable? We hold that a translation must also reproduce what an author says and how he says it in such a way that a reader of the translation be able, as much as possible, to ascertain for himself or herself the author's thinking. Consequently, the dispute among us concerns two issues: What does one do when all these desiderata cannot be achieved simultaneously? And, should it be the case that Tocqueville's meaning is sometimes more obscure than one might wish, how does the translator best convey whatever clues Tocqueville himself may have left to shed light on the obscurity?

Richter's strictures about the difficulties of producing a translation lead to an unstated conclusion with which we would heartily concur: no serious student of an author should read that author in any language other than the one in which he wrote. And even a native speaker should have at his elbow an historical dictionary or better yet, an historian with Richter's command of political and linguistic history. This sets a high bar for good translation, at times too high. In faulting our translation at specific points Richter often fails to suggest an alternative, or proposes one that all but requires leaving a term in French and adding a lengthy editorial note to which the reader must repeatedly recur. In effect, his position amounts to an argument against any user-friendly translation.

Richter reasonably expects us to defend the principles of our translation. We have done this at some length elsewhere.[1] The beginning of a 700-page translation, however, is probably not the place for a lengthy defense. There are many more or less serious readers who might wish to introduce themselves to *Democracy in America* without immersing themselves very deeply in French history and without learning French. The overwhelming majority of people who read Tocqueville in English today do so because they are curious about his thoughts on America and on democracy. Their picking up this fat book with the intent to read it from cover to cover is commendable, and we do not believe that we should do anything to discourage them from making the effort. These readers are not yet Tocqueville scholars, and it is for them that one attempts a translation that is as accurate and readable as possible.

These readers, one may reasonably suppose, are more likely to be put off by than to welcome a lengthy demonstration of the superiority of one translation to other existing translations. (And what of new ones that are to come along soon or in the future, to which we cannot compare ours?) A similar reasoning applies to our decision not to translate most of the several hundred additional pages of editorial endnotes included in the *Pléiade* or to add many notes of our own like the marginal notes found in the Nolla edition. Both editions contain information that is of great interest and some value to Tocqueville scholars. But let us take one of the examples Richter gives to establish our disregard for historical context: Tocqueville's use of the word *despotisme*. In the published text of *Democracy*, at the same instant in which Tocqueville employs the term, he laments that it does not quite convey the sense of the new phenomenon he means to describe (*DA* II 4.6). What more is needed to alert the reader that here is a matter that must be thought through? Those who want to make a thorough study of the development of Tocqueville's views on this or any other point should be reading everything he wrote that is relevant—in French, not in translation, as we suspect Richter too would advise. Moreover, the Nolla edition, with its marginal notes, is extremely difficult to follow if one is not familiar with the flow of Tocqueville's argument. Finally, to adorn a translation with earlier manuscript variants or with references to and quotations from discussions Tocqueville may have had with others elsewhere for the purpose of enabling the reader to compare these with his published text seems to us a dubious enterprise. Knowing what Tocqueville chose, in the end, *not* to say in the book is not very illuminating unless one can ascertain with some confidence *why* he chose not to say it. Was a term or phrase omitted out of consideration for literary style, out of a political calculation not to be unnecessarily provocative, or because, on reflection, Tocqueville decided it did not express his soundest thinking on the subject?

Richter contends that a word-for-word translation may create confusion and misunderstanding, as illustrated by our rendering of *état social* as "social state" rather than "state of society." His is, arguably, an acceptable formulation. (But how would he then translate *état social et politique* and *état politique et social*, each of which phrases occurs several times?) His translation is, in any case, not the one we chose. True, the meaning of "social state" is not clear without some attention to what Tocqueville says about it and how he uses it. Neither, however, is the meaning of "state of society" transparent. Moreover, we find Richter's concern that "social state" will surely be read anachronistically by contemporary anglophone students and teachers to connote socialism, social democracy, or even the welfare state, to be unwarranted. The estimable Raymond Aron notwithstanding, *Americans* are probably as likely to confuse the social state with the "social scene" as with socialism. Richter is confident that we would have known his preferred formulation to be clearly superior had we consulted Tocqueville's notes on the lectures by Guizot that he attended. But while a student's lecture notes may suggest that he has borrowed a term from his professor, they cannot establish that he understands it in precisely the same way. As professors, we don't think so much of ourselves or so little of our students as to suppose that they regurgitate what we say in our lectures without absorbing and modifying it. Nor does the fact that others use a similar term (*état social*) or technique (making predictions), or even that they appear to make it an important element of their thought, undermine the contention that Tocqueville puts it, with other concepts and methods, together in a coherent and important theory that he himself calls "new." To determine what Tocqueville means by "social state" or "state of society" and why his notion of it is distinctive, one must master *his* texts. Should the reader of a translation wish to begin this process, he or she must be able, wherever feasible, to see how Tocqueville uses a key term (or a presumed one) throughout the work. The translator best clarifies the text for this reader by making such discoveries possible.

A more important dispute concerns our translation of *tuteur*. The dictionary definition is "guardian," or more precisely, the legal guardian of a minor. Our decision to translate it as "schoolmaster" (*DA* II 4.6) was influenced by Tocqueville's portrait of a government become not just sovereign, but *tuteur* in *The Old Regime*,[2] as well as by his discussion in *Democracy* of increasing sovereign power in Europe (*DA* II 4.5). Astonishingly, the eighteenth-century monarchy as *tuteur* went so far as to try to teach (*enseigner*) to peasant farmers "the art of enriching themselves" by distributing pamphlets on "the agricultural art." In *Democracy*, the reader is asked to consider that the newer European government does not merely assume responsibility for formal education. More and more, it undertakes to "enlighten" individuals in all aspects of their lives and consequently comes to be generally regarded as a "preceptor" (*précepteur).* Thus the term "guardian" does not quite capture the spirit and ambition of Tocqueville's "tutelary power" (*DA* II 4.6).

Arthur Goldhammer, in addition to finding some errors,[3] objects to our putting thought before style. He suggests less awkward ways of saying things where we sacrifice smoother or more graceful language to maintain a distinctive word root. *S'échauffer* is a minor example. Tocqueville uses it infrequently, always in connection with partisan political passions. We render it as become "heated" or "heated up," rather than "excited." Partisans do easily become "hotheads" and have "heated" debates and worse. Moreover, Tocqueville uses the verbs *exciter* and *s'exciter* with some frequency in a variety of contexts. *Semblables* is a more important example. For this, we insist on a consistent if inelegant term, "those like themselves." Goldhammer is right to remark that our "study of the book has convinced [us] that the notion of *semblables* is"—or arguably is—"one of Tocqueville's novel contributions to political science." We became convinced of this by noticing that *semblable,* along with *individualisme,* are among the very few "new ideas" or "general notions" in the book that Tocqueville so describes in his own name, that he chooses to italicize them when he explains them (see *DA* II 2.2 for both), and that he tries to show, especially in Volume Two, that their effects are or will become pervasive in democratic life and politics. We ourselves take seriously the possibility that Tocqueville may use these two words as more or less technical terms, but we also give the reader the option of forming his or her own judgment on the matter. For this reason, we never translate *particulier* as "individual," reserving that translation for *individu.*

Richter, with Welch, shows how our efforts to render other terms consistently throughout the translation may give rise to a different sort of awkwardness. On occasion, one finds Tocqueville using in the same sentence or in otherwise very close proximity two different French words that would normally be translated identically in English (see for example, *orgueilleux/fier* [DA I 2.6], *policé/civilisé* [DA I 2.10], *apprendre/enseigner* [DA II 1.20]). One may suppose that a decent stylist writing in any language thinks about whether to repeat the same word for emphasis or to vary it in order to refine either his meaning or his style. We chose not to foreclose the possibility of our reader's appreciating what is either a subtle shift in meaning or a nice attention to style. Having once respected a distinction between terms, how to translate these same terms elsewhere in the text becomes an issue. It is because we do not presume to decide which consideration guided Tocqueville's choices that we endeavor to maintain consistency throughout our translation.

Then there is the matter of our fealty to Tocqueville's sentence structure. For the most part, his formal sentence structure was then and is still now required by the rules of written French grammar. English, especially contemporary American English, written as well as spoken, is far more flexible—as Tocqueville predicted it would become (*DA* II 1.13). Yet his formal writing style also accords with the manifest substance of his thought. Tocqueville himself makes an issue of forms and formality (*DA* II 4.7). He faults the excessive and empty formality characteristic of late aristocratic writing and politics (*DA* II 1.13, 4.7), even as he expresses some nostalgia for aristocracy's formalism in manners (*DA* II 3.14). But his warning about the *political* dangers of a democratic habit of mind that is utterly contemptuous of forms could hardly be more emphatic (*DA* II 4.7). So one may suppose that he would have been neither surprised nor pleased to see his own formality deliberately abandoned by future American translators. We chose not to overlook his substantive point in our rendering of his style, even if on occasion we did decide to depart from what now may strike readers as the sort of empty formality he criticizes. Tocqueville's long sentences also belong to a more formal time—one that still existed in early nineteenth-century democratic America as well. Even more jarring than his long sentences, however, are his numerous short, almost aphoristic, paragraphs. These, arguably, are idiosyncratic, not required or even recommended by French (or English) grammar or good style and not characteristic of nineteenth- (or twenty-first-) century prose generally. Just often enough, however, Tocqueville shows himself quite capable of producing a short sentence and a long paragraph. As Richter observes, "What gives Tocqueville's style its vigor and flavor are his rhythms, contrasts, and metaphors." Why then would one shorten sentences or lengthen paragraphs, as do other translators, to accord with current expectations? Instead, we have left it for the reader to ponder whether these variations in style are deliberate and if they are, in what way Tocqueville's style may or may not be connected to his thought and politics.

Goldhammer likes to think of Tocqueville's text and translations of it as musical performances of a score that once existed in the author's mind and is now lost. In this view, Tocqueville's written text is merely the performance of one good stylist, on a par with any accomplished translator's. His was played, so to speak, on a harpsichord, and to play it on a modern piano, one must adjust for the different qualities of the instruments. Similarly, a good prose translator must use words and word arrangements to convey to the twenty-first-century anglophone reader what Tocqueville sought to say to his nineteenth-century francophone reader. To this end, adjustments are made from language to language. (By the same reasoning, why not adjust from time to time even within the same language? None of our critics propose any updating of Tocqueville's French, although it would follow from their positions.)

Instrumental music is constituted of a formal relationship of its elements that will be grasped by the ear and the intellect. But by what criterion does one distinguish a good performance from one that is merely technically correct? The true power of music comes from the arrangement of these elements so that the whole *moves* listeners by arousing their passions. One may suppose that a composer intends to move listeners in a specific direction, to elicit from them an anticipated set of emotions. He may hope, through manipulation of emotions once evoked to modify these, and thus to shape or change the character of listeners in some way—in a sense, to educate them on a non-intellectual level. (Goldhammer's Bach is a good example.) Various renditions of a score may engage listeners, emotionally or intellectually, but only some of these engaging renditions will create the mood and inspire the transformation the composer sought. Thus in evaluating musical performances as well as in translating, respect for the composer's intent and not only the enjoyment brought to listeners should matter. We hold that one cannot appreciate, much less undertake to perform, a successful variation on Tocqueville without respecting the score.

Language, Tocqueville says, is "the first instrument of thought" (*DA* II 1.16). And while Tocqueville was surely a stylist, he is now read, especially in translation, for the presumed value of his thought. Goldhammer is correct to insist that beauty of language matters to Tocqueville, as well as to concede that for him, "clear terms" take precedence (*DA* II 1.16). In the chapter in which Tocqueville makes these statements, he identifies himself as a democratic writer, or at least as someone who deliberately uses the *obscurity* characteristic of democratic language, which "enlarges and veils" thought, when it suits his purpose (*DA* II 1.16). Just before this (*DA* II 1.15), he commends to all aspiring democratic writers the study of ancient (aristocratic) literature, which he admires for its attention to detail and its precision, in order that they, as writers, be conscious of and thus acquire an ability to take advantage of the "defects"—or "secret charms" (*DA* II 1.16)—of democratic writing. An author can designedly choose to adopt a seemingly transparent, even a careless-looking style in order partly to articulate and partly to obscure his thought. He might adopt such a style for a variety of reasons: to avoid stirring up troublesome political passions, to take issue with a generally admired thought or to express support for a controversial one, to encourage meticulousness of mind in a reader. Tocqueville in fact tells us in the course of his book that each of these is a consideration to which friends of human freedom and greatness, among whom he includes himself, will have to pay special attention in a modern democracy.

In the end, it is for each reader to try to determine first, whether, then, why Tocqueville may have written in this manner. Goldhammer and we seem to disagree both on how important and on how difficult this inquiry may be. It is chiefly because we, with Tocqueville, hold language to be above all a thinker's tool that we make different choices and translate in a different spirit than would our critics.

Notes

1. "Translating Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,*" *La Revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review* 21, 1 (2000): 153-64. This article contains a discussion of Tocqueville on associations in addition to the one in the Editors' Introduction to our translation.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* I.2.2 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1952), esp. pp. 113-14.
3. It was particularly generous of Goldhammer to publish these errors. Author of a rival translation, he might have been content to be silent about them, thus leaving his translation better than ours. Instead, taking on the role of, let us say, *tuteur,* he undertook to do his best to improve ours.