

# **THE CHARACTER OF NATIONS**

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**HOW POLITICS  
MAKES AND BREAKS  
PROSPERITY, FAMILY,  
AND CIVILITY**

Revised Edition

**ANGELO M. CODEVILLA**



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# PREFACE

**A**s an adolescent Italian immigrant to the New York of the 1950s, I adapted to a way of life I had not imagined. A half century later, the American way of life that I learned then has changed in ways that neither I nor those who taught it to me imagined. How might it change yet again?

The Greek classics teach us that habits make for very different ways of life, and that habits are subject to change. Plato and Aristotle's descriptions of how Lycurgus's laws made the Spartans dogged while Solon's laws made the Athenians expansive make sense. So does Thucydides' account of the Macedonian barbarians adopting Greek ways while any number of Greeks were degenerating into barbarism. And what is Roman history if not the tale of human character and political institutions rising and falling intertwined? The more we live and travel—and the more deeply we reflect about faraway times and places—the more we wonder what it would take for us to live like others, and for our country to change into yet something else. While the lesson that peoples really are different, and that they can change, is as old as Herodotus, fooling ourselves into thinking that all the neighborhoods in the global village are alike, that they will remain as they are and always were, is all too human.

We are interested in how habits change peoples because the character of the American way of life is up for grabs perhaps more than ever before, and because our government and the sectors of society associated with it—our regime—affects our character arguably more than it did generations ago, when it was smaller. Even as our regime is bringing about vast changes in how we live, liberals and conservatives are trumpeting ideas for social engineering. This book is intended to give pause to all social engineers by making the case that the powerful levers they want to pull really are

connected to living tissue, that each scheme for reform has reasonably well-known effects.

As a student, as a naval officer, and as a professor, as a civilian fulfilling various assignments within the U.S. government, and as a consultant, researcher, lecturer, and curious tourist, I have been privileged to poke into almost every corner of the world, to read about it, and to talk about it with interesting people. This has strengthened my awe for the countervailing powers of habit and contingency. By and large, people live as they do primarily by following old patterns. Nevertheless, ways of life change because everywhere some make themselves champions of “new modes and orders,” which Machiavelli says is the hardest thing in the world, but the most powerful.

I confess to sympathy with John Adams’s *A Defense of the American Constitutions* and *Discourse on Avila*, which surveyed the world’s political systems. Adams found it easy to imagine the world’s peoples digging themselves deeper into misery, despotism, depravity, and superstition, but more difficult to imagine them raising themselves to the prosperity, civility, decency, and piety in which the American people of his time found themselves. Indeed, thought Adams, the Americans should realize how precarious is their hold on the virtues responsible for their happiness, how “strait is the gate.” Along with Adams, I see new modes and orders as not so likely to improve human character as they are to worsen it.

Political science, as founded by Aristotle, had as its principal object understanding the human consequences of certain forms and acts of government. The great tyrannies of our time challenge political science to explain how so many peoples have changed so much. Walking around the last of the rubble of postwar Germany as a college student, I found it difficult to understand how the solid burghers I met could have been party to the Holocaust. What could have led such nice folks to do that? My political science courses hardly gave a clue. But Hannah Arendt explained, much as Aristotle would have, how their regime had made evil banal. I read that the Soviet Union had murdered on an even grosser scale. Arthur Koestler and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—not political scientists—explained the effects of living by lies. How could the superpolite Japanese people, who are filling the world with Sonys, have wreaked unspeakable cruelties around the Pacific? General Douglas MacArthur explained how one facet of this people’s character gave way to another. The Japanologists were otherwise occupied. This is why I have preferred the old political science to the new, and from the outset of my career wanted to write in the style of Aristotle and Montesquieu,

of Alexis de Tocqueville, Walter Bagehot, Lord Bryce, and Ferdinand A. Hermens. I wanted to grasp the meaning of our time's regimes by looking at their effects, the better to understand how America's regime is shaping us.

Since the following is political science in the old style, it does not mean to prove anything. It is an essay that musters facts because the author thinks they point to interesting phenomena. Notes are provided to help the reader check quotes, to provide the sources of statistics, to indulge some tangential thoughts, and to thank authors from whom I have learned. This book contains no facts previously unknown. It does bring the experiences of faraway places and times to bear on choices very close to us.

I began this book during my decade as a senior research fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution (1985–1995) and am indebted to a number of colleagues there whose wisdom enriched and delighted me: to the late Lewis Gann for his wisdom on Africa, Germany, and the English language; to Mikhail Bernstam and Robert Conquest for years of discussions on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia; to Hilton Root for insights on economics in China and the Third World; and to Thomas Metzger and Ramon Myers for introducing me to the interaction of Confucianism and the West. I am also indebted to Thomas West of the University of Dallas, and to the Claremont Institute in general, for discussions on the character of the American founding; as well as to the late Hernan Cubillos for countless conversations on the Chilean revolution of 1973–1990. I thank also graduate students David Corbin and Matt Parks and undergraduate Meredith Wilson, all of whom were at Boston University in the late 1990s, for helping with the original research. I alone am responsible for all interpretations and errors.

Since the first edition of this book was published in 1997, the regimes it described have evolved, and my reflections on them have deepened. This second edition draws from the ensuing decade's events and includes illustrations of our topic that are more familiar and lively. It also considers some aspects of the topic in greater depth and detail.

*This book is about the logic of modern regimes and how that logic affects America.* That is why, after explaining what regimes are, it focuses on how the legacy of the Soviet Union—the twentieth-century regime in which all of the elements of modernity were concentrated most heavily, the one in which modernity's logic unfolded most fully—affected the prosperity and civility, the families and souls, and the capacity for national survival of the people who lived under it. While we can be grateful that nowhere on earth, least of all in Russia, are any of that monstrosity's elements as virulent today

as they were between 1917 and 1991, nevertheless some version of them tempts regimes pretty much everywhere. That is important, because the logic of modern regimes exposes all of them to modernity's temptations. Because modern regimes administer much, the number of prominent persons who constitute them tends to be large. Few, if any, sectors or aspects of society are beyond their reach. To keep from wrecking prosperity, civility, family, and spiritual life, modern regimes would need powerful reasons. They seldom seek them.

Though production is the key to prosperity, redistribution is the economic logic of modern regimes. Whether in Russia, Asia, Europe, or increasingly in America, government itself or association with it is the likeliest path to plenteous, pleasant living. It matters less whether the government owns businesses, as in Cuba; mandates detailed operations, as in Europe; or permits economic activity as a privilege, as in China. The rulers' degree of discretion is key. Modern regimes determine prices, and it matters less whether it is by taxes, by regulations, by management of trade, or by manipulating credit and the value of money. Economic modernity—as it exists, for example, in the European Union—consists less of high tax rates than of exquisitely detailed choices of the categories and even the individuals who benefit, and at whose expense. By subsidies or rules, modern regimes make valuable things that would be worthless, and vice versa. Because regimes can make you a hot commodity, bankrupt you, or save you from bankruptcy regardless of your stupidity, the most economically profitable thing you can do, whether in Europe or Argentina, or China or Chicago, is to worry less about producing than about building a profitable relationship with the regime. Because exchanging economic privilege for political support is the essence of modern government, access to economic opportunities and enjoyment of the fruits of one's labor depends increasingly on what part you play in holding up the regime.

Economic life in America has become inexorably more modern as more and more people at the top, bottom, and even the middle of society have found it increasingly normal to stake their prosperity on the state. Whereas by the late 1990s, even as state power over the economy was growing, there was superficial consensus that it should not, and the subsequent decade saw America's upper socioeconomic end increasingly behaving as if it were entitled to having government cover its bets. The financial panic of 2008 became the occasion for the government authorizing itself to spend \$700 billion on top of some \$300 billion, and otherwise assuming responsibility for over

\$8 *trillion* in private liabilities. The point was to save from bankruptcy whatever businesses it thought worthiest. Not surprisingly, industry after industry argued that it deserved public financing. The winner of the 2008 presidential election, for his part, said that “the middle class” (itself the source and repository of the nation’s productive energies and wealth) needed to be “rescued.” Who would rescue whom? To whose profit?

The Republican administration of President George W. Bush initiated, and the administration of his Democratic successor expanded, the practice of “rebating” taxes to people who do not pay them—that is, of transferring money from those who pay taxes to those who do not. Composed of interchangeable people, they patronized the lowest strata with “compassionate” programs that they administered. In short, the regime punished the prudent and productive to patronize the imprudent.

The notion that any regime could distribute society’s wealth, pick winners and losers while abstracting from its own interests, that it would treat political supporters and opponents equally, is not worth a second thought. In sum, our regime, with the American people in tow, seemed to have accepted the premise that all are *entitled to expect* the government to guarantee their dreams—the very premise that led Argentina, wealthy in the 1920s, to food riots in the 1960s.

Citizenship and the rule of law are even rarer than economic prosperity. Our Declaration of Independence’s statement that “all men are created equal,” and its exposition of the logic that proceeds from it, sound even stranger to modern ears than to those of the late eighteenth century. That is because modern thought developed antibodies to the notion of God-given human equality. Whether through paths traced by Rousseau, or by Hegel, or by V. I. Lenin, Fidel Castro, John Rawls, or Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, the former French president, who authored the European Union’s constitution, the conclusion is the same: Ordinary people are equal only in their duty to meld into large organizations in which the rules are made for the good of all by those who know best.

In the most recent decades, however, in America as elsewhere in the Western world, regimes have added a new twist to old arguments about why ordinary humans are unfit to rule themselves—namely, that government must depend on science, which dictates that peoples must surrender to their betters plenary powers over where and how they live, how much and what kind of energy or even food they consume, in order to “save the planet” from human habitation’s effects. The details of such rules being purely



scientific and technical, so goes the argument, it would be inappropriate to debate them and subject them to contending interests. Yet, given the existence of contrary interests, scientifically inspired government must harmonize them. Special sensitivity to especially important matters is also the main premise of the argument for why judges and bureaucrats should decide such matters rather than persons tainted by politics. Because this argument has gained so much traction, this second edition examines its roots and consequences in some detail.

Few peoples live under rules of their own making. While some modern regimes have chosen to apply their laws more regularly than others, the American people were well nigh alone (Switzerland excepted) until the late 1930s in making and administering the laws under which they lived, mostly at the local level. Later, as the United States joined the ranks of administrative states, U.S. laws became grants of power to administrative agencies to make the actual rules by which we live, and local autonomy withered.

The effects of modern regimes on family life have continued to develop along a simple logic: As much as it can, the state deals with men, women, and children as individuals with inalienable duties to itself, and with such relationships with one another as each individual may choose. While there have been vast differences in the actual "family policies" of the Soviet Union, Sweden, China, Europe, and the United States, the assumptions underlying them have varied less. The actual condition of families varies widely, from, say, Japan, where they seem most coherent; to Sweden, where they barely exist and few seem to miss them; to Russia, where at least the women seem to miss them terribly. Nevertheless, the result has been a general decline in the rate at which families form, in how long they last, and in what responsibilities they bear for their members. In America the overall (though slower) decline in the various indices of family health can be understood by paying attention to a peculiarly American habit, as old as the nation itself, namely, the tendency of the population to sort itself out according to habits and preferences. Thus there are some sectors—notably unchurched blacks—among which families have practically ceased to exist, and others—Orthodox Jews, Mormons, conservative Catholics, and evangelicals—in which families thrive.

Sorting out and secession are natural reactions to cultural and above all religious differences. Separation of religious communities was the twentieth century's dominant demographic fact. The Indian subcontinent saw Hindus and Muslims separate. Whereas in 1900 Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived

side by side from the Caucasus to Morocco, a hundred years later the Christians had retreated to Armenia and Georgia or gone to the West, while the Jews were concentrated in Israel. No sooner had the Soviet empire's dissolution given the Orthodox and Catholic populations of the Balkans and Eastern Europe their freedom than they used it to push away from one another, if not to make war. The millennial strife between Sunni and Shia Muslims became arguably the force driving wars from Gaza to Baghdad.

No doubt, identity politics drive this strife and separation more than zeal over theological particulars does. Nevertheless, the non-Western world is alive with a lively life of the spirit. In China, that life includes perhaps 60 million who practice some kind of Christianity, as well as countless adepts of native cults. The government, eager to tap into what it perceives are the roots of Western civilization's strength, sponsors the teaching of Christianity in the universities. Seemingly understanding that spiritual emptiness is unsustainable, the Chinese regime approves unofficially of its people living spiritual lives as long as they do not threaten it politically.

By contrast, Western regimes have gone out of their way to deny their peoples' and polities' kinship with Christianity—the drafters of the European Union's constitution rejected references to it vehemently and repeatedly. In America, arguing that America is a Christian country endangers careers. Spiritual emptiness, the proposition that human life is qualitatively indistinguishable from animal life and hence meaningless, holds monopoly status in the schools. More important, acceptance of it is *de rigueur* for interacting with those who count. Moreover, Western regimes have tried to engender ersatz sentiments of reverence for “the planet,” and for their own status as priests of the culture of liberating meaninglessness. Though this culture is entrenched in regimes, and though it has diminished or suppressed the West's Christianity, it has not engendered enthusiasm, even among its priests.

Whereas in cultural as in other matters Europeans are habituated to following their regimes—usually passively—or revolting, Americans typically tend to gather into subcultures, turning their backs on, and disengaging from, religious as well as secular leaders they dislike. In short, many Americans have reacted to our regime's cultural policy as they have to its family policy: by sorting themselves out into subcultures. Hence America's pluralism is a long-term challenge to its regime—and not just on matters of the spirit.

At all times, however, regimes depend for their survival on their armed forces' willingness and capacity to win battles. Ultimately, these depend on

the population's identification of their lives and fortunes with the regime. Arguably (but seldom noted), modern regimes differ from their ancestors of a century ago most significantly in the diminished—often to the vanishing point—willingness of their peoples to defend them. The Soviet regime died in August 1991 when it could not find within its armed forces—the world's largest—a few hundred men to capture the rebellious Russian parliament. That regime, compared with its Russian successor—never mind the regimes of Western Europe—had devoted thought, resources, and brutality to ensuring its forces' responsiveness. They did not answer the call simply because the regime had long since lost the capacity to attract, or to compel, commitments of lives.

Note well, however, that the number of modern regimes that can inspire or compel men to lay down their lives for them is very small. Certainly it does not include any Western European regime. The world's tinpot tyrannies, from the Middle East to Africa and the rest of the Third World, generate plenty of violence through hired thugs. Sometimes, as in the Iran-Iraq war of 1981–1988, they can get people to kill one another by appeals to race, backed by police. Even China's regime trembled in 1989 as it scraped the bottom of its military barrel to find a unit willing to put down a student revolt in Tiananmen Square. In sum, most modern regimes are militarily fragile because their subjects do not see them as worthy of sacrifice.

In this as in other matters the American regime is exceptional, but becoming less so. If, as in Tocqueville's time, religion's pervasiveness is the first thing that foreigners notice in America, patriotism is surely the second. Although, like religion, willingness to fight for America is spread unevenly among American demographic groups, it is widespread enough to make of America probably the only country that can draw a large, reliable army from its population. But as that willingness and that participation in the armed forces becomes more and more peculiar to demographic groups that feel themselves less and less in tune with the regime, as America's regime becomes more and more like those of Europe, and as the regime's military ventures rack up one unsatisfactory end after the other, so is America's military losing its uniqueness.

The change began in the 1950s, as the social groups that make up the regime began to look down on their fellow citizens' revulsion to communism. During the Vietnam War, America's leaders revolted against those they had sent to fight it and withdrew from the armed forces. America's upper and upper-middle classes did not return, but imposed on the armed forces ele-

ments of their own culture: acceptance of homosexuals and restrictions on prayer. Our regime, absent in body and estranged in culture, especially scornful of the traditional military goal of victory, became accustomed to using the armed forces in ventures from the Balkans to Iraq that were neither war nor peace, that were more obviously related to regime goals than to American interests—but that got a lot of people killed nevertheless.

Alas, military incompetence is not the only drain on the sources of the American people's commitment to the regime. Increasingly, the regime has come to represent the opposite of the image that the American people have always had of our country. America, such is the image, is a place of bounty, which anyone may acquire without interference from one's presumed betters. Here, if nowhere else, "all men are created equal." Hence, if you live by the laws that you've had a hand in making, you need not suffer those who look down their noses at you. America is by, of, and for families; by, of, and for divine worship and thanksgiving. An equal among equals, you are familiar with weapons and are proud to defend a public realm that is very much your own.

In contrast with this vision, our increasingly Europeanizing administrative regime restricts opportunity. The grounds on which it does so—fairness, the environment—matter less than the fact that the restrictions on prosperity go along with an increase in the distance between the rulers and the ruled, between "authorized persons" and the herd. Americans are not used to such distinctions, or to being looked down upon for devotion to God and family. Add to this that our regime has not been successful as a manager of prosperity or as a healer of social maladies, that it has earned the reputation as a loser of wars.

In sum, different as the world's regimes are from one another, the modernity they share is affecting the peoples who live under them in ways that are comparable, and from the comparison, we may learn how our increasingly modern regime may affect us.

# INTRODUCTION

Day by day, case by case [the Supreme Court] is busy designing a Constitution for a country I do not recognize.

—JUSTICE ANTONIN SCALIA, *ROMER V. EVANS*

Americans have had reason to be nonchalant about government—at least until recently. We know that government cannot make us rich or wise—never mind good—and we would like to think that neither can government corrupt us into poverty and degeneracy. Our common sense tells us that people make their own poverty or prosperity, their own freedom or servitude. Moreover, until recently, Americans thought that the choices bearing on what kind of people we are had been made once and for all a long time ago, and we did not suspect that as we wrestled with the problems of the day we were changing our habits for the long run. Whereas once we were sure that the future would bring only more wealth, freedom, and happiness, now we realize that the range of possibilities is much broader.

Anyone over forty is tempted to think of the America in which we live as a different country from that in which we grew up. The changes in the ways we make our living, in how we raise children, and in what we expect from the future dwarf the physical and technological changes. And when we ask ourselves why so much has changed, we usually wind up talking about government. We then wonder how we might change further and how the things that our government does or does not do might make the

difference between our living in the land of our dreams or of our nightmares. Agree as we might that our character makes the biggest difference in how we live, we realize that government influences citizens' character, just as the character of citizens shapes the government. Regardless of where we begin, we are compelled to deal with the relationship between how we govern ourselves and how we live.

Consider a snapshot of life in New York City. In July 1994, after lengthy deliberation, the city government decided that a person riding the subway stark naked could be arrested—but only if the individual was smoking. Whereas an earlier generation of city officials would not have hesitated to protect the community against “indecent exposure,” by 1994 it was difficult to find an official who would explain that concept. But there was broad agreement among officials that subway riders should be protected against secondhand smoke, something unknown to these officials' parents. The change from intolerance of public nudity to intolerance of public smoking is just a whiff of what amounts to a revolution in American public life.

Or consider this: Until the late 1960s, on any Friday night in late spring, the streets of New York were full of wandering prom couples in tuxes and long gowns. These couples would close the bars, open the bakeries, and watch the sunrise from the Staten Island ferry or from the city's big bridges. Few feared for their safety any more than for their sobriety. Nowadays, serving beer to eighteen-year-olds is a crime, and anyone wandering the streets of an American city until dawn would be suspected of having suicidal instincts.

Or think about this: Very occasionally, a teenage couple would generate a pregnancy, typically followed by a shotgun wedding—a lesson to one and all that, as people sang then, “love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage.” Nowadays, the horse and carriage of sex (not to mention love) and marriage are increasingly uncoupled. Two-thirds of black children and one-fifth of whites are born out of wedlock.<sup>1</sup> If the young man causing the pregnancy is lower class and if he sticks around, he may share the girl's welfare payment. If he is above that, he normally joins in pressuring her to have an abortion, regarding the baby as an intrusion on bigger agendas. The very term “shotgun wedding” is hardly understood, and the compulsion to marital responsibility that gives it meaning is generally abhorred.

This revolution of mores is just as evident in public life. While in the 1960s, Nelson Rockefeller never got to first base as a presidential candidate because his divorce shocked public morality, by the late 1970s cohabitation had become so widespread that divorce and remarriage seemed conservative

by comparison. Thus, no one suggested that Ronald Reagan's divorce and re-marriage disqualified him as the leader of American conservatism—never mind for the presidency. Then again, an American who graduated from college before the mid-1960s might well have come across the words of Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*: "He that is a righteous master of his house will be a righteous statesman."<sup>2</sup> To later graduates, such sentiments are as foreign as the text.

Or reflect on this: In 1965, four-fifths of the members of Congress were veterans of the armed forces, and an exemplary military record was essential for men to advance in society.<sup>3</sup> In 1992, the country elected a president who had made no secret of his disdain for military service; and any young man trying to succeed in the corporate world, the media, or academe found that if military service did not disqualify him outright, it marked him as a social stranger with unsavory lower-class odors.

Nor will it do to describe the changes among us as a loosening of rules. No, the rules are as tight as ever, maybe tighter, as tight as anywhere. But they are different. Can one imagine an American television station today airing a drama about a repentant homosexual who confesses his sinful lifestyle to a priest? That is no more conceivable than a discussion of the sins of communism on Soviet television under Leonid Brezhnev. Modern America has its taboos no less than remotest New Guinea. But these taboos are ever changing. Some are brand new, while others are outright reversals of old ones. In our America, a single ethnic joke or even a remark merely susceptible of racial interpretation can cost a career. Thus, Howard Cosell's thirty years in sports broadcasting ended during a Monday night football game when he said of a great run by the Washington Redskins' Alvin Garrett: "Look at that little monkey go!" And although no law forbids the traditional English-language coverage of both sexes by masculine pronouns, nor has any law disestablished the words Miss and Mrs., editors importune authors to use gender-neutral language, as well as the appellation Ms.

Today, unlike a generation ago, one can do what one pleases to an American flag, anywhere. But no one is free to pray publicly in a public school. Students have been suspended for singing Christmas carols.<sup>4</sup> Police forces today must warn criminal suspects of procedural rights, but unlike in former years, police and other government agencies can now seize property without ever bringing criminal charges. More officials than ever have the discretion to subject individuals to onerous procedures. A fire chief in Massachusetts who relieved a small flood was fined his net worth for breaching

a beaver dam without a permit, a Florida homeowner was fined \$10,000 for killing a squirrel that was eating his garden, and an eighty-year-old New York woman was put through “the process,” including a strip search, because a cop did not like her attitude. All that anyone needs to have his or her life wrecked in modern America is to become some bureaucrat’s pet project or fit some agency’s “profile.” For example, people charged with sexual abuse of children can now get life in prison on the basis of testimony “recovered” from toddlers by experts, and a kindred expertise has turned spanking recalcitrant children, once the sign of dutiful parenting, into child abuse, about which the government solicits anonymous accusations. Above all, the list of things one can do today without some kind of permission from government is shorter than ever. So, not only does America “define deviancy down,” in the words of Senator Daniel P. Moynihan, it also defines other kinds of behavior “up”—out of deficiency into normalcy—as well as creating wholly new categories of things that are praiseworthy or beyond the pale. In short, it will not do to describe our America simply as a place where “anything goes.”

It is not necessary to protract the list of contrasts to see that our lives today differ more from those of Americans one generation ago than they do from those of our contemporaries in Western Europe. In short, we have changed enough to change countries. Some of us like the new country better than the old one. All will prefer some feature of the old or of the new. But that is not the point. Since we are continuing to change, a generation from now we might well live in yet another kind of country. For this reason, we should ask: What can become of us? What kind of people do we want to become? Another question, more immediately to the point, arises: What are the long-term consequences of our political choices on our capacity to be prosperous and civil, on our capacity to defend ourselves, and on the quality of our family lives and our spirit?

This book is about how, in various times and places, systems of government, or regimes, affect the economic, civic, familial, spiritual, and military habits of those who live under them. It does not attempt to give “the whole picture” of what is happening regarding any given set of habits in any given country, much less in the United States. The full picture includes the various forms of resistance to the regime by various parts of society, the struggles, and how they come out. But this book has the simpler task of describing what regimes do. Its premise is that governments and the leading elements of society—which together constitute what is variously called “the



Establishment” or “the regime”—have a lot to do with supporting ways of life, with tearing them down, or with building new ones.

## CHOICES—RADICAL AND NOT SO

The America described by Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s, when John Marshall was chief justice, Andrew Jackson was president, and Daniel Webster was in the Senate, left a lively record of a kind of life fostered by its own kind of rules. That life, based on propositions self-evident at the time—a sovereign God and a very limited government—is remote enough from us to provide, if not a set of realistic options for political organization and economic and social policy in our own time, then an extreme pole by which to judge the direction in which we are moving. At the other extreme, and equally unlikely to be pursued wholeheartedly by the whole American people, is the life toward which much of mankind has been moving in our time. That life is based on the proposition, self-evident to many, that omniscient government as the executor of modern science can be the agent of unprecedented wealth, justice, and happiness. We err at our peril if, by focusing on the bloody show of totalitarian regimes, we imagine that they were wholly extraneous to the great trends of our time or to what is happening among us. In fact, the century’s kindred spirits of secularism, of statism and radical individualism, most clearly manifest in the totalitarian regimes, as well as our century’s peculiar combination of pacifism and disdain for human life, have affected in some measure the rules by which we live. This triad shapes the choices that face us in the future quite as much as our heritage from Tocqueville’s America.

The twentieth century has retaught us the awesome power of governments to shape the character of the peoples living under them. The great totalitarian movements left a legacy even more fearsome and instructive than 100 million corpses, namely, the changes they wrought in the mentality and habits of the people who survived them, which they are passing down to new generations. The joy that greeted the collapse of communism was followed by the realization that it would be harder for whole nations to take socialism out of themselves than it had been to take themselves out of socialism. Whereas after the end of Nazism’s twelve-year reign the German people quickly recovered the capacity to run a free, prosperous economy in civil peace, restoring eastern Germany to productive and happy life after

forty-five years of communism is proving to be far more problematic. In Russia, which suffered for three generations, we see even more clearly how the atrophy of moral faculties mired able human beings in economic misery and crime, as if the Communist regime had killed something essential in the bodies it left standing and had created a spiritual Chernobyl.

Less dramatic, just as real, and perhaps more practically instructive are the effects of less polar forms of government—indeed, of individual policies by any government whatever. The histories of the Roman republic, for example, stress the litigiousness engendered by the redistributive “agrarian law.” Well before our century, every kind of economic policy had compiled a record of its effects on wealth and on society, as had policies toward families and religion. Educated people have also long been acquainted with the effects on character of the various systems for organizing political competition. The debates surrounding the establishment of Germany’s Federal Republic in 1949 were particularly replete with historical references to how government policy would affect the people’s capacity to lead decent lives. All sides searched history for alternatives to the financial and political rules that had wrecked the Weimar Republic. But in their consideration of social policy, they sought different models. Konrad Adenauer sought to promote families in which the husband is the sole breadwinner, while Kurt Schumacher sought models of the good life based on the communal raising of children. America’s founding fathers had not lived through the horrors of our century, nor even yet through those of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, led by George Washington (whose favorite phrase might well have been “we have a national character to establish”), they combed history for lessons about the possible long-term effects of the arrangements they were considering. America’s founding generation saw in God’s lengthy warning in the Old Testament against Israel’s adoption of monarchy a “common-sense” historical argument for the principle of human equality and for the practical proposition that big government is inherently wasteful, as well as corruptive of mores.<sup>5</sup>

## REGIMES AND CHARACTER

The first part of this book begins with the argument, strange to modern American minds but a staple of ancient thought, that regimes—governments and the Establishment associated with them—make big differences in how people live.

The diversity of human habits dwarfs the physical diversity of human beings. Not much travel or reading is needed to grasp that some peoples glory in labor while others shun it; that modesty is the rule of life in some places but exhibitionism rules in others; that in some places you can go out at night without fear, whereas in others daylight does not reassure; that among some peoples a handshake seals a deal but among others signatures are worthless; that some peoples will fight and others will not; that family ties bind some peoples more than others; that some peoples are more restrained by fear of God than by fear of man and others respond vice versa, along with a host of other contrasts. In short, while all men might well have been created equal, they regularly live lives that are obviously different. Moreover, the habits that enable us to live as we do disable us from living otherwise. And yet people's habits change—cumulatively. Social science, including economics, gives unsatisfactory single-cause explanations for such differences.

The ancients, however, realized that changes in political rules favor one set of habits over others and lay down new layers of habits. We have difficulty understanding this because we are the intellectual heirs of Western Christianity, which made society and individuals less dependent on government than ever before or since. The twentieth century, however, took sovereign government to its logical conclusion. Nowadays, few governments spend less than one-third of their people's wealth. Nearly all have become the chief makers and breakers of fortunes and reputation, even becoming the arbiters of truth. They create wholly new professions and sustain entire classes of people. In short, we now understand perhaps better than at any time since the fall of Rome what the ancients meant by "regime": an arrangement of offices and honors that fosters a peculiar complex of ideas, loves, hates, and fashions and that sets standards for adults and aspirations for children.

Attention to our surroundings leads to a practical grasp of the differences that regimes make in lives and how they go about making them. Well-traveled professionals, whether doctors, professional athletes, corporate or military officers, or journeymen mechanics, readily sense differences in the incentives and disincentives—the "climate"—established by those who dominate any given workplace. Indeed, most regimes—whether corporate or national—broadcast the tone they wish to set, for example, by requiring or banning certain items of clothing (the Muslim veil, the white shirt and tie that J. Edgar Hoover imposed on the FBI) or certain types of architecture, music, and art. Such outward signs are usually good indicators of the priorities that regimes press onto people. Often, governments leave the setting

of the regime's tone to private elements. Sometimes they do this intentionally, as when the Chilean military let the country's free-market reformers set the tone of Chilean life between 1973 and 1989.

Particular regimes bring out some of the potential inherent in any given civilization while suppressing others. Civilizations so limit the influence of regimes that, for example, in civilizations where the God-given equality and worth of individuals is not self-evident, we may not properly use the term "democracy" to describe movements for spreading political power. Nor may we discuss the economic effects of regimes as if motivation to labor and allergy to corruption were spread equally throughout humanity. Because civilizations truly are different, talk of spreading capitalism to the ends of the earth is downright meaningless.

Within the bounds set by any given civilization, the various broad categories of regimes—tyranny, the several kinds of oligarchy, and democracy<sup>6</sup>—have peculiar effects on the capacity of peoples to be prosperous and civil and to live spiritually meaningful lives in families, free from foreign domination.

The hallmark of the politics and economics of tyranny is cronyism. Wealth is just another of the privileges that flow from connection to the tyrant. The differences between modern party dictatorships and ancient tyrannies lie primarily in the much greater size of the retinues that society is compelled to support and obey today, as well as in the modern dictatorship's intentional degradation of family and spiritual lives. In military matters, tyrannical regimes are marked by special units with privileges far superior to those of the (usually very large) regular armed forces. The loyalty of such units is both the arrow and the Achilles' heel of the regime. The differences between oligarchies, regimes built to enrich the rulers, lie in the attitudes of the rulers regarding the wealth of others. On one extreme are what we might call Mafia oligarchies such as post-Communist Russia, where the rulers regard others' prosperity as a threat to their own and where friendship is restricted to families. Religion is pressed into superstition, and armed force is something used to rub out rivals. Then there are defenseless free ports, like Singapore, where the rulers thrive within systems of law and low taxes that encourage large numbers of people to think of nothing but making money. At the other extreme are grand oligarchies such as those of nineteenth-century Britain, ancient Carthage, and medieval Venice, all of which hired armies, built empires, and spread refined manners along with wealth.

Because democracies have no character except that which their regimes and their peoples combine to give them at any particular time, they can exhibit any of the features of other regimes. And they can change rapidly. The

history of the Roman and Athenian democracies, to name but two, is replete with swings between valor and cowardice, poverty and prosperity, freedom and tyranny, piety and sacrilege, harmony and civil war. While no people is ever spared the choices by which it defines its character, democratic peoples face those choices constantly. Alas, history teaches that when democracies find themselves astride the world, their enemies vanquished, they tend quickly to destroy the remnants of the habits that had made them great.

Few peoples have ever been in the position we are: to hope with some confidence to live with prosperity, limited only by our effort; to strive for government to be our servant rather than our master; to live in families undisturbed; and to overawe our enemies even as we walk humbly with our God. What can we do in our public lives to foster in ourselves the kinds of habits that make possible such an exalted wish list? What are the main choices through which we will create the character of our nation?

By deciding on the size of our government, we will decide to what extent we give in to the temptation to substitute power for voluntary relationships. Economic regulation affects civil society even more than the production of goods. To the extent that government squeezes civil society's autonomy over moral matters, it forces people to seek moral satisfaction through power. Governmental services provided to families tends to relieve them of their functions. In practical terms, the autonomy of civil society means chiefly the latitude of local government. But local discretion diminishes the power of society's most powerful, and tests everyone's tolerance of diversity.

We define ourselves by what we argue about and by how we structure our competition. Arguing about which interest group gets what is conducive neither to prosperity nor to civility. As Abraham Lincoln taught and as the contemporary controversy about abortion shows again, arguing about who shall be defined into and out of the human race is a recipe for civil war. Finally, whatever else we do, if we do not habituate the country's leading classes to sacrifice comfort and risk their lives in the country's defense, we will fall to the first serious military challenge.

## THE DIFFERENCES REGIMES MAKE

The second part of the book describes the manifold ways in which governments have affected their peoples' capacity for prosperity, civility, family and spiritual life, as well as for military defense.

Mindful of the hallowed logical principle that the search for understanding of the good must begin with contemplation of the awful,<sup>7</sup> the section begins with consideration of the Soviet regime—whose destructiveness and failure are now more acknowledged than understood. The Soviet regime trained its people to waste labor and investments by teaching them through practice that political connections, rather than productivity, are the keys to the good things in life. The Soviet economy was a very efficient model of a pervasive patronage machine. Like the rest of society, the economy ran by one supreme law: The politically strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. The prevalence of officially sanctioned caprice accounted for much of the mutual spite that characterized life in the Soviet empire. The regime also tried to destroy families outright. Only the fear of a demographic crash in the 1930s stopped it. Nevertheless, the regime's conscription of female labor, its usurpation of men's duties as heads of households, and its use of abortion for birth control fostered in men the characteristics we associate with ghetto youths, sowed distrust between men and women, and built an unhappy matriarchy. By contrast, the regime's even more consistent campaign against religion failed utterly to destroy the people's longing for God. In the end, religious and nationalist symbols replaced those of communism. Longing and symbolism notwithstanding, post-Soviet life is characterized by religious ignorance and irreligious practice. Finally, no failure of the Soviet regime is more remarkable than that of its military, to which it had devoted the best of its material and moral resources. It failed mortally in what was supposed to have been its surest strength, the loyalty of the special units that were supposed to do its dirty work—and refused to.

Worldwide since World War II, crafting formulas for national prosperity has been almost as popular as selling financial advice to individuals. During the 1960s, the Third World model was in vogue, followed in the 1980s by the so-called Japanese-Asian model. But the flow of goods and money into the Third World has created classes of powerful parasites there, while in Japan, the mighty production of goods has left many people with Third World comforts. Quite simply, prosperity lies in producing more butter than guns, more widgets than lawsuits; in minimizing the "cut" that nonproducers take from producers; and, above all, in treating the economy's various participants equally under law. Yet regimes often place production far down on the scale of activities they reward, and they redistribute at will.

Note how different are the skills, attitudes, and lifestyles fostered by various countries that from time to time are held up as economically imitable. The Chinese government's occasionally permissive, consistently predatory, regulatory climate creates less prosperity than privilege. Business in China consists effectively of granting and using the privilege to hire labor for next to nothing. The system runs not on property rights secured by law but on the expectation that various officials will be content with the bribes they have received. Thus, the most talented Chinese will continue to prefer gate-keeping and rent seeking to the making of real prosperity. In Europe, dirigisme—the cozy relationship between government regulators and established business—and welfare jointly dominate economic life. Europe's welfare culture has grown fastest at the top as well as at the bottom of society in areas already inured to clientelism, as in eastern Germany and southern Italy. It grows alongside the tendency of workers to start careers later, to end them earlier, and to work ever-fewer hours. One reason that work is becoming less attractive than working the system is that dirigisme, plus high taxes, make favors and lottery likelier paths to wealth than work.

By contrast, Chile, under the government of General Augusto Pinochet, set out to separate political power from economic life as well as to replace habits of group competition with habits of individual responsibility. To wean people from seeking favors, Pinochet reduced the state's power to grant them while outlawing the simultaneous practice of politics and business. To foster habits of personal responsibility, he substituted consumer sovereignty for traditional state services while turning the state social security system into individual retirement accounts. In short, the Pinochet regime used economic means for political ends. Chile's subsequent economic and political well-being is less significant than the change in attitudes on which it is based.

Nothing so affects economic life, civic life, or, for that matter, family and spiritual life as whether the rulers are bound by law or rule by discretion. The rule of law—and citizenship—arise from the habitual belief that people have things and freedoms by right rather than by anyone's leave. This is problematic in modern governments that recognize none but positive law, where millions of unelected officials write and administer countless pages of rules, and where the broad scope of administration inevitably leads to arbitrary enforcement. The pretense that voting for national officials makes citizens out of people who in practice do nothing but obey and wheedle engenders nothing but cynicism. In practice, law and citizenship tend to grow or wither along with property rights and local prerogatives. The politics of redistribution

has been destructive of citizenship precisely because it makes positive law—a thing without inherent limit—into a partisan tool. Some kinds of political parties engender more partisanship than others. Parties based on officials elected independently of one another have tended to be less destructive of law and citizenship, whereas parties that are controlled by their own apparatus have fostered the rule of men. The rule of law is a necessary but not sufficient condition of citizenship.

After 1949, the Communist Chinese regime largely succeeded in breaking down much of their people's Confucian respect for traditional virtues and order. But it has failed to inculcate any habitual respect for itself, never mind any of its ideals. Instead, it has trained ordinary people to imitate the leadership's use of power for personal satisfaction. As the regime has aged, it has granted to more and more people the franchise to take advantage of those below them—so long as they pay those above them for the privilege of doing so. In Taiwan, by contrast, the regime began by observing property rights and went on to build something like a civil society on Confucian foundations. The leaders of Singapore, the third regime within Chinese civilization, argue that the Taiwanese regime is doomed by the habits of indiscipline it has legitimized, while Singapore is nipping those habits in the bud. But while the future of citizenship in Taiwan may be shaky, few would argue that Singapore's inhabitants are any more than satisfied consumers of competent government.

The regimes of contemporary Europe, from North Cape to Crete, also present themselves as nonpolitical administrators of the only reasonable agenda—social security. Because Europeans largely accept that agenda, politics in Europe is dead. Although Scandinavians and Germans largely accept the government's good faith and Italians mostly do not, and although the currency of influence varies from north to south, all Europeans accept their roles as subjects—as entitled consumers of government services. The real citizens of Europe, from whom power and to whom privilege flow, are society's corporations, whether big business, unions, political parties, or the complex of bureaucrats and the interest groups they finance. Because of this, Europe's regimes differ only quantitatively from any number of non-European ones. The Mexican regime, for example, is not based on law but on what Mexicans call their national institution—the *mordida*, the “bribe.” Like most modern regimes, Mexico claims socioeconomic expertise and co-opts the country's main private interests while ruling through informal networks. Mexico differs from most modern regimes not because its voters have so much less power over their lives or because the amount of favor



brokering is so much greater than elsewhere, but rather because most Mexicans are wholly without illusion about law and citizenship.

Modern Western regimes are inherently enemies of families because their intellectual fashion dictates that all human relations (except those between sovereign government and each individual) are purely consensual. Marriage, the foundation of families, is everywhere a creature of law. Laws support the natural symbiosis of men and women when they protect the marriage contract and the party most faithful to it against the other party's evasion or abuse of responsibility. But when they favor the other party, laws tend to erase the essential difference between marriage and consensual relationships. By tilting to one side or the other, laws affect the character of men and women and families. Twentieth-century governments have also interposed themselves between parents and children, ostensibly to protect the latter but in fact diminishing habits of mutual responsibility between generations. To see radically different treatments in our time one must go outside the West—for example, to Japan or to Saudi Arabia.

Sweden shows the epitome of the tendency of Western regimes to atomize families into individuals whose primary recourse is to the state. The Swedish regime has achieved relations between the sexes similar to but less contested than those in the old Soviet Union. Its tax system makes sending women to work the most efficient way to raise a couple's income. Schools teach that marriage is just one of many lifestyles and encourage sexual uninhibitedness as the most socially acceptable expression of freedom. Government policy, implemented from day-care centers to the workplace and expressed even in the design of apartments, aims to feminize men and androgynize women while reducing intergenerational contact. One of the consequences of such social policies is that, by 1980, 63 percent of Stockholm's inhabitants lived alone.

Japan's government, by contrast, believes that the country's success and its very identity are due to the cohesion of its families. And so, Japanese tax laws encourage one-earner households, while the authorities back society's ostracism of cohabiting couples and unmarried parents. Japan's illegitimacy rate is one-fiftieth of Sweden's.<sup>8</sup> However, Japanese authorities have begun to pay at least lip service to modern European ideals of relations between the sexes, and Japanese public opinion tends to follow its leaders. The Saudi government, always under pressure by Muslim brotherhoods and various intellectuals to become more Islamic, is enforcing Islamic marriage laws that require equal treatment of multiple wives—something that is difficult even for the very rich and, some say, inherently impossible. Hence, as

the government is being pushed ideologically, it is pulling its people toward practical monogamy.

The most contentious and consequential issues touch religion. Modern government's relationship with religion has been one of rivalry. Although there is not now and never has been a better predictor of prosperity, family, and civility than the practice of Judaism and Christianity, modern Western governments have used their power over education to teach secularism at first, followed by various antireligious dogmas and, most recently, lifestyles repugnant to religious morality. The fundamental Judeo-Christian teaching is that mankind lives under a single, objective set of laws equally binding on all. As governments drain Western societies of religious preferences, they introduce new beliefs based on relativism, that is, on power. Hence, nowadays nihilism does battle for Western souls with a thin, ill-fitting combination of self-worship and earth worship. The stark alternatives in the relationship between religion and political power have clear effects. Outright persecution (unless it is total) strengthens religion, while embrace usually suffocates it. More interesting are the effects of nuanced approaches.

Rome approached religion differently at various points in its long history. In early republican times, the city revered its gods and the oaths to them with a strictness greater than that of the Homeric Greeks. But since its focus was on the city's victory in war, the Roman religion never developed a complex philosophic or ethical component. Thus, it lent itself to becoming a mere motivational tool and quickly lost respect. During the Roman Empire, official religion became irrelevant, while each of the contending nonofficial cults fostered its own way of life. In modern northern Europe, established Protestant churches acquiesced first in the government's secularization of society and even in the teaching of official antireligion. In Catholic Europe, the Christian Democratic movement, the principal reaction to militant liberalism, gave up advocacy of Christian causes, refused to take clear stands on the major issues of the day, immersed itself in day-to-day administration, and died. Throughout the European continent, then, politics has trained people to forget the soul.

In Israel, the official religion is observed by perhaps one-fourth of the population. The most important part of Judaism's legal status is the autonomy it inherited from the laws of the Ottoman Empire. On behalf of a large majority of religiously indifferent Jews (and a substantial minority of anti-religious ones), the Jewish state runs separate schools for the religious and accommodates some of their sensibilities about the Sabbath and marriage.

But as the religious increase in number and assertiveness, some secular Jews feel their irreligious Jewishness so outraged that they commit acts of mockery against their religious brethren. This helps neither Israeli souls nor Israel's chances of winning the next war.

The capacity to fight and win wars is the ultimate test of character, and nothing so characterizes a people or determines its fate as the way in which it draws military power from itself. In ancient republics, military service was synonymous with citizenship. The ultimate political question always and everywhere is which people will risk their lives to uphold the regime. Israel excuses its Arabs from military service, even as the South Africa of apartheid did not draft blacks: The regime could not expect to rely on them when it might need them most. Citizen soldiers and veterans have attitudes of ownership toward their regimes and are less likely to endure treatment as subjects. Regimes that purchase military service or compel it from subjects nevertheless have to ensure the loyalty of military cadres and satisfy their claims. Nothing so destroys any regime as soldiers' sentiment that their lives are being toyed with. A look at three regimes shows how their military establishments have shaped their very different characters.

Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fashioned effective, reliable naval and ground forces out of men taken almost exclusively from the bottom of society for their entire useful lives. Officers from a gentry and bourgeoisie schooled severely in duty and in the glories of empire provided the forces' connection to the regime. In sum, the military functioned like the other parts of Britain's oligarchy and satisfied its measured aims. In Napoleonic France, by contrast, the military was the template of the regime. Just as the democratic nature of the armed forces enticed men to unlimited promotion by merit, the civil service and the educational system in general adopted exams as the key to advancement. The Napoleonic institution of schools of engineering, mines, and public works, and even the numbering of houses, was designed to facilitate the conscription of all of society's resources to serve the regime's unlimited thirst for glory. Charles de Gaulle noted that Napoleon ended up breaking France's sword by striking it senselessly. The Swiss, for their part, have marshaled their forces perhaps as fully as anyone ever has, though without striking, for 200 years. Male service is universal, as are high-quality weapons. Bank presidents are colonels. Training is fierce. Units are as local as their mission. Thus, today's Swiss are still as Niccolò Machiavelli described them half a millennium ago—"most armed and most free."

## OUR CHARACTER

The third part of the book considers the struggles by which the American regime is reshaping itself and its people. In order to see how different the foundations of America's prosperity, civility, military defense, family, and religious life are from those of others and in order to see how new shoots are being grafted onto its stem, and how newer ones yet might be, we must begin by looking closely at the regime's point of departure—Tocqueville's time, when the sapling was young and most unique.

The economy of early America was not designed by anyone, and America's founders did not think of themselves as its managers. The vigor of the economy came from the freedom and equality of scattered farmers and artisans. Having been hurt by Britain's mercantilism, Americans were viscerally committed to free trade. In short, American capitalism was not a doctrine but rather the consequence of the country's religious, family, and civic institutions. Religion, wrote Tocqueville, was the first of America's political institutions. A kind of Judaized Christianity filled every nook and cranny of the public square and set the regime's tone, because both political and ecclesiastical authority was exercised by, of, and for a Bible-toting people. Clergymen, unlike today, were forbidden to hold office and taught that all men were equally under God's injunction to be virtuous—or else. The American people's love of liberty was anything but morally empty libertarianism. Tocqueville explained the American devotion to law and civic duty as a commitment to equality and to doing the right thing.

The old American regime's uniqueness may be grasped by the fact that the national Constitution does not even contain the most important word of modern government—"sovereignty"—meaning the prerogative to define one's own power. Habituated to making and respecting their own laws, to being their own police and their own militias, early Americans were wary of the notion that anyone, even the whole people, could exercise broad, ill-defined powers. The laws that principally shaped their private lives had to do with marriage. American laws punished adulterers and fornicators of either sex, as well as husbands who failed to support their families. Early Americans hanged rapists. Tocqueville reported that Americans also viewed marriage from the standpoint of the economic principle of the division of labor and distinguished the roles of men and women much more than

Europeans did. In sum, Americans saw their ways as part of the naturally and divinely ordained path to the good life.

In recent years, many Americans have adopted laws, customs, and habits that contrast sharply with those of America's founders. Others have sought to adhere to older ways. At any rate, today's America is substantially another country. The U.S. government and the regime it leads are not entirely responsible for this. But neither have they been spectators in the culture wars. On the contrary, they have lent growing force to those who have urged a rather coherent set of changes.

America's prosperity is being affected less by the kinds of forces mentioned in economics courses than by changes in the American people's economically relevant habits. Although there has been much talk of how the government expands irresponsibility among the poor by making acceptable the abandonment of responsibility, government-fostered changes in the habits of Americans in the middle and at the top of society are even more significant. As government imposes ever more rules and exceptions and gains greater power to endow and impoverish, it trains us to get ahead through official channels rather than through productive activities. It undermines middle-class responsibility through programs that promise more for less (alas, while delivering less). Above all, government corrupts America from the top by trading priceless access to power for the support of the wealthiest. Thus, the country is dividing between politically potent beneficiaries and the politically impotent who pay for them.

Big government is depriving Americans of self-rule by making unelected judges supreme over even referenda and by empowering them to legislate on whatever they choose. It is depriving us of the rule of law by multiplying bureaucrats who make, execute, and enforce rules. Bureaucrats and judges, along with well-connected labor unions, have well-nigh eliminated citizens' control over the education of their children. Having set out to right social wrongs by giving advantages to women and blacks, the government has spread habits of mutual recrimination. Having emasculated the police powers of localities, the government has curtailed citizens' capacity to protect themselves with firearms. Having made public places unpleasant, the leaders of the American regime have largely abandoned them. Not surprisingly, the country is filling up with people who like one another less—but who dislike the government most of all.

One reason for antigovernment sentiment is that government has become the main weapon of those who want to denigrate and diminish the

role of family and religion in American life. This is not to say that government has campaigned directly to increase the rate of divorce or to decrease that of church attendance. But government did institute no-fault divorce, has mandated sex education that abstracts from families, has weakened parental control by spreading the presumption that families abuse children, has made abortion into the most absolute right in the land, and has campaigned for the proposition that all forms of human relationships are at least as valid as that of the natural family. Government has effectively driven religion out of America's public schools and indeed out of almost all public spaces. The odor of illegitimacy attached to public expressions of religiosity has largely caused the very word "Christmas" to be replaced with "holiday" on the airwaves and in public discourse. The government has established, at public expense and with a host of privileges, a secular priesthood of judges, social workers, psychologists, intellectuals, and artists, all of whom teach a contrary gospel. The result has been not only a host of social pathologies, including increased abuse of children and the elderly, but also a growing split between those who live in natural families and by biblical religion and those who live in alternative arrangements and by the regime's new gods.

Can the new American regime defend itself? Since the Vietnam War, the U.S. armed forces have stood on an ever-shakier social base. The leading elements of society, which opted out of the armed forces during the war, also rejected for themselves the whole complex of personal habits and attitudes involved with killing and being killed. They have consented to dispose of military forces composed of hired personnel who have that complex of habits. But the tensions between the U.S. armed forces (as well as the subculture from which they come) and the regime are sure to continue growing.

Our objective here is not to predict the outcome of the struggles over the habits of Americans. Rather, it is to note the directions in which the current regime is pushing those habits. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note two of America's deeply rooted habits that surely affect those struggles. First, America's very bones are pluralist. Americans tend to move away from people they cannot stand and to congregate with those whom they can. Thus, complete victory in the culture wars by any side is less likely than is the increasing separation of the people who worship the God of the Bible from those who worship the gods of the regime, of those whose views of marriage and child raising are anathema to one another, of those who march to different drummers. Of course, such growing separation will accelerate the

trends that have thus far restricted civic life in America. And needless to say, all this casts a shadow over the country's capacity to face major challenges from abroad. Second, however, America is incorrigibly moralist. Not for nothing do historians point to the Civil War as the most telling event in our history. When two sets of Americans believe that their fundamental freedom to live righteously is being violated by the forces of darkness, they tend to the kinds of passion against which Abraham Lincoln warned—unsuccessfully.