

# A Philosopher's Adventures in Liberty



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Bernard Henri-Levy, Parisian media star and philosopher.

**Les Aventures de la Liberte**  
By Bernard-Henri Levy  
Editions Bernard Gasset  
400pp. \$49.95

By **ANTONY BLINKEN**

"An intellectual," says Bernard-Henri Levy, "is anyone — a theoretician, a writer, a painter — who interrupts the face-off with his work, with his own demons, to get involved with the issues of the day. The intellectual is, in a way, an artist playing hooky because of

a higher calling, a moral imperative."

Mr. Levy, the photogenic figurehead of the present generation of French intellectuals, has just produced a striking history of his brotherhood. "Les Aventures de la Liberte" or "The Adventures of Freedom," a jointly released book/television series, traces the political engagement of French thinkers from the Dreyfus affair to Tienanmen Square. It's a family scrapbook that demon-

strates, ultimately, that intellectuals have no higher claim to political or moral authority than anyone else; that the "isms" of this century — communism, Marxism, Maoism, existentialism, surrealism — have lost their appeal for French intellectuals.

For every Emile Zola or Andre Malraux, who, in fighting the right political battles, enhanced their reputations, Mr. Levy finds a Maurice Barres or a Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, whose despicable politics failed to banish them from the pantheon of greats.

Mr. Barres, a writer who inspired everyone from Proust to Aragon, Camus to Malraux, penned manifestoes against Dreyfus: "that ethnic nose ... that figurehead of a foreign race." Mr. Drieu, a charming dandy and brilliant scribe, called Hitler's Nazi congress in Nuremberg "overwhelmingly beautiful," and, following a guided tour of the Dachau concentration camp in 1935, two years after its opening, wrote that "nothing was hidden from me. ... The overwhelming impression was one of admirable comfort and strict discipline, and also the persistent and determined resistance of certain elements."

These are extreme, black and

white examples, and by no means the only ones. Equally fascinating, though, is Mr. Levy's depiction of intellectuals who rallied to dubious yet plausible causes because, like everyone else, they lacked the benefit of hindsight.

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*Mr. Levy calls into question all the 'isms' that have engaged intellectuals in the 20th century.*

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Some of Dreyfus' most ardent defenders became Stalinists 30 years later. More recently, to take the flip side of the process, intellectuals who demonstrated and petitioned in solidarity with Chinese students or Soviet dissidents in the 1980s were the very same ones who began their careers in

the late 1960s as Maoist revolutionaries.

Mr. Levy is hard on, but forgiving of, these misguided predecessors, guilty not of malice, but of poor judgment. He seeks not to condemn, but to understand. How is it, he asks, that the great humanist Albert Camus, when asked to speak out against French colonialism in Algeria, responded "between justice and my mother, I choose my mother." What did Michel Foucault, a seminal postwar philosopher, have in mind when he wrote glowing tributes to the Ayatollah Khomeini and the nascent Iranian revolution? Why, more generally,

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