

force to destroy any self-affirming Western consciousness and European national identity. Although politically less violent than other Lefts, it is culturally and socially more radical.” A fearful commitment to the *pure intention* makes its bearers all the more determined to ignore any aspect of the *real* reality that conflicts with their vision. Conservatives should put Gottfried’s book in the first place on their urgent reading-list; they should study it, along with its author’s previous book, and they should do their best to come to terms with it.

The Secret of American Vitality

Scott P. Segrest

Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006). 230 pp.

Ellis Sandoz’s most recent book brings all his prodigious learning to bear on a matter evidently close to his heart: the meaning of America—in itself, and for the world. As the title of the book suggests, Sandoz sees religion as in some sense central to America’s deepest identity. His earlier book *A Government of Laws* was a meditation on the meaning of American republicanism with its defining features of liberty and the rule of law. Sandoz there found that both features were seen by founding-era Americans to be grounded in spiritual freedom and higher law, liberation from the dominion of base passions, and freedom of conscience in serv-

ing God. In *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America*, Sandoz probes the sources of America’s founding more deeply and considers more directly the continuing relevance of the founding in today’s world, in particular in the face of the new Islamist threat. Thus, this second book can be seen as a companion volume to the first.

Superficially, Sandoz’s concern in the new book is captured in the questions raised at the outset of Chapter Two: “What is old, what new, about American liberty and constitutionalism? What maladies most threaten liberty and aspirations to rule of law regimes, in America and elsewhere?” But liberty and the rule of law, defining features as they are, do not for Sandoz get to the heart of things American. He wants to determine the underlying experiences that make them intelligible. On this fundamental level the book asks: What is the secret of American vitality in a Western world otherwise in serious decline? How might this comparative robustness be safeguarded and maintained?

The book is largely a collection of essays—some new, some previously published—and accordingly the current of thought is somewhat discontinuous. The first half of the volume is a searching meditation on the roots of American political order, while the second half is devoted largely to an analysis and interpretation of Eric Voegelin’s philosophy. What on a first reading seems an abrupt change of subject, in hindsight looks like a deepening of the initial inquiry. The first four chapters deal with the foundations of American life and politics and the forces threatening to undermine them; the next four deepen the inquiry by applying Voegelin’s ideas. Together, these eight chapters prepare for Sandoz’s assessment in the ninth chapter of America’s place in the modern world and its prospects for preserving the achievements of its civilization.

The specific content of the book defies

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summarization. As in *A Government of Laws*, the material here is dense and the argument tightly woven. This book demands the most careful reading and alert sensitivity to Sandoz's method: "Silently underlying the argument at every stage, in effect, is the Socratic invitation to look and see if this is not the case—then and still now the way to truth is through the exercise of critical reason in a dispassionate assessment of pertinent experience."

Early on Sandoz suggests that the reigning secular ideologies of the American intelligentsia are inadequate for understanding either America or its Islamist adversaries. Looking to the founding, Sandoz is "reminded that, if war is too important to be left to the generals, then history is surely too important to be left to the historians—not to mention political scientists, many of whom blithely write as though the Enlightenment dogma of their complacent persuasion has rightly ruled for the past three hundred years and seldom mention, except disparagingly, religion as having much to do with the rise of modern democratic republicanism." Religion, on Sandoz's showing, had a great deal to do with this development. "Advocates of republicanism in the Anglo-American Whig tradition (to be distinguished firmly from French Jacobinism, which was both atheistic and anti-property) assert[ed] liberty and justice in resistance against tyranny and arbitrary government and [did] so in the name of highest truth." That truth consisted of a Protestant Christian understanding of reality: "The imperfect, flawed, sinful being *Man*, for all his inability, paradoxically yet remains capable with the aid of divine grace of self-government." He has not merely a right but a positive duty to resist tyranny as he has a duty to resist evil.

Sandoz makes the historical case for the specifically religious component of this attitude with peculiar force in the first chapter of

the new book. He cites recent scholarship showing that the series of revivals beginning in the 1730s with what is called the Great Awakening and continuing well into the nineteenth century were pivotal in the formation of the American community. As he stresses, *homonoia* (likemindedness about what is good and right) and corresponding fellowship in common convictions are "fundamental matters": "it is not the institutional *forms* that were decisive (if they ever are)," but rather, forms are "'auxiliary precautions' of consequence." We must, therefore, recognize that the institutional forms of American constitutionalism came out of and were meant to reinforce a preexisting community of understandings, values, and habits, in order to understand the significance of those institutions and the culture they help to organize. The American community, Sandoz thus maintains, was decisively shaped by Protestant Christianity, as informed by Greek and Roman classicism. The ideas of modern writers such as Locke helped the founders organize government and society, but that arrangement of powers was put into the service of a biblical view of human nature and a classical-Christian ethics. The revivals lived up to their name and revitalized the culture.

This *homonoia* or community of shared understanding and conviction is the "soul of America" mentioned in the book's title. That soul, Sandoz suggests, was formed by religion and disciplined and supported by a government of laws. "The great secret" of American republicanism is "that a *sound map of human nature* (as John Adams insisted) uniquely lies at the heart of the Constitution of the United States and its elaborate institutional arrangements.... All of this would have been quite inconceivable without a Christian anthropology, enriched by classical political theory and the common law tradition as uniquely embedded in the habits of the

American people at the time of the founding and nurtured thereafter.”¹

Sandoz’s conclusion about the founding, quoted from his own *Government of Laws*, is that “the founding was the rearticulation of Western civilization in its Anglo-American mode.” The context of this rearticulation was American resistance—in the spirit of Edward Coke—to the drive to absolutism that was sweeping Europe and appeared to be infecting the British system. In Britain this took the form of increasingly arbitrary governance: claims of absolute sovereignty by Parliament (signaled menacingly in the Declaratory Act, in which Parliament asserted the right to “bind the colonies in all cases whatsoever”) and the willful opposition of King George III.

In the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights the framers reformulated and codified the Anglo-American common law tradition, which itself was consciously grounded in the older natural law tradition. The elaborate checks and balances and divisions of power in a government of, by, and for the people owe an especial debt to the biblical view of man as dangerously corrupt despite bearing the divine image. Madison, taught and tutored at Princeton by that staunch old Presbyterian philosopher-statesman John Witherspoon, captured the balance, and the heart of Christian republicanism, in *Federalist* 55: “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust: So there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.” These understandings of man, of the Anglo-Ameri-

can legal tradition, and of republican government were inculcated into the leading founders through a college education steeped in the classics of Greece and Rome and Britain (Chapter Three) and nurtured in founders and people alike by widespread and constant Bible-reading and congregational religious practice (Chapters One and Three). The final result was “Americanism,” as

Jefferson called it—“the ‘common sense’ of the country’s founding generation”² (Chapter Four).

The chapters on Voegelin are also pertinent to the American question. Although Sandoz has contributed notably to Voegelin scholarship, here he reads and analyzes Voegelin in order to apply his scholarly and philosophic breakthroughs to a consideration of the truth of Americanism and its essential elements. This is clearly no mere historical enterprise, or

at least not history in the vulgar sense. Sandoz really wants to know: Who are we, and how shall we live together?

One of Sandoz’s most provocative and profound suggestions is that the American experiment, in so many ways unprecedented and exceptional, was nonetheless fundamentally *anti-modernist* in spirit and substance. American resistance to the rising tide of absolutism was in fact a resistance to modernity. This is the great paradox of our country. America, at once so strikingly modern on the surface, and in all its instrumentalities, is at the same time profoundly anti-modern beneath, in moral and spiritual orientation. The spirit of modernity is atheistic and absolutist (see Chapter Seven), but it was in the French Revolution, not the American, that modernity first made its grand (and terrifying) appearance. The secret of Ameri-



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can vitality, it seems, is its unique blending of Christian piety, a sense and belief of being grounded in a source beyond ourselves (God), classical theory and praxis, and modern mechanics of government.

It is not adequately appreciated how much the Islamist mindset has partaken of the modern spirit. It has rejected atheism but has surrendered to a totalitarian will to power, in this case the will to impose its fantasy visions on the world. Sandoz has this ravenous, restless evil much in mind as he considers the possibility that we enter a new epoch in world history. We are seeing “the collapse of ideologically identified power structures”—most recently, the Soviet communist empire (following the Nazi and fascist imperialist ventures)—and “the rise of fledgling democratic states” in the aftermath. This is a time of opportunity for American-style constitutionalism, but it is also a time of great peril, because ideological “pneumopathologies” [Voegelin’s term] still live both in the West and among our current adversaries. Thus Sandoz ends with a challenge that echoes the last lines of his *Government of Laws*: “We still have a republic, if we can keep it, but now as it did then, that takes faith no less than intelligence.”³ More specifically, he suggests, the survival and spread of free government will require a renewal of those deeper sources, those spiritual experiences of faith and reason, that made our republic possible in the first place.

1. RRSA, 50. Italics in original. 2. *Ibid.*, 105. 3. *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

The Neoconservative Way of Thinking

Ted V. McAllister

In Defense of the Bush Doctrine by Robert G. Kaufman (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007). 251 pp.

Some books are of the moment, slamming their bows straight on into contemporary political storms. Robert Kaufman’s *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine* is one such book. Some book reviews are of the moment too, written during the maelstrom in hopes of discerning which way the wind is blowing. This is not such a review. By the time this review enters the conversation the book will be many months old and circumstances will have changed. But Kaufman’s argument raises many broader and deeper matters than does the present conflict in Iraq or even the “global war on terror.” This is a book that presumes rather than proves, and what it presumes goes to the center of the intellectual divide separating conservatives and neoconservatives. Kaufman, a self-proclaimed neoconservative, understands the world and its machinations in light of a very simple theoretical perspective and an even simpler moral casuistry. In his book one finds a number of historical “lessons” but nothing approaching historical understanding. All serious arguments in this book are deductive, despite the many historical references.

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