



4-1-2005

Leonidas Donskis. *Forms of Hatred: The Troubled Imagination in Modern Philosophy and Literature*

Palmer Talbutt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>

Recommended Citation

Talbutt, Palmer (2005) "Leonidas Donskis. *Forms of Hatred: The Troubled Imagination in Modern Philosophy and Literature*," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 52 : No. 52 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol52/iss52/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Leonidas Donskis. *Forms of Hatred: The Troubled Imagination in Modern Philosophy and Literature.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003.

This work in effect completes a trilogy by Donskis, begun by *The End of Ideology and Utopia? Moral Imagination and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century*, and followed closely by *Identity and Freedom: Mapping Nationalism and Social Criticism in Twentieth-Century Lithuania*. It is tightly packed, as its precursors are, with rich insights: in fact it is near-Kavolian in its density.

As the *Inferno* was mapped by Dante, Donskis explores malignant items of discourse from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as presented in “symbolic designs,” their aspects and functions being thoroughly illuminated. Multiple Virgils are on hand to guide him, ranging from literary dystopians to social scientists, preeminently Vytautas Kavolis himself.

Donskis’ first lengthy discussion is of a key symbolic design, the “conspiracy theory of society.” As imputed to the human context, as a sorry and destructive enframing for life, it parallels the potent and consoling mythic, or transcendent, Providence. Such a distortion leads off into partisanship and fanaticism, ideocratic hatred (counterparts to earlier theocratic zeal), followed by the designs of historical pessimism and apocalyptic theories of history. Next he explores the phenomenon of self-hatred (as with Weininger and Wittgenstein) where negative external evaluations are internalized in tune with the ambiguities and insecurities of modernity. (Did the virulent and ill-chosen, though scriptural-based, anti-Semitism and the attendant anti-modernism of Vienna, reinforced by personal doubts about paternal ancestry, cause one of the most disastrous contingencies of modern history, all through Adolf Hitler’s self-hatred?) Messianic Marxism, a secular corruption of biblicism, can also be associated loosely with radical nationalism, as opposed to reactionary nationalism. Marxist and anti-Marxist currents appear as “forms of hatred,” given their comparable intensity.

Ernst Cassirer’s *Myth of the State* reinforces such analyses in showing how malign pre-Axial “totem and taboo” themes briefly came to overwhelm biblical “ethical-individualism.” Another relevant point: Cassirer’s great improvement upon Aristotle’s defining of man, i.e. *animale symbolicum*, points us toward “symbolic designs” (Kavolis), “symbolic action” (the Chicago school), “social action” (Parsons), the “internalizing of norms” (Sorokin) and other similar insights, while

illuminating the validations for rabbinic, mandarin, and brahminic symbol-grounded dignities.

One final point: unlike Samuel Huntington's clashing civilizations (whose boundaries are roughly geographical—though fluctuating), Donskis' competing hatreds meet at the more temporal boundary between modernity and anti-modernity, perhaps initiated with the French revolution.

..... Palmer Talbutt

Brian Fagan. *Floods, Famines, and Emperors: El Niño and the Fate of Civilizations*. Basic Books, 2000.

Our ongoing study of civilizations seems to be reaching “outside the box” of history and literature. Increasingly the newest important works—such as Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and Keys' *Catastrophe*—have incorporated serious science to explain historic events. I would like to add Brian Fagan's new work, *Floods, Famines, and Emperors* to this list.

Fagan has written extensively on pre-Columbian history, most of which depends upon the work of archaeology because New World cultures did not have much by way of written records. He has also spent time in Egypt and Mesopotamia in archaeology digs, which provided him with a good comparison with the New World societies that he explored. I used his book *Kingdoms of Jade, Kingdoms of Gold*, as the best and most accessible text on Native American empires for an undergraduate World History course.

The book being reviewed here goes beyond archaeology and introduces us to the great global climatic systems that are increasingly affecting our lives. Before we had a global civilization, it was difficult for people in one part of the world to know what was going on in another part. A volcanic eruption in Java was the unknown cause for several years of no summer (and famine) in northern Europe. Nor did people in India or Africa suffering from failure of their monsoons to arrive know anything about the great oceanic cycles that we have now named “El Niño” or “La Niña.” Our ancestors, when confronted with climatic disasters, were compelled to attribute them to the will of the gods—or, as in today's Central African Republic, to the malevolence of witches.

Fagan provides an exceedingly useful and fascinating overview of the oceanic effects on climate, global warming, global cooling, and how these great natural systems have shaped human history. Empires have