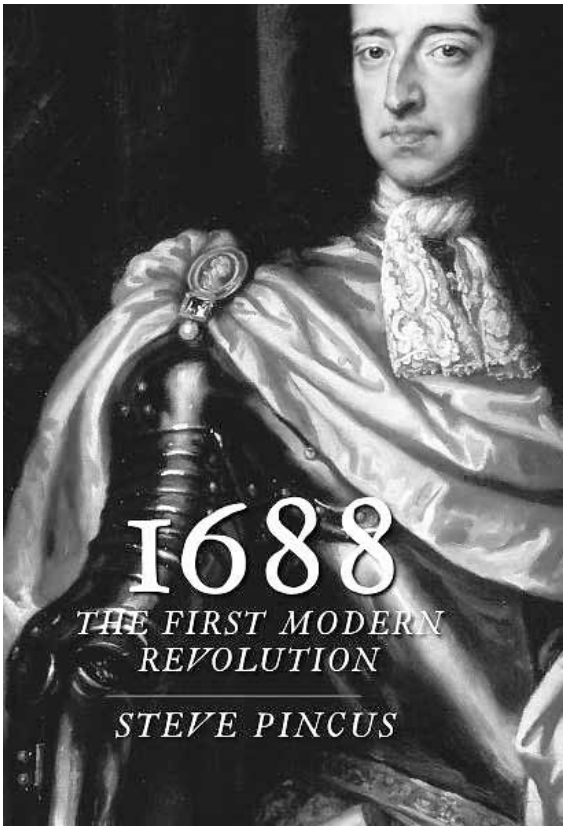

the Glorious Revolution as bloodless, aristocratic, and consensual, the actual event was none of these things … the English endured a scale of violence against property and persons similar to that of the French Revolution.'

The case is an impressive, sweeping one, and it is a laid out in a long book, rooted in years of research and buttressed by pages of footnotes. It is a case, though, that does not fully convince.

Take the striking argument that the Glorious Revolution was as bloody as the French Revolution. A footnote tells us, 'Statistics that highlight the bloodiness of the French Revolution inevitably include the Napoleonic Wars … By including the Nine Years' War (1689–97) and the wars of Ireland and Scotland – all direct consequences of the Revolution of 1688–89 – the percentages of dead and wounded are comparable to the French case.'

However, for many the bloody reputation of the French Revolution is based not on its wars but on its civil violence. It is the guillotine and not the battlefield that shapes the view of a bloody revolution. Hence, making a like-for-like comparison based on including the wars has merit, but does not form a good basis for the claim that 'the English endured a scale of violence against property and persons similar to the French Revolution', especially given the domestic implication many will take from that wording and given only the scattered and incidental subsequent comparison of violence off the battlefield in France and Britain.

Part of the book hinges on what is considered a revolution, with Pincus suggesting that revolutions should not be seen as a struggle of the new to usurp the old but rather as a staged process in which the existing power structure seeks to change and then in turn is challenged by an alternative route to change. It is a theory that prompts thoughts across many centuries and countries; in particular, whether or not the crucial early stage of revolutions is when the existing establishment starts to break down existing power structures in its own desire to bring about change – but thereby also opening up the possibility of a different form of change replacing the establishment. It is an intriguing idea, although one that in itself cannot really be supported by a book that focuses on just the one revolution.

In addition to the novel interpretation the book offers of both 1688 and revolutions more generally, it also offers an unusual reading experience as, at the end of the introduction, Pincus points readers with different interests to start reading the main book at different chapters inside. That offer reflects the breadth of a work that has been heavily praised for the detail of its research and which, whilst not convincing all fellow historians of the strength of its case, has certainly opened up new viewpoints to debate. The concentration on presenting those viewpoints means that those looking to understand the full cast of personalities or the story behind James II's accession to power will mostly not find it here.

As a result, this controversy and length, yet narrow focus, make the book more for the student of the period than for the causal reader looking for an accessible introduction.

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Prophet of democracy

Hugh Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville: Prophet of Democracy in the Age of Revolutions* (Profile Books, 2009)
Reviewed by **Sylvana Tomaselli**

The praise lavished on the 2006 hardback edition which adorns this, its paperback version, would be difficult to better. Described as 'an incomparable portrait of one of the sharpest and most sympathetic writers of all time', 'lively, comprehensive, well researched and exceeding well-written', '[a] magisterial account', as well as '[w]arm, witty, intimate, exhaustive, digressive, autumnal, and not in the least idolatrous' by well-known literary figures and academics on both sides of the Atlantic, this biography has been ranked alongside some of the greatest produced in the last century, most notably Nicholas Boyle's *Goethe*. Shortlisted for the Orwell Prize, Hugh Brogan's *Alexis de Tocqueville: Prophet of Democracy in the Age of Revolutions* was awarded the Richard E. Neustadt Prize.

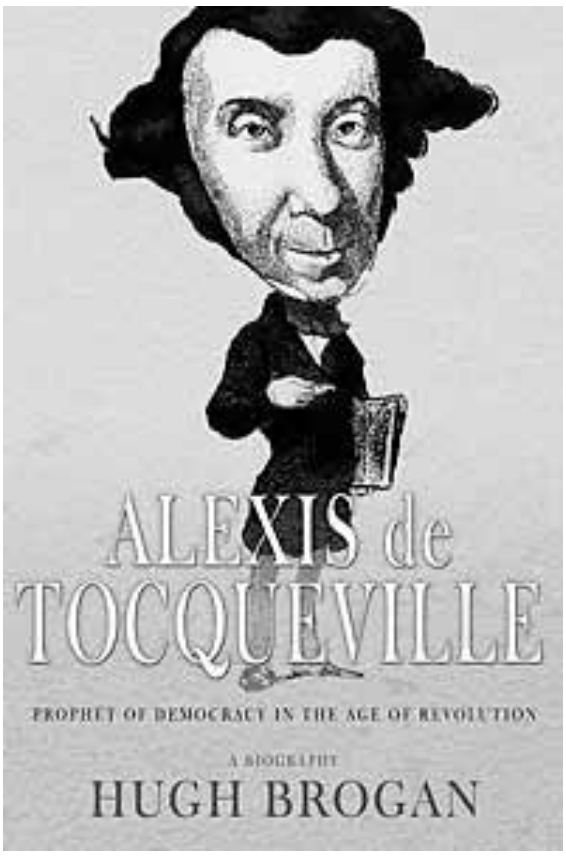
The praise is well merited. *Alexis de Tocqueville* is the first comprehensive biography in English of the greatest nineteenth-century French liberal, who formed much of Europe's view of America and its democracy, and indeed helped fashion America's own self-perception and understanding of its unique political culture. Through his influence on J. S. Mill, Tocqueville further

played a significant role in shaping British political thought and liberalism more widely, especially in relation to the liberal conception of the threats posed to it by mass democracy. A towering intellectual figure, Tocqueville was also actively engaged in much of the turbulent politics of nineteenth-century France. With the publication of *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* in 1856, he was to become one of his country's most arresting historians. To do justice to such a personage was no mean task, and Brogan of course also faced the more mundane challenges encountered by biographers of lesser men: documents lost or destroyed, closed or only recently opened archives, indecipherable hand-writing, and so forth.

The author of *Tocqueville* (1973) and co-editor with Anne P. Kerr of the *Correspondance et Conversations d'Alexis de Tocqueville et Nassau William Senior* (1991), Brogan was by no means a newcomer to his subject. Nor, given the largely uncontested relevance of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, was the celebrated Frenchman's work ever much neglected. But Brogan brings to his subject both the right sensibility and at least one particularly valuable area of expertise. As the author of the *Longman History of the United States of America* (1985), *American Presidential Families* (with Charles Mosley, 1993), and *Kennedy* (1996), Brogan's reading of *Democracy in America* benefits from a detailed knowledge of, as well as long-term perspective on, the social and political history of North America. More tangible still in his rendition of the journey Tocqueville and his companion, Gustave de Beaumont, undertook is Brogan's feel for the period, the various people the travellers met, and the land and riverscapes they went through.

Examining America's penitentiary system was the official reason for Tocqueville and Beaumont to cross the Atlantic, though it was politically very convenient for them not to be in France at the time. Using their respective reports, published and unpublished materials, their correspondence with colleagues, friends and relations as well as independent sources on prison conditions and the governance of such institutions, Brogan produces an account of what the visitors saw of and learnt about incarceration and punishment, what they missed or misinterpreted, and what they ought to have noted or what they could not – an account that is well worth reading in and of itself. This can be said of a number of the sections of this biography, but amongst the most memorable is the description of the trip the friends undertook from Cincinnati in early December 1831 to Memphis. That winter proved the harshest America experienced in half a century. The Ohio and Cumberland rivers froze, as did the Mississippi. The two men decided to travel over land. Tocqueville fell ill and the men had to take refuge in a cabin so cold that the water Beaumont poured himself froze before he could drink it. Later in the same leg of their trip, they were to see Choctaws, victims of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, on their way from their ancestral lands from which they had been forcibly removed in this terrible winter to Indian Territory, now eastern Oklahoma.

Whether in his poignant rendition of such a harrowing sight or in providing sufficient historical and political context to make the actions or inactions of Tocqueville comprehensible to his readers, Brogan writes effectively. He succeeds in covering the different facets and various phases of Tocqueville's life without losing sight of the complexities of the issues involved, whether emotional, political or intellectual. As can be expected of a biography today, it is not shy about matters of health and sex, and follows the vicissitudes of his engagement and marriage as well as those of his relations with women other than his wife before and after their wedding. This reviewer would gladly have traded these for lengthier analyses of Tocqueville's intellectual relations with contemporaries such as J. S. Mill or his debt to figures from France's past, such as Montesquieu, who pioneered the approach that Tocqueville sought to adopt, that is, to seek to determine the causal relations between all aspects of a society (from the status of women within it to its attitude towards work, money, religion, education and the arts and sciences) and its political institutions, with due consideration also to the impact of its geographical and climatic circumstances. While Montesquieu is not entirely ignored, Benjamin Constant, a major figure in nineteenth-century French political thought, goes unmentioned. There are good reasons why this is so – namely that it is unclear whether Tocqueville read him or took him seriously, if he did – but they could have been made explicit. We are given a taste of Tocqueville the imperialist, but more could have been said about his stance on Algeria and on France's colonial ambitions more generally. These are personal preferences and do not detract from what is an impressive and valuable scholarly achievement. Some readers might be taken aback by the undisguised critical presence of the biographer within this work. Brogan does stand in judgement upon Tocqueville. This is particularly, though not solely, true of his assessment of *Democracy in America*, one weakness of which, he tells us, is its 'inadequate



treatment of political parties' (p. 160) or that Tocqueville met many political actors who could have been good informants had he only asked the right questions. Done as it is, openly and unashamedly, Brogan's expression of his frank opinions actually strengthens his story and often draws attention were it should. Finally, as is not uncommon with biographers writing about noblemen and women, Brogan does appear at times to be *à la recherche du snobisme* and to project onto Tocqueville the assumptions and prejudices one might expect of a member of the Normand nobility. We, who live in times when referenda are denied us or their results disregarded until we vote as we should, will understand that one does not need to be the scion of an illustrious family to be concerned about mass democracy.

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Liberal thought

Kevin Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats since 1945* (Manchester University Press, 2009)

Reviewed by **Peter Sloman**

This is, as Kevin Hickson notes in his introduction, the fourth major academic collection of essays on Liberal and Liberal Democrat politics to have appeared over the past thirty years, following on from the volumes edited by Vernon Bogdanor and Don MacIver in 1983 and 1994 and a 2007 special issue of the *Political Quarterly* edited by Richard Grayson.[1] In contrast to the three earlier collections, however, this book focuses almost exclusively on issues of political thought and policy development within the party. In its organisation and intellectual approach, it represents a companion volume to *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945,* also edited by Hickson,[2] and it has a dual objective of drawing scholarly attention to centrists within the party as well as to strands of thought on the right and left, and of fostering interaction between academics and active politicians in the discussion of political thought. This latter ambition is achieved by bookending six thematic chapters with contributions outlining classical liberal, social liberal, and centrist approaches to Liberal political thought at the front of the book, and with commentaries by parliamentary exponents of these approaches – Vince Cable, Steve Webb, and David Howarth – at the back. It is striking that not only have all three parliamentary contributors had academic careers of their own, but three of the academic contributors (Roy Douglas, Richard Grayson and Alan Butt Philip) have also stood as Liberal or Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates, whilst Duncan Brack and Russell Deacon are also active in Liberal Democrat politics.

The quality of the contributions is consistently high throughout. In the thematic chapters, Matt Cole on constitutional reform, Russell Deacon on decentralisation, Duncan Brack on political economy and Alan Butt Philip on internationalism all provide lively and comprehensive accounts of Liberal (Democrat) thought and policy on the model of the essays in the Bogdanor volume. Although the volume was published well before the 2010 election, journalists and scholars looking to set the policies of the coalition government in the context of Liberals' historic policy commitments will find these chapters invaluable. In a spirited chapter on social morality, Bruce Pilbeam argues that rhetorical fidelity to the writings of John Stuart Mill has not prevented the party's policy approach in practice being heavily informed, implicitly or explicitly, by ideas of social rights. The final thematic chapter, by Andrew Russell, considers political strategy, and sets in a historical context the strategic dilemma facing the party in the 2005 parliament – a dilemma for which Liberal Democrats might now be forgiven for feeling somewhat nostalgic.

The thematic chapters are well complemented by the broader analytical chapters on the influence of classical liberalism, social liberalism and the 'centre' on party policy. The inclusion of Roy Douglas and Vince Cable as exponents of classical liberalism – the one a prominent classical liberal activist since the 1940s, the other the Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor at the time of writing and now Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills – has an attractive symmetry to it. Richard Grayson and Steve Webb correspondingly outline the social liberal case, emphasising the extent to which the social liberal willingness to use state power to promote greater equality and sustainability, as essential prerequisites of freedom, has informed the