

hard to connect with voters but who make terrific drinking buddies. Germond roots for those who stand up for truth and justice but get done in by the dirty deeds of consultants and money—as when John McCain’s voting record on breast cancer was distorted during the 2000 Republican primaries, all to the benefit of George W. Bush, whom Germond describes as “an embarrassment” combining “ignorance and arrogance.”

And therein lies one of the lessons of Germond’s diatribe. Reporters have opinions, strong ones. From drinking with candidates or schmoozing with them in unguarded moments, they think they know who should be elected. But the knowledge drives them crazy, because they’re supposed to be objective.

Something else drives Germond crazy, too. The game of politics has changed enormously since his salad days in the 1960s and ’70s. Today, he says, it’s about apathetic and gullible voters, sleazy consultants, incompetent journalists, and, of course, the dominance of money, which he calls the “easy answer” that explains much of what’s so wrong. But I’m old enough to remember Germond’s good old days a bit differently. When I ran for Congress 32 years ago, I spent most of my time dialing for dollars, and I struggled with the same kinds of conflicts and potential obligations that candidates face nowadays.

No, what made the good old days so good for Germond is that he was a player, influential, close to the decision makers, on a first-name basis with the few hundred people who controlled the political process. What’s not to like? For half of those 50 years, you had to talk with Germond (and *The Washington Post’s* David Broder, *The New York Times’s* Johnny Apple, *The Boston Globe’s* Bob Healy, and a few others) if you wanted to go national. Germond was *important*. But today, television and the Internet have shrunk the clout of print reporters.

People didn’t get their political news from *The Daily Show* when Jack was king. Now that he’s off the throne, the mask has come off as well.

—MARTY LINSKY

*NEW POLITICAL RELIGIONS,
or An Analysis of Modern Terrorism.*

By Barry Cooper. Univ. of Missouri Press. 242 pp. \$44.95

Wave upon wave of books about Islam and terrorism have been published in the West since September 11, 2001, but few have offered much new. University of Calgary political scientist Barry Cooper’s volume might have been one more rehash, because his sources are entirely secondary. Instead, Cooper draws useful parallels between the Islamist extremism now stalking the planet and prior forms of totalitarian ideology.

A belief in the intrinsic separation of the political follower from the rest of the world; faith in the capacity of the political creed to fulfill divine, historical, or natural laws—such characteristics are common to all forms of totalitarianism, including Nazism, Stalinism, Japanese militarism, Italian fascism, and the contemporary Japanese cult of Aum Shinrikyo, to which Cooper devotes substantial attention. But his main focus is on “Salafism.” That’s the polite term preferred by both militants and Western academics when discussing Wahhabism and neo-Wahhabism, the Islamic movements that inspire Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and their allies.

Classic Wahhabism, like Soviet, Italian, and German totalitarianism, has enjoyed the backing of a state: the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in which Wahhabism remains the official religion. Neo-Wahhabism is the product of thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), who introduced the concept of revolution into a religious milieu that previously had eschewed it as a form of sowing dissension, a major sin in Sunni Islam. Unlike the original Wahhabis in the Arabian Peninsula, who allied with the Christian powers for their own political ends, the neo-Wahhabis of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jama’at movement preached resistance against Christian domination as represented by British rule in their countries.

Cooper believes that the works of political philosopher Eric Voegelin, including *Political Religions* (1938) and *The New Science of Politics* (1952), provide a framework for understanding terrorism. Voegelin not only equated political extremism with forms of religious

affirmation, he also perceived the role of crises in stimulating political developments. He read Plato and Aristotle as products of a crisis in ancient Hellenic society, while Augustine's *City of God* grew out of the crisis of Rome and Christianity, and Hegel marked "the beginning of the modern Western crisis."

And what crisis has stirred so much of the Islamic world to a radical if deviant attempt at religious revitalization? Everyone, Cooper included, seems to give the same answer: the encounter with that oft-cited but seldom defined *deus ex machina* "modernity." Islam-

ic revivalism stirred by non-Muslim success (and, let us add, colonial aggression) has given rise to "direct political action" in the form of terrorism.

Cooper's book is marred by his reliance on secondary sources, including eccentric and marginal works that seek to locate the crisis of Islam in the religion itself. Even so, *New Political Religions* is clearly written, and it includes enough basic information, and enough fresh understanding, to be recommended to all newcomers to the discussion.

—STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

CITIES OF WORDS:

Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life.

By Stanley Cavell. Harvard Univ. Press. 458 pp. \$29.95

Surely no scholar has done more to bring American philosophy into the viewing room than Harvard University's Stanley Cavell. His latest volume reads as if it were a single, pleasantly rambling essay—an integration, extension, and reunion of his earlier writings

on film, particularly *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981), and his writings on Ralph Waldo Emerson, particularly *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (1989) and *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990). If the present edition is less focused than the earlier volumes, its intimate, ambulatory style is equally rewarding.

Cavell explicitly marries, or remarries, philosophy, particularly the notion of moral per-



The Philadelphia Story (1940): A romantic comedy or a study of Emersonian democracy?