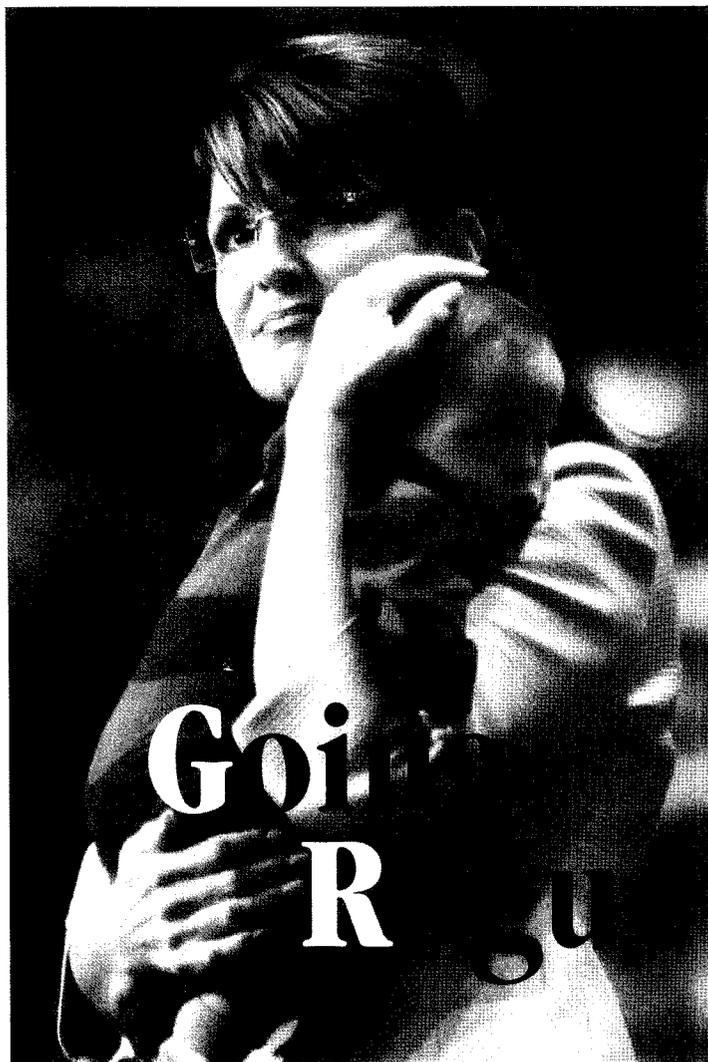


ARTS & CULTURE



B O O K S

Sarah Palin's independent, thoroughly American intellectual grounding

by Sarah Palin

**HarperCollins, \$28.99, 2009,
413 pages, cloth**

Reviewed by Gregory Sanford

A regularly expressed, and thoroughly understandable, reservation with regard to former national Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin is whether or not she possesses the intellectual interest, tools, and background to lead America's post-World War II conservative intellectual movement. Or, putting it, perhaps, more correctly, is she led *by* it? Has she read Hazlitt, Kirk, Meyers, Kendall, and Chambers, Burnham, de Toledano, and Hayek, not to mention more contemporary thinkers and conservative intellectual leaders such as Friedman, Buckley, and Muggeridge? Has she read *National Re-*

view, *Human Events*, *Reason*, and *The American Spectator*? The bookshelves at Ronald Reagan's ranch, I am told display *The Conservative Mind*, *God and Man at Yale*, *Up From Liberalism*, *Suicide of the West*, and *Witness*. Would we find those volumes crowding Palin's shelves in Wasilla?

Frankly, I recall no mention of them in *Going Rogue* — *An American Life*. But I submit that the book answers the larger question that concerns us here in the affirmative. Palin is every bit as motivated by the largest ideas of contemporary American conservative thought as Reagan was and, what may be of even greater importance, she seems to have come to them independently of the classic influences that informed many

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of this journal's readers: by osmosis of life, by experience, by family, and directly through religious experience.

Of course, prior to any consideration of Palin's intellectual background we must seek to ascertain what sort of mind she has. After all, even Arnold Schwarzenegger has read Milton Friedman, but the experience influences his behavior in office not at all. It is one thing to read Hayek, quite another to be led by him when the chips are down. Another way to ask this question is to inquire what really matters to Sarah Palin: will she sacrifice the immediate interests of her own career and of her family and friends when conservative principles say she should? This is an essential question because its answer tells us how she sees the world. Abraham knew that following God's will was right — even to the point of sacrificing his own son's life, and not just objectively and broadly but specifically for himself and even for his son. For another example, George Washington knew that sacrificing the immediate interests of his officers and men in obtaining back pay was the right thing to do when respecting the authority of Congress required it. In 1783, for instance, he defused the so-called "Newburgh Conspiracy" involving many of his most senior officers over the issue of moneys owed them for years of service to their country. They had come together to declare a military dictatorship in defiance of Congress in order to obtain what was owed them, but Washington knew much

*Washington, according to contemporary accounts, first delivered prepared remarks, but then could see that his men remained confused and uncertain, not quite appreciating what he had said. With a sigh, he removed from his pocket a letter from a member of Congress, saying he wished to read it to them. He looked at the letter without speaking, then took a pair of reading glasses from his pocket saying: "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country." Witnesses record that tears filled many of the officers' eyes as they recalled the many battles, privations, and varied life and death experiences they had endured alongside their commander-in-chief and that the rebellion died on the spot.

more was at stake in the incident than back pay. He knew he must remind his men of their responsibilities to far more than their immediate personal concerns.*

Palin's *Going Rogue* is full of similar such instances in which she places her personal concerns in second place to her responsibilities to the people. In straightforward language, for instance, Palin describes an all-too-typical and familiar sequence of events that she witnessed in Alaska.



.... People look at the Republican Party today — the supposedly conservative party — and say, "what happened to the Reagan legacy?"

.... it looked to me as if [national Republicans] thought they could achieve a permanent majority by compromising their principles. In the end, they lost both.

That bled on down to the state level. I saw it happen in Alaska. It's why our GOP-dominated Legislature, where the Rs outnumber the Ds, turned into a Democrat-controlled Legislature. A few Republicans gave key committee assignments to the most liberal Democrats in Juneau, just so they could secure favors and big titles. It's why, even with billions of dollars in state savings accounts, we couldn't permanently

repeal a fuel tax or a tire tax that hit the people in their pocketbooks. It's why I had to veto huge budgets. And why, when I vetoed a government expansion program, it was ultimately overridden. Its why an outnumbered Democrat, Hollis French, who was handed the Senate Judiciary Committee gavel by just a few Republicans, was empowered to kill a parents' rights bill that would have protected our daughters from invasive surgeries without parental notification.

One of the best books written on Reagan, Peter Schweizer's *Reagan's War*, describes Reagan, the man, as a "hedgehog" in contrast to most of his contemporaries in politics. "Fifty years ago," wrote Schweizer, "philosopher Isiah Berlin wrote an essay titled 'The Hedgehog and the Fox.'" Schweizer quoted the Greek poet Archilochus, who said, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." The many things the fox knows mostly have to do with the mundane daily movement of the people and the money and the power. But the "one big thing" the hedgehog knows is an overriding idea that shapes an overall ap-



proach to life, to politics, or to whatever the large topic in question may be. These “big ideas” are not always true, but they always shape human beings. They are the ideas that move human history. In politics, they are such ideas as monarchy or democracy or republican government, the rule of law, human freedom, and Marxism and Nazism. These ideas do not merely occupy the minds of men, they work actively within them. They develop and introduce themselves into social and political life. Eventually they will manifest themselves as ethical codes or systems of government or road maps guiding political behavior. Even liberalism, which consists primarily in the rejection of ideas, is itself just such a hedgehog’s “big idea.”

“The ‘one big thing’ Reagan knew,” Schweizer wrote, “was the power and value of human freedom, which proved to be the defining principle and value of his world view For more than thirty years, Reagan embraced a vision for dealing with the Soviet Union and ending the Cold War that was remarkably consistent and proved to be decisive.”

Modern American conservatism serves many such “big ideas.” The decisive question about Sarah Palin — the answer that separates her from the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the sort of Republicans who cravenly gave away their power in the Alaska Legislature — the answer to the question: what sort of mind does she pos-

sess? puts her squarely in the camp of the hedgehog, Ronald Reagan. What are the “big things” Palin knows? They are actually old ideas — old, anyway, as we in America measure time and history. Russell Kirk identifies them with John Adams and Edmund Burke.

Both [men] declare the necessity of religious belief to sustain society, both exalt practical considerations above abstract theory, both contrast man’s imperfect real nature with the fantastic claims of the *philosophes*, both stand for a balanced government which recognizes the natural distinctions of man from man, class from class, interest from interest.

“It is weakness rather than wickedness which renders men unfit to be trusted with unlimited power,” Kirk quotes Adams as writing. Anyone who reads *Going Rogue* will recognize these familiar themes from Palin’s own ideas and primary motivations. She introduces Thomas Sowell’s book *A Conflict of Visions*, describing the left’s “unconstrained vision” (Sowell’s term) as one that sees human nature as “changeable (therefore perfectible) and that society’s problems can all be solved if only the poor, ignorant, disorganized public is told what to do and rational plans are enacted Conservatives ... know that human nature is flawed and that there are limitations to what can be done in Washington to ‘fix’ society’s problems.

“Commensense Conservatives deal with human nature as it is — with its unavoidable weaknesses and its potential for goodness. We see the world as it is — im-



perfect but filled with beauty. We hope for the best. We believe people can change for the better, but we do not ignore history's lessons and waste time chasing utopian pipe dreams"

The trouble with the left's vision is that it always becomes an addiction indulged far beyond its own viability. If they pursued it only to the point it proved itself illusory there'd be little trouble except for the waste of time and resources to that point, with the educational value the experience afforded to mitigate even that "waste." But they never want to stop there. As Tom Bethel has pointed out, the left is finally learning how little inclined the common man is to being "reshaped" into New Socialist Man, with the bizarre outcome that the very people who began as the left's special darlings soon become its most despised victims. If man won't be changed, let him be destroyed. We now see precisely that sentiment in action in the draconian anti-people program of the socialist "environmentalists." And again, in response to such left-wing abuse of power, we see in Sarah Palin the altogether conservative answer. "The role of government is not to perfect us but to protect us — to protect our inalienable rights" — from whom? From the government itself, of course. "The role of government in a civil society is to protect the individual and to establish a social contract so that we can live together in peace."

Palin's account of her political career is one long record proving that these are not merely words she draws forth to sound Reaganesque. I open the book more or less at random and immediately locate an altogether typical passage reading: "So I had to make something happen. I prayed long and hard. I loved the job. And I had to consider that by making any drastic moves I would be crossing swords with the most powerful men in my own Party. My political career would be over. My whole future was before me. But I also knew I couldn't sit there and be a party to all of this."

That's hedgehog-speak. It is an irksome — to "moderates" — determination to respect the realities of life above

our own convenience and even our most cherished pipe dreams that sets the so-called "moderate" Republicans running for cover or firing their howitzers in the direction of the "rigid," "unbending" conservative. Such unwillingness to compromise, to cut deals, to cave in, always strikes these folks as too extreme to win election to anything, no matter how often it is proved to be the only kind of Republicanism capable of winning majorities of Americans to the GOP banner.

It is the quality that the left understands, because it shares and fears it. The left, with good reason, fears Republicans who won't cut deals, Republicans who know what they are trying to do, where they want to go, and the ends they want to serve. The left fears Sarah Palin. My conclusion for conservatives is not to worry about Palin's capacity to lead our movement. She is the genuine article and, as countless massive crowds of enthusiastic supporters — and the sheer terror she ignites in the souls of Democrats who understand exactly the sort of conservative that is required to defeat them — as both these clear signs attest, Palin is a winner. She is a hedgehog of thoroughbred conservative markings; she gets the idea, she knows what it takes to serve people, and, what is more important, she knows, like Abraham, Washington, and Reagan, that standing with what is right is what she is in politics to do.

What, then, should concern conservatives about the Palin phenomenon? It is that the left is learning where our own most potent strengths lie faster than we are. The left thought Reagan could be laughed off; actually hoping on several occasions that he would win nominations so they could run against and smash the woefully over-conservative candidate. They now know better, as they showed in their concerted efforts to destroy Palin as soon as she surfaced in the McCain campaign. Again,

they know the kind of Republican that defeats them. Conservatives should learn the lesson equally well and prepare for and fight from the beginning to defend Palin and the natural strengths of the GOP banner she brings to the battle. With full grass roots and rank-and-file conservative support, which she amply deserves, Palin can win.



Who's afraid of Sarah Palin?

CPR



Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe

by Robert Gellately
Knopf, \$35, 2007, 720 pages
with full index, cloth

reviewed by Denis Norrington

What can one learn from studying the careers, successes, and ultimate ends of the three most evil despots of the 20th century? According to Dr. Gellately in his book, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe*, examining the history of their respective regimes allows readers to gain important insights regarding the roots of dictatorships, the elements contributing to their survival and ultimate demises, and the traits of these three men that contributed to their rise to power.

It has plenty to teach us about the ultimately disastrous policies they undertook for their respective nations and how the results of these policies contributed to the current state of world affairs more than 56 years after the death of the last of them, Joseph Stalin, in 1953.

This well-documented work makes extensive use of archives of the former Soviet regime that the Russian government has released since the fall of the Soviet Empire and that have now been collected at Yale University. It is perhaps no surprise that most current academics have shown little interest in this gold mine of history. This lack of interest is symptomatic of the latent and, in some instances, overt sympathies that exist among Western academics for the former Soviet Empire and for regimes that take the USSR as their model. A notorious intellectual apologist for the old hard-line communist regimes, Professor Eric Hobsbawm of the United Kingdom, stated frankly that the deaths of 15 to 20 million people in the old Soviet Union would have been justified if the “radiant tomorrow” of the socialist utopia had been achieved.

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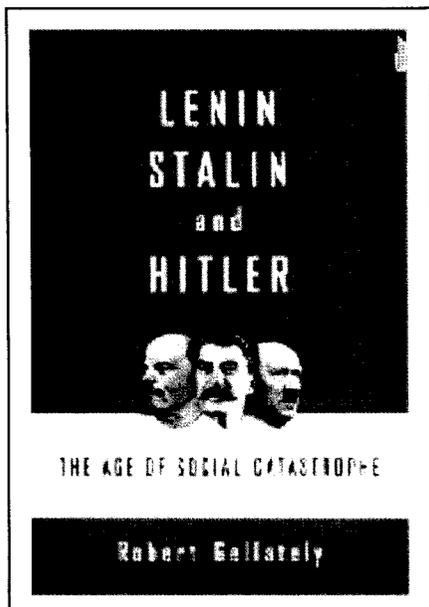
Maybe the next time success will be achieved if 30 million are eradicated. This may have been where Bill Ayers, (President Obama's confidant and ghost writer) found his idea that a "successful" socialist revolution in the USA would require the deaths of from 10 to 20 million Americans. At least that's what an FBI informant close to Ayers during his "Weather Underground" days said the unrepentant leftist said to him. As the old saying goes, to make an omelet, you have to break eggs.

Professor Gellately said many of his colleagues were distressed by his inclusion of Lenin. Many of them have bought into the myth of the "good Lenin" whose heritage and policies were supposedly betrayed and destroyed by his successor Stalin. The author amply demonstrates the falseness of this notion. It was Lenin who conceived of and instituted policies of direct terror as methods of political dictatorship. When the one election the communists allowed to take place at the beginning of their regime went badly against them, Lenin merely instructed the Red Guards to close down the Duma and undertake arrests of anyone who protested. Stalin learned much of his dictatorial methods, including his greatly expanded use of terror and the construction of vast networks of concentration camps, from Lenin. Indeed the hypocrisy of those who denounced Stalin upon his demise can be shown by pointing out that Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor whose condemnations of the old Soviet dictator made headlines in the West, was one of Stalin's most brutal enforcers and supporters. Khrushchev was responsible for the extension of the policies of terror and mass execution into the Western Ukraine and Eastern Poland when the communists occupied those areas in 1939 following the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that made Hitler and Stalin allies temporarily.

The parallels and contrasts between Hitler's Nazi regime and that of his communist

counterpart are both intriguing and instructive. First of all, unlike the Soviet regime in Russia, Hitler and his Nazi Party for the most part had the support of a majority of the German people. Indeed prior to their accession to power, the Nazis were the plurality party in free elections. After Hitler became dictator, he developed what amounted to a majority "consensus" around his regime and policies. This consensus was aided by Hitler's, and his supporters', constant efforts to develop policies that were popular in Germany and, until the outbreak of World War II, held the use of direct terror and police state brutality to a minimum. Thus, even though the Nazis eliminated democracy and freedom, most Germans supported Hitler and his regime as long as they appeared to be successful in "fighting crime," establishing "good order," and restoring economic prosperity to the Ger-





man nation.

By contrast, both Lenin and Stalin justified their dictatorial brutalities by citing Lenin's so-called "key" addition to socialist ideology: the theory of an "enlightened" dictatorial elite, an ideological "van-

guard," that had a right to lead because it knew better than the people what was best for society. One who examines the history of socialist ideology following the death of Karl Marx will find a void regarding specifically what tactics socialists are to use to seize power because Marx never said how it was to be accomplished. Eventually, socialists split between English Fabian types who believed the ballot box was a legitimate tool for socialists to use while accepting the restrictions imposed by democratic politics and those who said, as Lenin did, that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was just that — an unrestrained tyranny run by an elite dictatorial group (the communist vanguard) who knew the "proper" and "correct" direction the society should take to become a Marxist-socialist utopia. Hitler was certainly no self-restrained Fabian, but his regime did lean somewhat more toward respecting and relying upon popular support for its policies than did those of Lenin or Stalin.

What parallels and conclusions can be drawn for contemporary politics, both here and abroad? For one thing, Stalin served as an ideological mentor to Mao and his Chinese communists. The author points out that Stalin's book, *The Foundations of Leninism*, bears a significant resemblance to Mao's *Little Red Book* that became a Chinese communist's "holy text" during the the Cultural Revolu-

tion. Interestingly, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin helped trigger the Sino-Soviet split between Russia and China, a development Nixon attempted to use, ultimately unsuccessfully, to salvage an acceptable conclusion to the Vietnam War. As far as current U.S. politics is concerned, perhaps Pelosi's idea of developing "consensus politics" has some basis in the idea of a quasi-dictatorial regime nonetheless enjoying majority support among the American electorate. However, as polling has made it apparent that any such "consensus" has been evaporating rapidly, Democrats may be falling back on the old Leninist principle of an "enlightened" dictatorial elite who know what is best for the nation without regard to whether or not electoral majorities oppose it.

In conclusion, I should also mention that Dr. Gelately's book contains an enormous wealth of historic information. A fairly substantial portion of it consists of necessarily continuous summaries of the extensive mass imprisonments, executions, and brutal suppressions undertaken by all three of these dictators. While much of this is mind-numbing in its extent, it gives an accurate history of the horrible excesses of all three dictators and how they guided their respective regimes toward what ultimately became the Holocaust known to us as World War II.

CPR





First Things

The horse race

by John Kurzweil

Most political journalists like to say they are “not rooting for either side, just looking for good stories.” That usually translates into covering the political horse race — leaving out the very elements that explain it, though trying to be as objective as possible.

One way or another, this attitude is responsible for most of the misreporting we all see even from solid, honest reporters. It simply is impossible to understand American politics without at least knowing the most basic elements moving the three sides actively slugging it out in our political arena — conservatives, leftists, and liberals (or, more descriptively, the side favoring America's free way of life, those who hate it and hope to destroy it, and the always-ready-to-compromise “moderates” who strive mainly to avoid treating seriously their responsibilities as a self-governing people).

The tacit justification underlying this “not rooting for either side” position is that it is the only safe way to avoid biased reporting. On the contrary, however, all that is required to report objectively is an essential commitment to honesty (*i.e.*, truth, one of the First Things). Perhaps paradoxically, walking around this obvious reality, liberal reporters actually open themselves up to every sort of bias,

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leading to unbalanced reporting on more or less every issue. Soon we see them, like Dan Rather, justifying even conscious bending of the truth when it serves “the right side of history.” As the more perceptive reporters in Moscow during the Stalin-era 1930s used to say of the preposterous official government reports they received every day showing the most impossible Stakhanovite exaggerations: “its all true except the facts.”

The horse race is emphatically *not* the most important element in elections. Honest reporting begins with a straightforward look at voters' true motivations and objectives in casting ballots. We see precisely the opposite in all the balderdash about Massachusetts voters “continuing in the protest mode that elected the Democrats to Congress and the White House.” This Democrat line-of-the-day on the recent special election is not just self-delusional: it reflects a refusal to admit that “truth” matters (*that* would require taking sides — a man can't seriously take truth into account without rooting for those that stand with it).

The media's near-universally wrong estimations of Ronald Reagan's political strength is another glaring example of the misreporting fostered by the “not rooting” canard. If you root for neither “side,” you will inevitably notice

and count as essential everything *except* what actually moves voters. (The best book on why Reagan acted as he did and why he won remains Peter Schweizer's *Reagan's War* which looks first at what made the man go and, consequently, what voters saw in him that they liked.

Life is about the First Things, which regular readers know I consider to be good, life, love, truth, and beauty. All humanity's dreams are about achieving them, especially in one's own life; its nightmares begin with fleeing them. Life's great lie, leading inexorably to despair, is that we can live and be fulfilled without reference to the First Things — that we can live for wealth, power, a comfortable existence, even peace (a meaningless concept if, again, it is separated from reliance on the First Things — What is peace without freedom and personal security from attack? So-called anti-war folks routinely act as though peace was no more than absence of war, but no peace is to be found in Communist or Islamic societies where everyone is endlessly subject to the real possibility of the tyranny visiting them or their loved ones, destroying them.) Can any political analysis explain what is actually happening without “rooting for either side”? In a word: no.

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