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978-0-521-87788-6 - French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society?

Annelien de Dijn

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FRENCH POLITICAL THOUGHT FROM MONTESQUIEU TO TOCQUEVILLE

This study makes a major contribution to our understanding of one of the most important and enduring strands of modern political thought. Annelien de Dijn argues that Montesquieu's aristocratic liberalism – his conviction that the preservation of freedom in a monarchy required the existence of an aristocratic 'corps intermédiaire' – had a continued impact on post-revolutionary France. Revisionist historians from Furet to Rosanvallon have emphasized the impact of revolutionary republicanism on post-revolutionary France, with its monist conception of politics and its focus on popular sovereignty. Dr de Dijn, however, highlights the persistence of a pluralist liberalism that was rooted in the Old Regime, and which saw democracy and equality as inherent threats to liberty. She thus provides a new context in which to read the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, who is revealed as the heir not just of Restoration liberals, but also of the Royalists and their hero, Montesquieu.

ANNELIEN DE DIJN is a postdoctoral researcher in the History Department of the University of Leuven. She has also been a visiting scholar at the Columbia University History Faculty and at the Cambridge University History Faculty. This is her first book.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> viii
Introduction	I
1 Political thought in eighteenth-century France: the invention of aristocratic liberalism	II
2 Liberty and inequality: the royalist discourse	40
3 A society of equals: the liberal response	68
4 Liberty in a levelled society: Charles Dunoyer, Benjamin Constant, and Prosper de Barante	89
5 The new aristocracy: a theme in Restoration liberalism	III
6 The danger of democracy: Orléanist liberalism and Alexis de Tocqueville	129
7 The French predicament: aristocratic liberalism in the Second Empire	155
Epilogue	185
<i>Bibliography</i>	195
<i>Index</i>	210

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