

ment and on its faith in the emancipation of the individual by means of a universally diffused culture based upon an "objective" set of values. The analysis of the romantic concept of *Volksggeist* or "national genius" sets the scene for Finkelkraut's critique of the "*philosophie de la décolonisation*," which in its emphasis on relative values specific to each culture denies universality to the values of the colonizing civilizations of the West.

Not that the author denounces all the ideas of

tors? "I don't believe in theater's ability to change things in that sense. There are no certain values anymore. What could I 'defend' in a show? I don't know. I believe that French theater is very healthy, that there are a lot more chances being taken on stage than in film...But theater is a marginal art. When it's really good, though - it's something great."

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his talk about universal values, of which truth is surely one of the most important, there is little space devoted to the "truth," especially to the empirical truths so dear to the 18th century. The author never attempts to determine to what extent, if any, our western values can be useful to other cultures. Given so much cultural diversity, can the ideals of the 18th century be applied without hesitation or qualification to the 20th?

In his emphasis on the universality of cultural values, the author seems to have lost sight of the only universality that matters and remains after so much diversity has been catalogued - the domain of moral values. Because for all of the differences between funeral rites amongst the Fang in Gabon and courting rituals in 20th-century Paris, there exists a moral universe of pain and pleasure, of anguish and serenity common to us all. That is where our duty lies - not in imposing our cultural standards upon those who have read

Anyone who has had to listen to someone hold forth on how the Rolling Stones are the modern-day equivalent of Beethoven will be sympathetic to Finkelkraut's denunciation of the blurred "frontier between culture and entertainment." But is that confusion a cause of the problem or merely a symptom? Popular culture has no need for justification in the form of foolish comparisons to the great in order to exist: pop culture, by definition, respects none of the criteria (least of all the notion of "value") by which

little Shakespeare and could care less, but in respecting the universal capacity to suffer. Moral conduct, which Finkelkraut examined in his excellent *Sagesse de l'Amour*, must always precede the cultural judgement to which he devotes so much of his latest book.

That Bernard-Henri Lévy should be the one to denounce the present state of the intelligentsia comes as a surprise, because in his steadfast cultivation of his own persona, in the preeminence of the personality of the thinker over the form and content of the thought that his career exemplifies, he is responsible for the trivial state of French intellectual life. Lévy's 154-page quickie *Eloge des Intellectuals* is not a careful and restrained analysis of the problem à la Finkelkraut, but a 60-second advertisement for the "intellectual of the third kind," of which he is obviously the most perfect example. What is wrong with the intelligentsia? asks Lévy, to which the answer is plainly: books like this - unserious, unscholarly efforts about unserious subjects. Given the present intellectual desert that advances several feet across Paris every month, do we really need another paean to intellectuals? Why don't they get a real job for a change?

Of course, there are many interesting ideas in Mr. Lévy's book: his defense of television and his plea for complexity, the argument that the Left is not the Right, communism is not fascism and Marchais is plainly not as bad as Le Pen. The argument that an intellectual must have "betrayal in his veins" and owes

imposition of universal values by an external authority but the freedom of the individual to choose. The savants of the 18th century could not have known or even imagined the kind of societies existing in Africa or South America, but they recognized the need to adapt the ideal to the real, to enunciate universal truths that would respect the particular truths of individuals.

Curiously, Finkelkraut's essay is almost a purely idealist exercise in support of a pragmatic and empirical vision of the world. For all of

fidelity only to the truth is intriguing but dangerous: Lévy's intellectual is a romantic hero at odds with Finkelkraut's more sober and dependable man of reason. But all this is overwhelmed by his discussion of "*Sartrons*" and "*Droidloms*" - his use of gimmicky intellectual ready-mades that are meant to serve in the place of scholarship and argument.

Some of this is meant to be critical of his own work, and he acknowledges the role his own first book *Barbarie a Visage Humain* has played in bringing the world of ideas to its present sorry, anarchic and useless state. But in his plea for a return to ideology the author is hardly able to see much beyond the very limited history of the French 20th century - hardly an outstanding period in the history of political thought. Great thought is not necessarily synonymous with great ideology, and plenty of serious political philosophers - Hume, Locke, Hobbes and Rawls, to name but a few - have done very well without benefit of "ideology." As for his critique of movie stars who become intellectuals, it is impossible to know whether Lévy is being self-critical or merely incoherent. After all, Lévy is the one who was a member of the jury that chose the "best legs of Paris" in a contest sponsored by the Dim hosiery company and who has exploited the male *decolleté* as a sex object. Looking over the very strange career of Mr. Lévy, one cannot but think that the problem is not the movie stars who become intellectuals but rather the intellectuals who become movie stars. ■