

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY, *War, Evil, and the End of History*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2004, x + 371 p.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, the famous French philosopher and writer, provides a noteworthy intellectual and speculative experience for any social theorist involved in examining political and social global unrest or organized emancipatory efforts in an age that is neither bi-polar (post-1989) nor preceding September 11th, 2001. Lévy's writing, accompanied by Charlotte Mandell's superb translation, is exquisite, masterful and intriguing, providing the reader a true experience of superb mastery of the pen. Due to this fact, the reader feels exceedingly satisfied while digesting the words within its pages. At the same time, however, the theoretical arguments and presentation are flawed.

As presented in the title, Lévy supports what some have labeled a postmodern premise/discourse toward the societal, economic, and cultural dynamics of contemporary geopolitics. This is done through the examination of several conflicts and social movements throughout the world (Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan) and how such variances have, without ideology, responded to inequitable power relations and fiscal pauperization. It is in this context however that Lévy's argument is devoid of substantiated fact and theoretical conception. Paradoxically, while his work issues that conflict throughout the world today demonstrates "an illusion of meaning" (155), Lévy himself, without his own comprehension, degrades his very contention through contradiction.

Lévy promotes the position that "for a long time, wars used to have meaning (but today) those days are over." He argues, as many postmodern thinkers do, that this loss of meaning is due to "the decline of Marxism, along with all the great narratives" (3). Lévy mistakenly takes it a step further by arguing that these passé political theories and ideologies have in actuality been manipulated and bastardized so as to cause war. He believes that they have "conspired ... to give meaning to what had none" (3), thus not only negating the contextual status of contemporary conflicts, but that their historic material fabric of social change, if having a militant or revolutionary element, is meaning-less. While Lévy proceeds to express the absence of meaning and ideology within war, he overlooks one of the most elementary weaknesses when theoretically examining society: power relations. Lévy announces that war has been a constructed manipulation of the combatants. The failing, however, is that Lévy falls short of presenting

who exactly supports this exploitative approach. If the combatants are fighting a bloody conflict without reason, or only for purpose of power or wealth, then who is guiding their course of action? Are they an irrational mass merely demonstrating a continuance from the Cold-War with an absence of leadership? Lévy fails to provide answers. Moreover, his failure to present a constructive argument concerning or against revolution – an instrument of historic necessity which has brought progressive conscious organized sociopolitical change – weakens his argument further.

The position that ideology and meaning are over as a result of Marxism's decline is a characteristic of the postmodern milieu. Strangely, however, after an interview with Ivan Ríos of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's – Peoples Army (FARC-EP) Secretariat, one infers that Lévy comes to a realization that the FARC-EP are creatively implementing Marxism within a contemporary social and geopolitical setting. In 2003, James LeMoyné of the United Nations stated that the FARC-EP were unquestionably an "ideologically committed" revolutionary social movement. Lévy partially declares these same sentiments by establishing that the FARC-EP are a "Marxist-Leninist" movement which holds an ideology that does not resemble dogmatic socialist tendencies of times past. He then articulates, "there is something in this Marxism-Leninism that, despite its irreproachable rhetoric, resembles nothing I have ever heard or seen elsewhere ... This is an impeccable Communism (and) certainly, the most powerful" (82). It is with these words that Lévy unwraps his own argument without even being aware of it. He demonstrates that not only does Marxism exist, but that it is being applied clearly in a modern context through an ideological context not witnessed through preceding "Marxisms."

One must consciously examine why such a book has been written without concrete evidence, a loaded political theoretical position, and an openly anti-Marxist tone. Is it actually the case that the End of History has come, that movements in the world such as the FARC-EP are without ideological purpose, and that Marxism has wavered and ceased to exist? Or is it that postmodern theorists, primarily located in the minority-world, are embarrassed by their obsession with trying to disprove the contextual realities of Marxism over the past two decades – and adopted a Eurocentric position which had them primarily focus on the areas stated to be employing Marxism and not other regions of the majority-world who were for several decades. Movements like the FARC-EP have embarrassed and de-legitimized the postmodernist argument of the end of ideology and the demise of Marxism by having subjectively proven that Marxism has not only continued throughout the past half-century, but has continued to thrive. Such ideological movements materially demonstrate that they are in struggle with ideological purpose and meaning.

Lévy's book neither advances postmodernist analysis nor reveals the sociopolitical and economic reasons for the existence and persistence of conflict in the modern world. It is in this reasoning that Lévy and other postmodernists have had to backtrack regarding their theoretical

foundation, or, more accurately, the lack thereof. It is in this position and reasoning that postmodern theorists like Lévy must, to save scholarly face, make every effort to dismiss movements by labeling them non-Marxist, terror-based, and nothing more than uninformed individuals fighting in un-ideologically motivated wars of evil at the end of history. The disturbing reality in this, however, is that by doing so they legitimize the current geopolitical construct of power, thus having one believe that they are unable to effect change.

It is in this position that those with an ideology of understanding must combat the underanalyses of those who fail to understand that reality is ongoing and that history only ends when one ceases to look toward the future. Lévy fails to demonstrate his theoretical premise while simultaneously demonstrating his ignorance toward the socioeconomic and political geography of the world fifteen years after the so-called decline of meaning and ideology.

James J. Brittain University of New Brunswick

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