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Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture by David B. Dennis (review)

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brokenness and violence of our world. The last study, “Spirit of wonder,” reminds us that the story is not over; we need to keep thinking and contemplating and acting, right to the end. His purpose, as he puts it on the last page of the book, is “to draw attention away from the search for cross-religious universals and on to the much more open-ended question of how one responds to truth, what impact it makes, what one *does* to realise truth.”

—Francis X. Clooney, *SJ*

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T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 344 pp.

In the spring of 2009, I was a member of the standing-room-only audience for four of Tim Clark’s six A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts on “Picasso and Truth,” at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, and I can testify that the present volume, closely based on those lectures, conveys much of the experience of being in his presence on such an occasion. Clark is an electrifying lecturer in addition to being a superb writer on art, and the combination gives *Picasso and Truth* a cumulative force that is nothing short of remarkable. Naturally, I cannot summarize his argument here. Suffice it to say, though, that he approaches Picasso (not all of him; the story really gets under way in the wake of the initial Cubist revolution, which Clark earlier treated in a memorable chapter in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* [1998]) from a Nietzschean perspective, posing a question extrapolated from the *Genealogy of Morals*: “What will art be, . . . without a test of truth for its findings, its assertions; without even a *will* to truth?” Clark’s relentlessly original book offers one answer—or rather, considering its intense and detailed encounters with a wide range of paintings from the master’s oeuvre, many answers—to this unexpected question.

—Michael Fried

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David B. Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 553 pp.

Dennis has read every article on culture published between 1920 and 1945 in the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* and turned it into a book. The result is a detailed compendium of the many ways in which the Nazis appropriated and abused Western culture, praising the “Nordic spirit” of Dürer and Shakespeare,

turning Dante and Rembrandt into Germans, and settling accounts with “Jewish” artists like Heine and Mendelssohn. There are few surprises in these 450 pages of exegesis. Romanticism is good, Wagner is a prophet, social realism is bad, jazz is degenerate, Thomas Mann is a rootless cosmopolitan, and the music of “the Jew Schoenberg” is “sickly and convulsive.” We should nonetheless salute the author’s fortitude.

—*David Blackburn*

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Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knobl, *War in Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 336 pp.

Let us start with three observations, the most moving by a writer who fell victim to war, Simone Weil: “Death is the most precious thing which has been given to man. That is why the supreme impiety is to make bad of use of it.” Has anything more profound been said about war—its waste, or its glory? The reality of both has been conveyed for centuries through philosophy and literature. A book, wrote Kafka, any book “must be an ice-axe to break the seas frozen inside our soul.” But those seas have intimidated most social theorists from diving very deep. It was Freud who wrote that frightening and threatening experiences are the ones that the conscious mind is likely to shut out, though without robbing them of their potency—an explanation, perhaps, for the failings of even the most renowned social theorists (not excluding Marx and Weber) to come to terms with the phenomenon of war.

Joas and Knobl are sociologists, and they are commendably honest in taking their own discipline to task for this failure. They have also in this book produced a substantial work of contemporary social theory that ranges widely—from Hobbes and Rousseau to present-day social thought—and that in focusing on European writers offers a welcome antidote to the strategic community’s Anglo-American bias. War still has its votaries and probably always will have. Whether this generalization extends to the new players—the criminal cartels, jihadists, pirates, and militias of the world—is a moot point. Is war itself like the Borg Collective, appropriating every social phenomenon in its path? And is our two authors’ patent unwillingness to face this question (which they themselves pose) another case of suppressing war within the social sciences?

—*Christopher Coker*

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