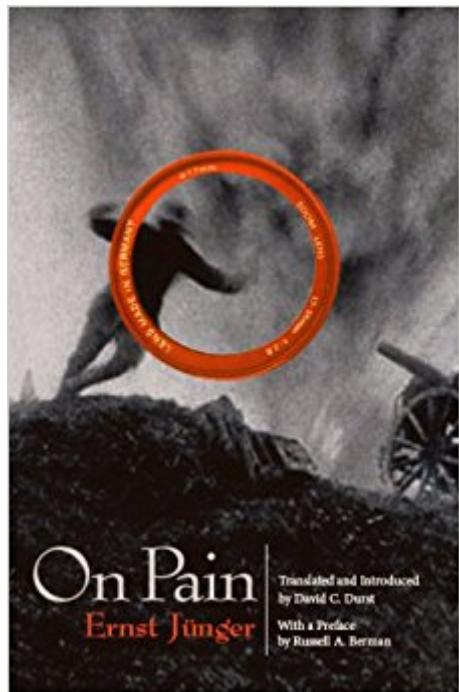


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On Pain



Synopsis

Written and published in 1934, a year after Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Ernst Juenger's *On Pain* is an astonishing essay that announces the rise of a new metaphysics of pain in a totalitarian age. One of the most controversial authors of twentieth-century Germany, Juenger rejects the liberal values of liberty, security, ease, and comfort, and seeks instead the measure of man in the capacity to withstand pain and sacrifice. Juenger heralds the rise of a breed of men who--equipped with an unmatched ability to treat themselves and others in a cold and detached way--become one with new, terrorizing machines of death and destruction in human-guided torpedoes and manned airborne missiles, and whose "peculiarly cruel way of seeing," resembling the insensitive lens of a camera, anticipates the horrors of World War II. With a preface by Russell A. Berman and an introduction by translator David C. Durst, this remarkable essay not only provides valuable insights into the cult of courage and death in Nazi Germany, but also throws light on the ideology of terrorism today.

Early Praise for On Pain"With this superbly introduced and meticulously translated edition of *On Pain*, scholars will have access to a key Juenger text, which demonstrates his uncanny ability not only to analyze the ruptures and crises brought about by modernity in his day, but also to anticipate world-historical phenomena that critical social theory still grapples with in the twenty-first century."--Elliot Neaman, Professor of History, University of San Francisco, and author of *A Dubious Past: Ernst Juenger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism*"Juenger represents a way of thinking about those things we fear the most....This excellent translation introduces readers to a work of primary importance that will open a new perspective on human experience to all who read it in this volume."--Marcus Bullock, Professor Emeritus of English, The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and author of *The Violent Eye: Ernst Juenger's Visions and Revisions on the European Right*"Until Telos Press's newly translated edition of Juenger's *On Pain*, there has been no clear-cut introduction to this, his vital critique of social liberalism and the culture of modernity, for scholars of literary, military, and intellectual history. Important yet contentious, *On Pain* offers a perfect entry point for readers unfamiliar with Juenger the political essayist, focusing upon such issues and ideas as torture and terror, horror and affliction."--John Armitage, Principal Lecturer of Media & Communication, Northumbria University, United Kingdom, and Founder and Co-Editor of *Cultural Politics*"In *On Pain*, Ernst Juenger shifts a code word of modern subjectivity, derived from Nietzsche and Baudelaire, into the realm of phenomenological objectivity. His 'pain' no longer emphasizes the liberal gesture of 'me, me,' but rather the affirmation of the anonymous condition of the soldier in modern war and the worker in industrial production.... Unique insight into the cruel phenomena of the twentieth century and pre-fascist impulses coalesce in a gaze both analytic and fantastic."--Karl

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Customer Reviews

Ernst Juenger (1895-1998) was born in Heidelberg, Germany. He was a shock troop commander in the German Army during World War I, and for his service was awarded the Pour Le Merite, the highest Prussian military order. Juenger's memoir of the war, *Storm of Steel*, offers a gripping account of his experiences. During the Weimar Republic, Juenger was an outspoken conservative critic of the first German democracy, but never joined the Nazi party. In 1939, Juenger's novel *On the Marble Cliffs* provided an allegorical critique of the Hitler regime. One of the most controversial writers of twentieth-century Germany, Juenger received many literary prizes. He died at the age of 102 in Riedlingen.

Ernst JÃ¶nger requires two translations. One from German to English, the second from English to understandable English. I mean this literally. E.J. was without a doubt one of the most brilliant literary minds of the 20th century (which he lived through in its entirety): he was capable not only of compressing enormously complex thoughts and ideas into arresting single sentences, but occasionally of writing prose so beautiful it took on the quality of poetry. However, he was also frequently turgid, opaque, digressive and vague, so that reading his works often required great concentration and patience, not to mention a willingness to sift through those flaws to find what might be called the ores of his meaning. It is possible to read a JÃ¶nger book through without actually grasping just what the author wanted to say (*Aladdin's Problem* confounds me to this day),

and this explains partially why "On Pain", a 47 page essay, has 47 pages of forwards and introductions in its vanguard. It is a great and important read, but it is not an easy one. I say "partially explains" because the other reason JÃ¶nger's essays are always prefaced with massive introductions by academics is that he is considered one of the most dangerous writers ever to pick up a pen. His reputation as "the intellectual Godfather of Fascism" demands that legions of scholars feel obligated to hurl their twopenny bits of disclaimer before he is allowed to speak. JÃ¶nger's works are presumed, by those who presume to be smarter than you, to be something unreadable unless you've been told how to feel about them beforehand. I remember reading a forward to *On the Marble Cliffs* which violently attacked E.J. because he admittedly "lacked the capacity for hatred", by far the strangest criticism I've ever heard. It is precisely JÃ¶nger's incapacity for ordinary human emotions which allowed him to write the way he did...but I guess that's the problem. His ideas, his conclusions about existence, his particular way of viewing the world, are regarded by a great many people as simply too dangerous to be tolerated, which goes a long way to explaining why most of his works have never been translated, and why the few that have are always so unreasonably expensive or hard to lay ahold of. "On Pain" is a deceptive title, and here again we come to the issue of translation, which is noted by the translator himself in his forward. This is not a book about the sensation of physical pain, but rather a metaphysical analysis of the changing relationship between human beings and suffering in the broadest sense of that word. In "On Pain", JÃ¶nger, who was writing in 1934, and whose outlook was shaped by his combat experiences as a storm trooper in the First World War, posits that mankind is turning away from the values of bourgeois morality - safety, security, ease, comfort, individualism - and becoming harder, more disciplined, and less individual. The new man defines himself via struggle, self-sacrifice, and the ability to withstand pain in all its forms, physical, emotional and otherwise. JÃ¶nger likens this evolving consciousness of man to a photographic lens, which gazes upon the most gut-wrenching horror in total objectivity, unmoved by pity or emotion of any kind. He also maintains that his mentality, the conservative mentality, is born out of an acceptance that pain is unavoidable and, in certain mediums, beneficial. Discipline, for example, is "the way man maintains contact with pain." He notes that during the "enlightened" i.e. liberal era, a "good" face was "nervous, pliant, changing, and open to the most diverse kind of influences and impulses." In '34, however (with the Nazis in power in Germany, Communists in Russia, Fascists in Italy, etc.) the human face is undergoing a "hardening" which brings to mind soldiers of the old Prussian Army, that "stronghold of heroic virtues." What causes this physical manifestation of the inner hardening of the human soul, JÃ¶nger writes, is "the imposition of firm and impersonal rules and regulations." Humanity, he believes, has galvanized itself in imitation of

the unfeeling, destructive machines he has created, and thus taken a step to become more machine than man. At the heart of "On Pain" is Junger's rejection of what we today would call "Western values." America is the stronghold of the pleasure-loving super-individual, who no longer feels much in the way of responsibility, and whose main purpose in life, other than experiencing pleasure, is in the acquisition of money and objects. But it is not the only country to hold these "values", and they are precisely what Junger wanted to destroy. "On Pain" is, in essence, a gleeful ringing-in of what he thought was a new era, one which shovels dirt over the corpse of bourgeois liberalism. And indeed, as an indictment of "moderate" and "liberal" thinking it is devastating, the moreso because Junger was not a Nazi. (Indeed, he saw with remarkable prescience that a society founded on the values of the machine could lead to ruin. "One grasps how an enormous organizational capacity can exist alongside a complete blindness vis-à-vis values, belief without meaning, discipline without legitimacy.") Rather, it is simply unwilling to accept that a fat belly, a full wallet and a silk cushion are the highest ideals of human existence. Just as *The Storm of Steel* committed the ultimate academic sin in refusing to view war as an unqualified evil, finding in it "an incomparable schooling of the heart", "On Pain" compounds that sin by maintaining that the measure of a man lies in his capacity to withstand pain. Viewed as prophecy, "On Pain" is faulty as of now, but one can already see in certain places in the world a deep-seated rejection of "Western values" and a desire to define life in terms of the acceptance of suffering rather than in its avoidance. Radical Islam, for example, views the individual as of no consequence except in his relation to the struggle, the struggle itself as waged without mercy or restraint, and death as simply the price of devotion to the faith. Terrorism is a cult of pain as Junger defines the word, and if we see it in those terms the magnitude of the task of defeating it becomes clear: one of many reasons why "On Pain" remains relevant after 76 years.

This essay is preceded by an intro and foreword almost as long as the text itself, but the reader shouldn't let the work's brevity deter them from reading it. "On Pain," is a brilliant meditation on how we as a species are willing accomplices in our own dehumanization, via the technological tools we create and avail ourselves of daily. Nothing escapes Junger's ken, from the mass media, to tanks, to photographic cameras. This work, though written more than half a century ago, remains prescient and relevant in its themes. The language is not too dense or obfuscatory, but every sentence and paragraph yields new meaning and dimensions upon repeat readings. "On Pain" is part of a triptych of works that Junger wrote on characters/archetypes he saw emerging as human products of the increasingly complicated and nihilistic world we inhabit. The other works are "Die Arbeiter" (about "the worker" type) and "The Forest Passage" (about "the Anarch," a man who maintains his

autonomy over his own mind and soul, regardless of the external pressures exerted on him or the power of the regime in whose shadow he suffers). This is the better of the two between "On Pain" and "The Forest Passage" (I have yet to read "The Worker"), even though Junger offers a prescriptive way forward in "The Forest Passage," while merely offering an ominous catalog in this shorter, but better work. The future Junger depicts and the present he delineates are both dark (Junger is something of a fatalist, though he and some of his biographers would deny it), and there is something inexorable in the process he describes (thanks to Moore's Law of Exponential Growth), which means that things are even worse now than when Junger saw the storm coming on the horizon. But whether we are collectively doomed or not by the decisions we've made collectively, Junger's insight on display in this work have to be read to be believed. And then probably reread. Highest recommendation.

Telos Press has done a good job of printing this little booklet into a sleek, slender eye-catcher, if not for its cheesy ZOOM LENS graphic on the front. This translation was meticulously done and cuts to the chase quickly, affording the English-speaking audience JÃnger's prose in fluent and readable style. As a work, it not only gives insight into the mind of one of the greatest and popular German authors of the past century, but into the spirit of the age following the greatest catastrophe that mankind had ever known until that point. He literally captures the feelings of starkly being forced to face the reality of violence and mayhem, as well as the great factor that technology multiplies it by in the modern age, and triumphantly accepts what many of the sheltered and privileged people of the time had had the luxury of isolating themselves from. The only annoying part about this edition was the introduction, in which a sociologist attempt to put his own slant on the writing, but it's not a big enough deal to take a star away. The Translator's Notes are also a good read and give the context of JÃnger's literary activity.

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