

**Tocqueville in Arabia: Dilemmas in a Democratic Age.**

By Joshua Mitchell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. 208p. \$20.00.  
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— Sheldon Gellar, *University of Pittsburgh*

In his book, Joshua Mitchell adapts and updates Tocqueville's analysis of the role of religion and the impact of equality on the psychology and behavior of democratic man (drawn primarily from Volume 2 of *Democracy in America*) in order to explain the causes of the turbulence and the dilemmas created by the unfolding of the democratic age in the Middle East.

*Tocqueville in Arabia* is a personal and passionate meditation that reflects the author's religious beliefs and perceptions of the state of mind of his American students at Georgetown University and Arab students in Qatar taking his Tocqueville and Western political theory courses.

Like Tocqueville, the author argues that the transition from aristocratic to democratic societies is a turbulent process, fraught with dangers and setbacks. Equality brings with it a weakening of existing social relations that bind society together, as well as the emergence of what Tocqueville called "lonely" man who, becomes "delinked" man in Mitchell's terminology. Besides opening up new opportunities, equality increases competition and anxieties that did not exist during the aristocratic era.

Despite their outer confidence, the author sees his Georgetown students as fragile and anxious about their futures and adversely affected by the evolution of American society since the 1960s. He deplores the erosion of family values, sexual mores, and church connections. Students prefer hanging out and companionship to marriage and having children. Students look more to shallow "spirituality" than to religion for guidance. They do not understand that suffering and failure is part of life and that everyone cannot have and deserve the same degree of success.

Tocqueville and Mitchell both agree that there can be no freedom without religion and that religion tempers materialism in democratic society. However, they differ somewhat concerning the mode of religion that should prevail. Mitchell's criticisms of his Georgetown students imply that the delinked man would do well to return to family, church, and traditional Christian values to overcome materialism and rebuild community. Although critical of the watering down of religious beliefs in America during the 1830s, Tocqueville was more accepting of the decline of dogma and efforts of individuals in democratic societies to seek general principles and commonalities among religions, rather than stress their differences as inevitable in the democratic age. Tocqueville observed that religious tolerance permitted American Catholics to

thrive despite being a minority and to enthusiastically adopt democratic norms and separation of church and state.

In Qatar, where Mitchell taught from 2005 to 2008, his Arab students were increasingly becoming part of the global youth community in embracing the social media and equalitarian norms. On the other hand, they still functioned as aristocrats enjoying a privileged status in society, which they expected to preserve, and maintained relationships based on loyalty and obligation to their extended families. Despite their opening to Western cultural trends, they still accepted traditional orthodox modes of Islam. In wealthy monarchies like Qatar, students adopted democratic notions of equality without really understanding the concrete forms and processes that are needed to make them work.

Chapter 4, on religion, presents a conservative Augustinian perspective concerning the fall of man, emphasizing original sin, the imperfectability of man, the impossibility of avoiding suffering, and Christ as the incarnation of God. These themes appeared in Mitchell's *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (1995), which claimed that Tocqueville's analysis of the role of religion in the democratic era had its roots in Augustinian thought.

Mitchell recognizes that equality before God is part of Islam's teaching and is a tenet held not only by Christians. More significantly, he asserts that in declaring Islam's inability to thrive in a democratic age, Tocqueville was simply criticizing orthodox Islam and thus did not dismiss out of hand, Islam's potential for a democratic order. In short, Christianity is not the only way forward toward democracy. Building on this assumption, Mitchell succinctly presents his own formula as to how a democratic order could emerge in the Middle East that would be compatible with Islam:

"If indeed religion shapes the mental habits that guide man to the political form he adopts, then what can be said about the supposed universality of democracy? First, and foremost, democracy may not be universal at all; second, *if* democracy is to emerge in those regions without a Christian heritage, it can only do so by relying on the religious heritage that already exists there. In the case of the Middle East, democracy will have to emerge within the context of Islam or not at all" (p. 175).

This perspective offers a solution as to how to navigate the difficult transition to democracy in a deeply Muslim Arab world. Mitchell warns that his students will need to avoid two extreme paths: a) the pitfalls of "reenchantment," which calls for a return to some idyllic pure form of Islam that never existed, and b) violent "socialist" revolutions that purport to abolish inequalities and social injustice by leveling society and destroying perceived enemies and those opposing the revolution.

Mitchell is especially critical of experiments in “socialism” in countries like Iraq under Saddam Hussein that brought great cruelty and suffering, destroyed much of the old order, and rendered society dependent upon a powerful state and tyrannical ruler. He is also concerned about the temptation of people with no democratic traditions or weak ones to turn to a strong dictator in order to avoid anarchy and chaos.

His solution lies in finding a middle path that will build upon and modify existing religious traditions and social practices over time, while introducing democratic reforms. For example, Mitchell suggests that a constitutional monarchy might be the best path for countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia to take on the road to democracy, a position held by many of his Arab students.

The last section of the book contains an epilogue with a sharp critique of American foreign policy and the State Department for not investing in learning more about the culture, history, and religion of the Arab world before launching wars of liberation and for assuming that the overthrow of a dictator like Saddam would be in itself sufficient to install democracy.

*Tocqueville in Arabia* is not without flaws. Mitchell’s summing up of the forces shaping the generation formed by the 1960s is based largely on his personal recollections as a child rather than on the historical record. Georgetown students do not represent a microcosm of American students, nor do the 24 students he taught in Qatar represent more than the thinking of a small group of privileged Arabs. Generalizations about American and Arab students on the basis of such a small and skewed sampling must be taken with a grain of salt.

Despite these caveats, the book provides an excellent demonstration of the ways in which Tocqueville’s modes of analysis and insights can be updated to shed more light on major issues confronting democratic societies like our own and those in the making. It also offers the basis for a genuine conversation between conservative and liberal readings of Tocqueville concerning the future of democracy in the twenty-first century and the validity of alternative paths to the preservation of freedom.

**Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear: From Absolutism to Neo-Conservatism.** By Marc Mulholland. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 416p. \$65.00. doi:10.1017/S153759271400139X

— Jeremy Jennings, *King’s College London*

“How beastly the bourgeois is.” This is the title of a poem by D. H. Lawrence, and I could not help but think of it as I worked my way through Marc Mulholland’s account of bourgeois liberty from the seventeenth century to the present day. Lawrence’s mockery of this “fine specimen” in “God’s own image” is pitiless. Let the bourgeois be faced, Lawrence wrote, “with another man’s need, let him come

home to a bit of moral difficulty . . . and then watch him go soggy, like a wet meringue.” Mulholland seems of a similar mind, for the central proposition of his monograph is that the attachment of the bourgeoisie to civil and political liberties is only skin deep. When the going gets tough—when, in particular, the bourgeoisie are faced with the radical demands of “proletarian democracy”—they cut and run into the arms of the authoritarian state, conveniently forgetting their previous commitment to the principles of constitutional government. Hence, the author observes, the historical charge that the bourgeoisie are betrayers of liberty.

The book begins with a fine illustration of this bourgeois mentality. Mulholland quotes Heinrich Heine’s comment in 1842 that the politics of the bourgeoisie were “motivated by fear” (p. vii). Mulholland might easily have cited many examples to prove the point. In the June Days of 1848, for example, Alexander Herzen came across the arch-liberal Alexis de Tocqueville, rifle in hand, on his way to help put down the workers’ rebellion. Read the correspondence of Hippolyte Taine and you see with what relish he applauded the slaughter of the Communards in 1871. On this account, the politics of bourgeois fear was responsible for the defeat of the European-wide revolutions of 1848, the illiberal unifications of Italy and Germany after 1860, the “liberal failure of nerve” before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the turn to interwar fascism, and the maintenance by the West of military dictatorships during the Cold War. As Mulholland states, it is this narrative that he sets out to examine (p. vii). And, of course, this narrative is, in essence, a Marxist narrative.

It follows that those who have never found this narrative to be compelling might find Mulholland’s study to be of little or no interest. The numerous references to staid capitalism, monopoly capitalism, militarized capitalism, cartel capitalism, and other variants of capitalism might leave such readers feeling slightly punch-drunk. So, too, they might find the numerous glib *marxisant* generalizations—Benjamin Constant is reduced to the status of “constitution-monger,” for example (p. 28)—to be rather irritating.

By way of consolation, there are some interesting insights along the way, and Mulholland’s text is undoubtedly broad in scope, beginning with the transformation of absolutism in seventeenth-century England and ending with the recent financial crash or “Great Recession.” Here, it is surprising how relatively little attention is given to the French Revolution. It was this event, and especially the blood-letting associated with the Jacobin Terror, that arguably gave birth to the politics of bourgeois fear and that remained the nightmare for bourgeois liberals throughout the nineteenth century. Only the Bolshevik Revolution managed to dislodge it from its much-deserved prominence in the catalog of bourgeois horror stories. If nothing else, the French Revolution showed that the bourgeoisie were right to be frightened of what