

private belletristic pleasure? It is difficult to say with certainty. Be that as it may, I found myself engaged with the study and its provocative central argument of political transgression attending on—nearly a handmaiden of—gender transgression, almost in spite of its esoteric, nearly mystical mode of presentation. Δ

Amerykański konserwatyzm na progu XXI wieku

(American Conservatism at the beginning of the twenty-first century)

By **Jacek Koronacki**. Radzymin: von borowiecky (księgarnia@vb.com.pl), 2015. 517 pages. Index of persons. ISBN 978-83-60748=80-0. Hardcover. In Polish.

Sally Boss

The word “conservatism” has many meanings. Jacek Koronacki takes it for granted that in the political arena they include support for limited government and the idea of subsidiarity, whereas in the social and moral arena conservatism flows from a recognition that man is a *created* being. It is hard though not impossible to be a conservative and an atheist. Conservatism rejects George Orwell’s and Aldous Huxley’s dystopias, or the taking away by the omnipotent state of human dignity and of the right to decide while dangling before citizens the utopia of a cradle-to-grave security. In Koronacki’s book these essential aspects of conservatism are viewed in the context of American history and society.

Koronacki’s treatment of the Civil War shows the depth of his conservative convictions. He takes the view that when individual states ratified the American Constitution, they implicitly or explicitly reserved the right to withdraw the ratification if federal authorities claimed undue power. In other words, the right to secession was implied from the very beginning. The Civil War marked a decisive change in this regard. From that moment on, federal power continued to grow and state power continued to decline. In Koronacki’s view, Joseph Sobran was a conservative writer who

argued most loudly for this interpretation of American history; he lost. Koronacki considers the Fourteenth Amendment to be another major step in the weakening of the rights of individual states. In the spirit of this amendment, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal sealed the political (and therefore social and moral) profile of American society and politics. An important element of these changes was the growth of the importance of the judiciary at the expense of executive and legislative power. The seemingly appropriate and just amendments to the Constitution have been used to dramatically increase the power of the courts, to the point where issues that should have been voted on were decided by a fiat of a group of judges from whose errors there was no recourse.

In Koronacki’s view America today is partly shaped by the disappearance of the Soviet Union. As virtually every conservative Pole knows, this superficial disappearance has not eliminated Russian expansionism and aggressiveness; it merely changed their rhetorical tools. Many Europeans, primarily Germans, do not wish to see it. If Americans decide to leave Europe to its own devices, the likely scenario is that Russia will attack the Baltic states, then Poland (annexing Ukraine and Belarus in the meantime), and then, hypnotized by these conquests, would put enough pressure on Western Europe (weakened in the meantime by Muslim immigration) to make it side up with Russia rather than the United States in the global game. There is no doubt that powerful propaganda has been launched to convince ordinary Americans that Russia is no longer a threat; however, American common sense works against this propaganda. Still, there are areas of American conservatism in which this propaganda has taken root. The dream of America withdrawing from its engagement with the world is shared by such American conservatives as Patrick Buchanan and the *Chronicles Magazine* team. Koronacki’s book should help disabuse them of their illusions. He dedicates an entire chapter to the discussion of American isolationism, with Patrick Buchanan as the central character. Buchanan’s facile slogans about the return to being a republic rather than an empire are rightly dismissed as

nostalgia rather than a realistic political program. However, Koronacki worries about the tone in which the critique of Buchanan's other postulates is being delivered. In his view, the narrowing of the American debate is clearly visible in this case (78–79). In some areas of conservatism there is more room for debate in Poland than in America, a paradox that Koronacki does not explore but merely points out.

A good part of Koronacki's book is dedicated to the conservative media in the United States, especially *Chronicles*, *Modern Age*, and publications of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. There also are references to *The National Interest* and *The Weekly Standard*. Among the thinkers whose works Koronacki invokes most often are Russell Kirk, Thomas Molnar, Peter Lawler, Claes Ryn, Wilhelm Röpke (while lamenting the scarcity of conservative writings on economics), Orestes Brownson, and the neoconservative Francis Fukuyama. Rodney Stark's argument about the role of Christianity in economic and scientific progress is described in detail. Edmund Burke also appears as the fountainhead of many conservative ideas in the English-speaking world. These thinkers are not presented chronologically, but rather invoked in connection with the topics discussed. From the Southern Agrarians to the war in Iraq, issues agitating the minds of American conservatives are presented clearly, accompanied by copious citations. It is a platitude to say "This book deserves a translation into English," but in this case it has to be said most forcefully.

It is ironic that the best book on American conservatism has been written by a Polish mathematician who spent several years teaching at American universities and returned to Poland to head one of the Institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences. For nearly two decades Koronacki's writings have appeared in the Polish conservative bimonthly *Arcana*, and a great deal of the book consists of essays appropriately reworked that he wrote for that periodical. Its format accounts for its strengths: instead of repeating slogans or presenting one more time the well-known theories, Koronacki sketches out the flow in real time of

conservative ideas, personalities, and policies expressed in specific articles, journals, social trends, debates, and legislature. The result is a vivid picture of postwar American conservatism from the 1950s (the launching of *National Review* was a milestone) to the present day. As is well known, American conservatism soon split into paleoconservatism and neoconservatism, owing partly to the editorial policies of the same *National Review*. Koronacki rightly points out that the firing of Joseph Sobran and Samuel Francis from *National Review* did unspeakable harm to the conservative movement, making it a slave of political correctness just as has been the case with mainstream periodicals. Δ

East West Street

By Philippe Sands. New York: Knopf, 2016. 425 pages. ISBN 978-0-385-35071-6. Hardcover.

James E. Reid

"Where are you now, park benches of Lwów, blackened with age and rain, coarse and cracked like the bark of mediaeval trees?"
Mój Lwów, Joseph Wittlin, (1946)

In an odd coincidence, on the morning I finished reading Philippe Sands's *East West Street*, I walked out to my mailbox and discovered his article "A Grand and Disastrous Deceit" in the July 2016 issue of the *London Review of Books*. Sands's survey in the *LRB* of John Chilcot's "Report of the Iraq Inquiry" is marked by a damning examination of Tony Blair's reprehensible maneuvering to twist the intelligence that Saddam Hussein did not present a threat to anyone other than his own citizens. Blair twisted the facts until he had an empty *casus belli* for a pointless war in Iraq, which has brought us ISIL, ISIS, Daesh, new wars and deaths, hundreds of thousands of refugees, and unprecedented acts of terrorism.

However, in *East West Street* Sands's tone is that of a thoughtful man searching for the