

Book Reviews

War, Money and American Memory: Myths of Virtue, Valor, and Patriotism, by Richard Earley. Diane Publishing Co., Box 1428, Collingdale, PA 19023, paper, 519 pp., \$27.95.

This book is politically incorrect with harshness. American values are superficial because United States citizens are adolescent. We think we saved the world for democracy, for example, and we did help in the last two great wars for several months toward the end of those conflicts, but the brunt of suffering was by the countries devastated. They lost the flower of their manhood, their homes, their cities, their countries. We hardly know the nature of war compared with other countries. We suffered in our Civil War, but the cause was not accurately stated. The popular theme promoted by Hollywood, a central influence on our culture, was that the war was fought to combat slavery. It was fought to consolidate power and the manufactures of the north.

Richard Earley is an anti-Semite, which his thesis does not demand. He really dislikes the Jews. Putting his thesis crudely, he dislikes Jews because they run the United States from positions of influence, campaign for their causes, buy and sell congressional seats. For almost fifty years Zionism has driven foreign policy in the Middle East; nothing has been permitted that threatened the security of Israel. To oppose Zionism is not the same as detesting Jews. We may believe that a religious state is not a valid state without being anti-Semitic.

In spite of harshness this book challenges our assumptions and deserves serious consideration.

—Angus MacDonald

Knights of the Brush: The Hudson River School and the Moral Landscape, by James F. Cooper. Hudson Hills, 109 pp., \$35.

Should art, high or low, have a moral purpose? How about architecture? It seems to me that design has abandoned Socrates for Nietzsche. No more pure geometrical shapes. No more strict correspondences between form and function. No more efforts to refine materials and production methods to their pure Platonic essence. Instead, we behold building after building, room after room of dancing stars, fluid shapes, appetizing colors, laughter in the dark, flesh. The postmodern world is a Dionysian drama of design. It reflects boredom, dullness, a lack of moral imagination.

So it has become with pictures.

Is there a moral landscape left in painting? We can confidently assume that, somewhere in America, in a dark, out of the way little studio, is an under-appreciated or little known artist who still believes in putting the big and important ideas on canvas. After the hoo-hah of postmodernism has really collapsed, that lonely artist's creativity and achievement will come to the fore. Let us pray that the

present crisis, indeed catastrophe, that afflicts all the fine arts, ends soon.

In the meantime, we will simply have to spend some time reflecting on the moral landscape that was in fact the motivating aesthetic for an important group of American artists not too far gone from us chronologically, yet a world away culturally. I speak of the Hudson River School, which survives on canvas as a kind of last vestige, a beatitude, reminding us that beautiful art was still possible up to a hundred years ago.

In his new book *Knights of the Brush: the Hudson River School and Moral Landscape*, James F. Cooper has given us a gem. His shows us that the romantic period of American landscape art began about a quarter of the way through the 1800s and lasted seventy-five years. Robinson Gifford, Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Albert Bierstadt, Asher Brown Durand are the big names that come to mind. They gave us a moral landscape that glorified the natural beauty of young America, realizing on canvas after canvas the rich wilderness of America as a lesson that could draw out the best of the older European traditions.

This wonderful little book goes a long way toward explaining to the lay reader how the Hudson River School's artists presented history, Christianity, light and beauty as a concentrated form of lasting worth. He shows, most provocatively, that with the erosion of values in art comes an erosion of morals and culture.

Can art be used to renew Western ideals and, ultimately, to restore American culture? Can the reintroduction of beauty, virtue and spirituality in art be the catalyst to a regeneration of the national spirit and character? Cooper answers with a resounding yes, much like his nineteenth century artistic brethren. The Hudson painters sensed a fading order, spirituality and beauty too. So they looked to antiquity for the virtues that ensured a rich and prosperous Republic and transformed those virtues for a new time.

They looked primarily to high classical life as the model of virtue because they felt its myths and history clarified and illuminated the ideas of liberty and justice upon which America was founded. Thus the Hudson painters extracted images from antiquity and transplanted them into American settings.

Painting after painting richly illustrates a Romantic love of ancient ruins but also serves as a cautionary tale or moral lesson for a young country: they were reflecting the likely results of decaying civic virtue. They were conveying the dangers of losing virtue and embracing decadence. But there is also a kind of moral lesson on the beauty of the American wilderness; stewardship is everywhere in their art.

A battle raged as the nineteenth century closed and the twentieth century opened. Would the Hudson School prevail in all its representational glory? Or would European modernism—the disfigured, chaotic, fragmented world of Picasso and Braque—carry the day? Clearly, the latter vision won going away.

The artist is now the rebel against fundamental beliefs, the result of the corrosion of art. Losing its mission to convey moral absolutes, art became distanced from the American people; a new elite ruled. Beauty and moral virtue were divorced from pure politics and pure art.

Cooper is right, it seems to me: art *can* help mold a more virtuous society. But to what lingering moral sense will our new artists appeal in the midst of what is clearly a new depression of American culture? The Hudson School faced only decay, not destruction.

My own sense is that we need a better, more morally vibrant culture before we can have better art. Cooper believes something a little different, that the power of art to restore culture comes first. Either way, the important point is that Western culture is badly in need of a new art evoking the old themes which call us to a higher, deeper, more moral plane, an aesthetic rooted in ennobling and virtuous ideas instead of cynical and mocking ones. Cooper helps us think about how we might move in that direction.

—Timothy S. Goeglein

Apostle of a Humane Economy—Remembering Wilhelm Röpke, by Patrick M. Boarman. Paper essay of 21 pages, available for \$4.00 from Patrick M. Boarman, 6421 Caminito Estrellado, San Diego, CA 92120.

Röpke writes as a free market economist but insists on limits to the market by saying it must be humane. He objected to laissez-faire economics that advocated no government interference in the economy beyond the maintenance of peace and property rights. We need a strong government, he said, for some protection. He would approve of laws against monopoly and in favor of environmental preservation. He would probably approve of some kind of legislation that helped workers in their old age, though he would not approve of the duplicity in our present Social Security laws. I do not know whether he would approve of a company transferring to another country for less labor costs if it meant firing workers of many years employment. He would not approve of a country such as Russia, where the lack of sound money and infrastructure allows a concentration of wealth in criminals. He would not approve of the callousness of China toward its people. A country needs a sound legal system and must rest on a moral/religious base. Without a moral base economics may descend to barbarism.

Röpke opposed the mathematical orientation of present economic studies in favor of an economics of the real world. Present economic studies are so abstruse that some of the biggest companies of the country have closed their economics departments—I.B.M., General Electric, Kodak. Almost unknown in the United States, he was of immense influence in Europe. The economic miracle of Germany after World War II was because of Röpke. At present he is being studied in China, a hopeful sign.

From the essay:

In an address delivered at Frankfurt on February 8, 1933, one week after Hitler's assumption of the Chancellorship, he described the new regime as a "new form of barbarism." A threatening visit to his family by representatives of the SS soon followed. Rather than knuckle under to the Nazis, Röpke quit his post at Marburg and chose exile, one of the first

German professors to do so following Hitler's takeover. It was the beginning of a tumultuous and perilous odyssey for him and his family, first to Holland and Switzerland, then to Turkey where the Kemal Ataturk government entrusted him with the reorganization of the Department of Economics of Istanbul University, and finally, in 1937, to the Institute in Geneva, whose chair of economics he occupied with eclat in growing renown for the next three decades.

—Angus MacDonald

A Student's Guide to Philosophy, by Ralph M. McInerny. ISI Books, P.O. Box 4431, Wilmington, DE 19807-0431, 75 pp., no price listed.

The thesis of this book is that modern philosophy is hardly worthy of study and if we are to be philosophical we should become Aristotelian. The classical world, in general, was genuinely philosophical while the modern world has become sterile with a stupid kind of intelligence.

One not versed in the history of philosophy might get lost in some details, but the meaning of the book is clear. There are thumbnail sketches of major figures in the history of philosophy which in themselves are worth the cost of the book.

—Angus MacDonald