FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Social Sciences

Plagues of the Mind: The New Epidemic of False Knowledge
Bruce S. Thornton
Intercollegiate Studies
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The following accusation appears in the introduction: “We are, despite being awash in information, just as prey to misinformation, half-truths, gratifying superstitions, pleasing myths, and outright lies as any seventeenth-century Salemite reaching for a torch as he eyes suspiciously the neighborhood crone.” Thornton details examples of such false knowledge from drug educational programs to television to our educational system and spends the entire second half of the book debunking three “popular errors” that are representative of this new epidemic: aspects of romantic environmentalism, cultural attitudes toward Native Americans and goddess worship. His evidence is long and expansive, going back to the very beginning of the human story.

The roots of this epidemic lie, according to Thornton, in legacies from both the Enlightenment and nineteenth century Romanti-cism (though both can be traced as far back as the Greeks) and in the strange chemistry that occurs when the two ideologies collide in the twentieth century, what Thornton calls the therapeutic vision. A veritable hotbed for false knowledge, the therapeutic vision combines Romantic ideals about our existence and the Enlightenment belief in science to realize them.

Thornton does not mince words and he is not taking any intellectual prisoners. It is impossible to read this book without getting angry at some point, probably at Thornton himself, though he wouldn’t care, and would even be pleased if it spurred the reader on to research the issue for himself. Thornton’s arguments are bold and frustrating and yet enticing for readers who like to challenge the popular mindset. For ultimately what Thornton is attempting to do is shake us out of our intellectual complacency and remind us of “the freedom of our minds, our intellectual autonomy that allows us to confront the hard choices and make the hard decisions that are the responsibility of every citizen in a democracy.”

Those who like quick labeling for all the easy insinuations that go with it are out of luck.

Plagues of the Mind doesn’t fit into the political left or right, as prescribed. That’s the point. There is simply no way around the mucky work of weighing and deciding for oneself—about this book or about our grimy and amazing existence as humans, an endeavor that is both a burden and a liberation.

Nava Hall