

2001 *Tocqueville between
Two Worlds: The
Making of a Political
and Theoretical Life*

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Sheldon S. Wolin

Sheldon Wolin is one of the great political philosophers of the past half century, a man who almost single-handedly revived the tradition in 1960 with his *Politics and Vision*. That work, both in its original edition and in its greatly expanded version of 2004 (Princeton), is a powerful critique of attempts to turn political study into a science, and a profound exploration of creative vision in the history of political thought. Four decades later, the publication of this, his second major book, was welcomed as a true event.

Wolin's great achievement is to present Tocqueville in the round, as a man torn between two worlds in several senses—torn between the life of politics and the life of the mind, between France and America, between the old and new regimes in France, and between his own aristocratic past and the world's democratic future. He presents Tocqueville's work as a vital early attempt to grapple with many of the forces that still constrain politics today—the relentless advance of capitalism, science and technology, and state bureaucracy. Though critical of Tocqueville's ambivalence toward democracy, the book was also a paean to Tocqueville as “perhaps the last influential theorist who can be said to have truly cared about political life.” As such, it is not only a monument to Tocqueville but a testament as well to Wolin's own lifelong passion for the political.

