



X LÉVY, B.-H. *Barbarism With A Human Face*. Translated from the French by George Holoch. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. xii + 210 pp. \$10.00—Lévy was a left-wing student leader during the events of May 1968; *Barbarism With A Human Face* is a fiercely polemical transvaluation of his former values, proclaiming that what seemed to be the hope of the world is really its destruction and that what seemed to be progress is really the approaching and inevitable triumph of all the forces of darkness. This is a book of iconoclastic

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prophecy, whose central intention is to show that behind the mask of revolutionary benevolence hums the motor of absolute evil.

The most immediate source of this evil is socialism, in all its forms (including the Eurocommunist "socialism with a human face"). According to Lévy, Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* expresses the crucial truth that the Gulag prison camps are not accidents but the necessary consequences of socialist society. This is so because a socialist order aims at eliminating all centers of resistance to political power. But if oppressive political power is the ultimate evil, socialism is only its proximate cause. Socialism itself is nothing new, but only the extension of the bourgeois transformation of living human activity into dead capital: "socialism in power is not only a form of capital; it is a *barbarian* form which is afraid of no shortcut . . . in order to lead societies to the sterility that capital promised them." Moreover, both capitalism and socialism are but consequences of the Enlightenment; the ultimate villains are technology, materialism, and uncontrolled desire.

The real target of Lévy's diatribe is the progressive development of the modern West, a development which from his point of view is the inexorable progress of a disease. There are Nietzschean and Heideggerian echoes throughout the work, but the most precise formulation of Lévy's dystopic vision of the future is (as he notes) drawn from his archenemy, Karl Marx. This is the Marxian notion of "crude communism," as developed in the 1844 manuscript on "Private Property and Communism." Under crude communism, or state capitalism, the bourgeoisie and private property are abolished, but human beings remain alienated laborers or proletarians. According to Marx, this state of affairs is avoidable, but for Lévy the worst features of capitalism and socialism are now combining to produce a barbaric society which is invincible, since it contains no internal opposition to its execrable principles.

Lévy is attached to his pessimism, and holds out little hope of subduing this rough beast which, on his view, is slouching towards Rome to be born. This is because he holds that the Enlightenment's attack on religion and the Marxian dismissal of the "formal freedoms" of liberalism are as sound theoretically as they are disastrous for decent politics. Though he claims to have been aroused by Solzhenitsyn from his dogmatic slumbers, Lévy remains convinced that God and nature are as dead as Marx and history. Moreover, he is apparently committed to an uncritical cultural determinism, which leads him to believe that all our present political options (which, for a Parisian intellectual, means our language even more than our actions) are hopelessly contaminated by the modernist hegemony. All that is really left are romantic gestures to which he gives the names metaphysics, art, and moralism.

There is very little argument in *Barbarism With A Human Face*. The book, whose success has established Lévy as a prominent spokesman for the so-called new *philosophes*, is most similar in its unremittingly critical posture toward the modern West to the first published work of the great anti-*philosophe*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A comparison of Lévy's work with the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*

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provides partial confirmation for his thesis that the recent history of the West is a story of progressive decay.—S.G.S.

