

unavoidable conflict of collective versus individual interests, but she never moves beyond, or below, the obvious. Veteran Communists, she writes, had invested their whole lives in the workers' struggle; they feared what might happen if they were suspected of "arrogance," "individuality," or other bourgeois tendencies; and they genuinely believed that Marxism-Leninism, despite its dictatorships and food shortages, was superior to free-market democracy. "Communism was their *raison d'être*; to break with their faith would have dissolved the master narrative of their lives into countless meaningless episodes."

That's fine, but it reads a bit thin. The power of the totalitarian idea, as Milan Kundera and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, among others, have articulated, is the power to dissolve the sense of self and to corrode the fabric of society until there are no relations, no freely feeling and freely thinking human beings—indeed, no community—but only atoms tethered to the state. This is a rich and complicated topic, layered with thought, myth, and emotion, and it deserves deeper probing.

The Last Revolutionaries is well written, intelligent, and, unlike much of what is called history nowadays, devoid of postmodernist lingo and other academic fashion statements. But by the end, one is still left to wonder what exactly compelled these people to stay faithful to a regime and a politics that had wrought so much devastation.

—PETER SAVODNIK

**GRAND OLD PARTY:
*A History of the Republicans.***

By Lewis L. Gould. Random House.
602 pp. \$35

This much-needed history of the Republican Party takes as its theme America's partisan fluctuations during the past century and a half. Lewis L. Gould, a professor emeritus of histo-



With Calvin Coolidge directing it, the GOP elephant stamps out the snake of radicalism in this 1924 cartoon.

ry at the University of Texas at Austin, argues that the positions of the two major American parties have been almost interchangeable on a wide variety of issues, especially those relating to foreign policy and the division of labor between federal and state government.

What, he asks, does the Grand Old Party actually stand for? The Whigs, Know-Nothings, and others who formed the Republican Party in 1854 seized the initiative to become, in effect, America's party, the party of Union and patriotism. The Republican Party presided over the Civil War and Reconstruction, during which it intimidated opponents by waving the bloody shirt and taking the "patriotic" offensive. For all the cultural and political twists and turns in the years since, for all the contradictions brought about by shifting centers of power and interest, the Republicans have retained this position in the mainstream of national identity. Witness the Democrats' ongoing difficulty contending with, in Gould's words, the "sense of innate social harmony as the central fact of American political and economic life [that] remains a key element in Republican thought."

The Republicans' seminal contributions to modern American democracy, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, did much to define a system of values for multira-

cial coexistence, but the price was high: Radical Reconstruction effectively scuttled Republican control of the South. A century later, it was the Democrats who set out to fulfill the promise of civil rights. The GOP opposed these New Frontier and Great Society reforms, and thereby won back the loyalties of Southerners.

Since splitting with Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moosers in 1912, Gould notes, Republicans have generally opposed labor unions, welfare programs, and regulation of business. He also pays some extended recognition to such Republican presidents as William McKinley, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, and Dwight Eisenhower, whose accomplishments were scanted during more liberal periods. With Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential candidacy, Republicanism "shrunk and shifted rightward at the same time." By the 1980s, the GOP "had detached itself" from most of its own history. Current leaders, Gould

suggests, have become so arrogant as to raise doubts about whether they "really believe in the two-party system as a core principle of politics."

Unfortunately, Gould mostly sidesteps the fundraising dilemma of American politics. He discusses the post-Watergate regulations only briefly, by noting that "soft money" helped the Republicans because of their "greater access to corporate resources." The true magnitude of the problem, for the political system as well as for the GOP, and its defiance of workable solutions go largely unmentioned.

Still, Gould is especially effective in charting the shifts in the defining political issues of the past 150 years. And he reminds us that the Republican positions on these issues haven't always been predictable: The party has repeatedly "moved in directions that would have seemed improbable to its members only decades earlier."

—HERBERT S. PARMET

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

EVIL IN MODERN THOUGHT: An Alternative History of Philosophy.

By Susan Neiman. Princeton Univ. Press. 358 pp. \$29.95

Susan Neiman's "alternative history of philosophy" is no exercise in fashionable special pleading or canon reform but an attempt to show that Western philosophy has the wrong focus. Instead of the common but misleading alliance of metaphysics ("What is real?") and analytic epistemology ("What can we know?"), Neiman argues, philosophers ought to recognize that metaphysics is linked with ethics ("What is right?"). The traditional questions of appearance and reality, substance and change, reflect a sustained struggle, often frustrated or futile, with the problem of evil. This is not an unprecedented thesis—Aristotle, for one, had a version of it—but Neiman's modern focus and the unhappy coincidence of recent events make the issue of evil at once more difficult and more pressing.

Usually conceived as a strict theological debate within Christian theodicy, the problem of evil is based on the widespread perception that bad things happen to good people. If this is so,

then the Christian deity's "triangle of perfection"—the linked divine qualities of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence—is challenged; at least one corner must give. If innocents suffer and die, then God must be ignorant, weak, or malicious. The 1755 Lisbon earthquake, a shocking devastation, prompted sharp criticism of the theodicy, especially Gottfried Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds" version, which was lampooned savagely by Voltaire.

Neiman, director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, asks: Are natural evils, such as the Lisbon earthquake, and human evils, such as the Holocaust, versions of the same problem, or are they distinct? If there is a distinction, what is it? We may abandon Christian belief, and so ease the sting of a natural disaster (it's no longer, except metaphorically, an "act of God"). But this will not help us when human-made evils, genocide and torture and terrorism, have the very same effect of tearing asunder our idea of the world as a place where things make sense.

The book is ordered in four long chapters, working within self-imposed restrictions of nei-