

The principle behind the Bush thinking, the book says, is, "this is a new world." As a matter of fact, the world that we face today is an exceedingly old world: terrorism as a substitute for armed strength, violence against "the other," the arrogance of the affluent, the careless expectations of the powerful, and the ambitions of the zealous are all as old as the Bible to which George W. Bush so passionately ascribes.

The president says testily at one point in the book to Democrat Thomas Daschle, "I'm in the Lord's hands." One rather thinks, after reading this book, that much of the time now we all are indeed. ■

Georgie Ann Geyer is a nationally syndicated columnist and the author of Guerrilla Prince, The Untold Story of Fidel Castro.

[Democracy: The God That Failed: The Economics and Politics of Monarchy, Democracy, and Natural Order, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Transaction Publishers, 220 pages]

The Democratic Road to Tyranny

By Clyde N. Wilson

HANS-HERMANN HOPPE'S theoretically disciplined examination of the present sad state of Western governments has received considerable and well-deserved attention. His diagnosis of the disease is superb. His recommended cure—the maximum individual disengagement and community secession from the state—is worth serious consideration by those who have learned that government is now without limits and its growth unstoppable by a mere change of parties.

His starting point, which used to be taken for granted by all thinkers in the

tradition of American republicanism, is that society is distinct from and more important than government. The purpose of government should be to protect society and otherwise interfere with it as little as possible. Man is a social being and naturally forms societies in which families go about the business of finding material and spiritual fulfillment, Hoppe's "natural order." But the state no longer nourishes society. (Hoppe would probably say it never has.) Rather it preys upon and distorts society.

This evaluation of the United States and other Western governments is what distinguishes real libertarians and real conservatives from the left libertarians and neoconservatives who flourish today, as well as from mainstream party politics. Hoppe means to appeal to true libertarians and true conservatives, and he definitely has much to say that we should hear.

Why has the state become malignant to society? Hoppe's answer is democracy. He prefers monarchy, for which he builds a strong historical and theoretical case. Historically, the European monarchies of earlier days did not possess more than a tiny fraction of the power over life and property that democratic governments do. Monarchs could not collect income taxes or conscript the national manpower for total wars. They could oppress individuals but could not effectively oppress whole classes.

Theoretically, a monarch has incentives to nourish rather than loot his realm. Since it is the property of himself and his dynasty, it is in his interest to have a happy and wealth-building people over the long term, and the best way to achieve that is to leave them alone. Contrast that to democracy in which the rulers have no incentives to pursue the long-term welfare of the people. Since their possession of the benefits of rule is temporary, their incentive is to maximize their profit out of existing wealth and maintain their popularity by its redistribution.

Alas, the theory is pretty persuasive. Jefferson was making the same point

when he said that "the earth belongs to the living," by which he meant that the current generation can enjoy the usufruct of the earth. It cannot be bound by past generations, but more importantly, it has no right to bind future generations with its overspending and debts. John C. Calhoun was making the same point during the Jacksonian era when he damned the "spoils system" by which those who profited from government (that is, politicians and their beneficiaries) had become a class unto themselves that pursued power without reference to any other interest or principle. Thus, elections had become games designed to mislead the people rather than to represent them.

One can agree that democracy has in some sense failed, but I am not sure it was ever really a deity. Certainly it was not to the American Founding Fathers. Despite the heated rhetoric of grasping politicians, it seems to me that thinking people have always regarded democracy in the way that Churchill did—it is not a very good form of government, just better than all the others known.

That was certainly Jefferson's attitude. Since men are sinful and grasping, none can be trusted with much power (even to secure the alleged goods promised by the Hamiltonian elitists). That government which governs least is the best, and it is most likely achieved by adhering to the sense of a majority of serious citizens, who have no personal agenda. C.S. Lewis defended democracy on the same grounds. Because of original sin, none of us can be trusted, so it is best to have as many sensible people as possible in on the decisions that affect all.

Interestingly, the people who today are making a deity out of "global democracy" as "the end of history" are not democrats but (former?) socialists who used to worship socialism in the same way.

In what sense has democracy failed? The polls indicate that nearly seventy percent of the American people want to curtail the high levels of immigration we have been "enjoying" in recent years.

The president, the congress, the media, and both political parties will not respond to the people's will or even allow their concerns to become a matter of public deliberation. Is this a failure of democracy or a failure to have democracy? (Of course, the polls also seem to show 58 percent of the people approving of the president's plan to make unilateral war on a foreign country.)

It can be called a failure of democracy in the sense that the people do not rebel against being governed by federal judges, faceless media moguls, nameless bureaucrats, and the champion scoundrels who have managed to work themselves into "leadership" of the two-party system. But is it possible that conditions might improve if we had more democracy rather than less?

I agree with Hoppe that paper constitutions have proved ineffective checks on government usurpations of power. The Old Republicans had come to the same conclusion by the 1820s. If a president can launch a war by his own decision and federal judges can give sweeping orders to citizens and officials about personal and local matters, then it is deceitful and ludicrous to argue over interpretation of a document that is no longer binding except in minor details.

I am inclined to give a bit more weight to other offending factors than the undoubted villainy of career democratic politicians in the excessive growth of government. Governments have grown in Europe, I suspect, because of class conflict, envy, and the over-active Germanic penchant for order. In other words, national characters must bear some of the blame.

I know a young lad, twelve years old or so, who comes from a liberal Midwestern family. Concerned about the over-consumption of oil, he wrote the president not long ago that to conserve fuel he should make everybody ride horses. This is unfortunately one side of the American national character that has been with us since the settlement of Massachusetts Bay. I have an insight, therefore the federal government must make it imperative and universal. This

is why Bob Dole, who claimed to have the Tenth Amendment in his pocket, and George H.W. Bush pushed through the Americans with Disabilities Act. In order to make themselves feel benevolent, they were willing to extend federal control over every building and parking lot in the fifty states and impose immense costs upon the people. You cannot blame this on democracy, I think, or even on redistributive envy.

Unlike Hoppe, I have not completely lost faith in democracy, though I value his telling critique, nor do I have quite as much faith in monarchy. In fact, what we have now is exactly what Jefferson meant when he espied a tendency toward "monarchy" in some parts of the American body politic. Nor am I quite convinced, as much as I admire Hoppe's Rothbardian analysis, that the operation of economic man freed of the burden of government will solve everything. Society and man's life are finally God-given mysteries that do not yield completely to rational action. There are intangibles. For instance, an army that defends its people has to have in its nature something more than the organization and skill of a defensive force hired by an agreement among property-holders.

Democracy: The God That Failed is an exemplary exercise in rigorous thought about government that is nearly absent from scholarly discourse today and completely absent from popular discourse. It is full of remarkable, telling, and quotable insights.

The author knows that we are not likely to restore monarchs, who are made by history, not by choice. The problem is to roll back a state that has already destroyed far too much of society's natural order and has already advanced to within a few steps of real tyranny. What we should do, he argues, is distance our minds and our goods as much as possible from the state. This means curing ourselves of its sacralization and recognizing it for the burdensome intrusion that it is and forming natural associations that withdraw themselves as far as possible from its

reach. That is, try to regain a measure of the self-government of communities of men, which is what democracy was supposed to be about to begin with. ■

Clyde N. Wilson is a professor of history at the University of South Carolina and editor of the Papers of John C. Calhoun.

[Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime, Eliot A. Cohen, The Free Press, 248 pages]

Solid History, Shaky Theory

By Correlli Barnett

IN *SUPREME COMMAND*, Professor Cohen has in effect interwoven within one volume two quite different narratives. The first consists of shrewd, well-informed, and insightful portraits of four great national leaders in time of war (Lincoln, Clemenceau, Churchill, and Ben-Gurion), while the second, and the less convincing, consists of an academic's thesis on the correct functional relationship between ruling politicians and their top military advisers and commanders.

Of Cohen's four chosen national leaders, only Abraham Lincoln came to supreme command without either some previous personal experience of war or of living through a time of major conflict. He therefore had to learn the trade of supreme commander while in the saddle after the guns had begun to fire. As Cohen shows, Lincoln brought to this process a quick intelligence and an open, questioning mind. He was fortunately endowed with a combination of clear politico-strategic vision and a grasp of military nuts-and-bolts.

Lincoln confronted all the greater challenge because, in American terms, the Civil War was unprecedented in its sheer human scale and because it also