Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Vision*

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But freedom lies definitely in a reconstruction which is not in the nature of a rebellion but in the nature of presenting an order which is more adequate than the order which has been there.—George Herbert Mead, The Philosophy Of The Act (1938), p. 663

In four of his works,¹ Herbert Marcuse has stated and developed a fairly broad thesis about how technological society corrupts its members and how it should be reconstituted, especially in the United States. Marcuse contends that, as a whole, our society is irrational and reprehensible. The fact that the vast majority of its members accept its values does not render it less so. For, in our society, the character and intensity of human needs are not determined autonomously by the individual members.

Whether or not the possibility [sic] of doing or leaving, enjoying or destroying, possessing or rejecting something is seized as a need depends on whether or not it can be seen as desirable and necessary for the prevailing societal institutions and interests. [Moreover], we may distinguish both true and false needs. ‘False’ [needs] are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression . . . Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual [but] no matter how much such needs may have become the individual’s own . . . they continue to be what they were from the beginning—products of a society whose dominant interest demands repression (ODM, pp. 4–5).

‘True needs’ are those whose satisfaction results in ‘the optimal development of the individual, of all individuals, under the optimal utilization of the material and intellectual resources available to man’ (ODM, p. 6). Our technological society, according to Marcuse, not only controls what sorts of thing are produced, but appears ‘to be the very embodiment of Reason [sic] for the benefit of all social groups and interests . . . to such an extent that all contradiction seems irrational and all counteraction impossible’ (ODM, p. 9). Accordingly, the efficiency of the technological interests of the society ‘blunts the individual’s recognition’ that he is enslaved; and, thereby, the technological interest takes full control of him, for ‘all liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude’ (ODM, p. 7). Even when a deviant individual protests, the society deflects his protest so it becomes ineffective. The only possibility of change, therefore, lies in revolution, i.e. ‘refusing to

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play the game' (ODM, p. 257). 'The most advanced consciousness of humanity' (ODM, p. 257) must oppose the system from outside 'the democratic process' (ODM, p. 256) and destroy the system altogether. What is to replace it is partisan or liberating tolerance (RT, pp. 85, 88, 109), which is intolerant toward the repressive status quo and which 'may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teachings and practices in the educational institutions' of the society (RT, p. 100). The purpose of such restrictions, of course, would be liberation, which consists in freeing people from the traditional need to labour for necessities and in transforming society so that they are enabled to cultivate a 'new sensibility' (EL, pp. 23-4).

The liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the attainment of this goal. Technique would then tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated. Emergence of a new Reality Principle: under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an aesthetic ethos (EL, p. 24).

This ethos requires a change in the nature of sexuality 'from sexuality constrained under genital supremacy to erotization of the entire personality' (EC, p. 201). This change

would be the result of a societal transformation that released the free play of individual needs and faculties. . . . [Under] the free development of transformed libido within transformed institutions, . . . sexuality tends to its own sublimation: the libido would not simply reactivate precivilized and infantile stages, but would also transform the perverted content of these stages (EC, p. 202).

In short, by eliminating the repressiveness of established society, we liberate

the naturally creative and satisfying power of the libido.

There are five main issues in Marcuse's analysis of our society: false needs vis-à-vis true needs; totalitarianism; liberation; inevitability and autonomy; and social engineering vis-à-vis revolution. He is confused about every one of them; and, in what follows, I discuss them in terms of their key concepts so as to clarify both the concepts and the issues.

To begin with, there are four different kinds of need-statement. (1) A need-statement may refer to 'a state of affairs in which something is required or demanded by a prescriptive rule or law'. Thus, 'He needs the jack of spades to have a straight flush', is a statement that what is required is demanded by a rule of poker; and 'One needs a license to fish here' is a statement that what is required is demanded by a state law. (2) A need-statement may refer to a state of affairs 'in which the something-that-is-needed is a necessary means to the attainment of a goal of the person who is said to have
the need'. Examples of such a statement are 'People need food, shelter, and clothing', 'I need a watch', 'He needs a doctor', and 'There is a need for traffic lights at this intersection'. In this sense of 'need', what someone needs is relative to what he wants. Thus, a nudist does not need clothing, and someone about to commit suicide does not need food, shelter, or clothing. (3) A need-statement may refer 'directly to the conative dispositions of human beings or animals....' [A] need in this sense is a comparatively strong "drive", "wish", or "motive". An example of this kind of need-statement is 'Children have a need for love and affection'. (4) A need-statement may be purely normative, i.e. 'a recommendation that a certain course of action be taken, and this always, of course, contextually implies the speaker's value judgment that it is better to do what is being recommended than not to do it'. Examples of this kind of need-statement are 'We need to make the highways safe' and 'We need to replace slums by good housing', where 'need' can be replaced by 'ought'.

Having distinguished these four kinds of need-statement, consider the following.

Even if it can empirically be shown that man has certain basic needs in senses (2) and (3), it is neither self-contradictory nor logically odd to refrain from recommending that such needs be satisfied, or to recommend that they not be satisfied. The purposes and goals to which needs in sense (2) are relative may, after all, be morally undesirable. And we may disapprove of certain human conative dispositions (needs in sense (3)), however dominant they might be in some individuals or groups.

Now, the needs that Marcuse mentions are needs in senses (2) and (3). The latter determine the former: what is necessary to achieve a certain goal depends upon what the goal is. What Marcuse calls 'false needs' are allegedly repressive conative dispositions that 'technological society' causes its members to acquire for its own benefit (whatever that means!); and what he calls 'true needs' are allegedly non-repressive conative dispositions that, when exercised, lead to people's liberation from 'society's' repression and to their genuine happiness. His sole justification for having the true needs satisfied is that their satisfaction (allegedly) benefits those whose needs they are. But he does not state in detail what the true needs are nor how he knows that satisfying them will benefit all people. Since Marcuse himself is a member of a repressive society, according to his own thesis, he should be unable to know what his own true needs are. Nevertheless, he claims to know not only what his needs are but what everyone else's are. According to him, what makes a need true or false is 'not a matter of value-preference but of rational criteria' (RT, p. 101), for 'the distinction between ... progress and regression can be made rationally on empirical grounds' (RT, p. 105).
Marcuse never states the criteria or the empirical grounds, but it is nevertheless clear how he decides what sort of need is true and what sort is false. Axiomatically, 'repression' is bad and 'being oneself' and spontaneity are good (RT, p. 114; EL, pp. 28, 36–7), and the needs that 'repression' imposes or fosters are false, whereas those that spontaneously flow from a person himself are true.

Let us consider the foregoing with respect to one of the needs that Marcuse regards as false. Keep in mind that he so classifies it on allegedly empirical grounds. The need in question is the need to behave aggressively. Marcuse wants to rid us of it (RT, p. 114; EL, p. 23). And, of course, he wants to do this so we can live a life of sensuous, playful, calm, beautiful gratification (EL, pp. 24–5). Such a life is free from frustration and misery. Now, there are three things wrong here. First, it is tautological to say that frustration and misery are evils. Accordingly, no one would disagree with Marcuse's statement that we are better off without them (other things being equal), but only because it tells us nothing with which we might disagree. Second, there are perfectly decent people who would not enjoy Marcuse's paradise, just because it would deny them aggressive behaviour. These people would not want lives of sensuous, playful, calm, beautiful gratification. Consider, for instance, William James' little essay, 'What Makes A Life Significant?'. In it, he discusses a week he spent in a town on the borders of Chautauqua Lake, 'beautifully laid out in the forest and drained, and equipped with means for satisfying all the necessary lower and most of the superfluous higher wants of man', where 'you have the best fruits of what mankind has fought and bled and striven for under the name of civilization for centuries...in short, a foretaste of what human society might be, were it all in the light, with no suffering and no dark corners' (loc. cit. pp. 53–5). Yet James found Chautauqua undesirable. He writes:

... I asked myself what the thing was that was so lacking in this Sabbatical city, and that lack of which kept one forever falling short of the higher sort of contentment. And I soon recognized that it was the element that gives to the wicked outer world all its moral style, expressiveness, and picturesqueness,—the element of precipitousness, so to call it, of strength and strenuousness, intensity and danger. What excites and interests the looker-on at life, what the romances and the statues celebrate and the grim civic monuments remind us of, is the everlasting battle of the powers of light with those of darkness; with heroism, reduced to its bare chance, yet ever and anon snatching victory from the jaws of death. But in this unspeakable Chautauqua there was no potentiality of death in sight anywhere, and no point of the compass visible from which danger might possibly appear. The ideal was so completely victorious already that no sign of any previous battle remained, the place just resting on its oars. But what our human emotions seem to require is the sight of the struggle going on. The moment the fruits are being merely eaten,
things become ignoble. Sweat and effort, human nature strained to its uttermost and on the rack, yet getting through alive, and then turning its back on its success to pursue another more rare and arduous still—this is the sort of thing the presence of which inspires us, and the reality of which it seems to be the function of all the higher forms of literature and fine art to bring home to us and suggest. At Chautauqua there were no racks, even in the place’s historical museum; and no sweat, except possibly the gentle moisture on the brow of some lecturer, or on the sides of some player in the ball-field.

Such absence of human nature in extremis anywhere seemed, then, a sufficient explanation for Chautauqua’s flatness and lack of zest (loc. cit. pp. 56–8).

I cite James as an example of someone who would find Marcuse’s paradise unspeakable, because James’ own writings and Perry’s biography of him make it impossible to dismiss him as a mere parrot of society’s. In some moods, James neither sought nor desired ‘the absence of vice, but vice there, and virtue holding her by the throat’. Marcuse’s false need, then, is sometimes James’ true need.

Third, Marcuse states that his contentions about true and false needs are empirically grounded. But consider one work by an empirical scientist: On Aggression by Lorenz. In my remarks on this work, I shall simply summarize some of what he writes. My point in doing this is not to claim that his theses are correct, but merely to emphasize that the empirical investigation of at least one ethnologist raises serious questions about the soundness of Marcuse’s method and programme.

Lorenz states that aggressive behaviour between man and man is largely innately, not socially, determined, and therefore cannot be eliminated by changes in education and social structure. He writes that the belief that human behaviour is predominantly reactive and that, even if it contains any innate elements at all, it can be altered, to an unlimited extent, by learning is ‘completely erroneous’ (loc. cit. pp. 50–1). For instance, a gentleman’s disinclination to strike a woman, which one might suppose to be entirely culturally determined, is paralleled by male behaviour in other species, e.g. the domestic dog, the hamster, the Goldfinch, and the South European Emerald Lizard [loc. cit. p. 123]. The central thesis of Lorenz’ book is that love and friendship have evolved phylogenetically from intra-specific aggression. He discusses several instances of redirected aggression that forms bonds of love and friendship between members of the same species [loc. cit. pp. 54, 58–62, 167–74]. Now, Marcuse believes that aggression in an individual is a perversion arising from the influence upon him of his repressive society. It is on this quite non-empirically held ground that he would transform society to eliminate aggression from its members’ behaviour. He does not consider whether or not aggression is innate or what will happen to love and friendship as he attempts to eliminate aggression.11
It turns out that Marcuse begins with a need-statement of Type 3, 'People need to behave aggressively', and then asserts that the need is a 'false' need. He claims that, in doing this, he is not expressing a value-preference but making an empirically grounded statement of fact. Yet he gives no empirical ground for his assertion, but makes it a priori. Moreover, Lorenz' empirical research shows that the need is innate and 'true'. Marcuse, ignorant of Lorenz' finding, assumes (contrary to it) that the need can be eliminated by transforming society. At this point in his analysis, according to Marcuse, no value-preference has been expressed. Yet he next asserts a need-statement of Type 4: 'We need to eliminate aggression.' But if the statement that the need for aggression is a false need is not the expression of a value-preference, then Marcuse has no warrant for his Type 4 need-statement. This is an example of his general confusion about needs. He assumes the existence of specific needs of kinds (2) and (3), fails to tell us in detail what they are or how he knows we have them, and then makes need-statements of kind (4) that he confuses with those of kinds (2) and (3) or erroneously believes to be entailed by them.

Moreover, Marcuse offers no reason to believe that we all have the same true needs, or that our true needs are mutually compatible. In general, the situations in which we find ourselves, as social beings, are situations in which we cannot get what we want except by co-operating with other people whose wants are different from ours. Marcuse merely asserts, but does not justify or even argue for, the crucial contention that people really have the same goals and needs but are led by the leaders of 'technological society' into believing otherwise. He thereby prescribes a politico-moral ideal without discussing and, I suspect, without even considering what human beings are or are capable of becoming.

The second main issue in Marcuse's analysis concerns totalitarianism. Marcuse does not define 'totalitarianism', but is content to allow it to function as a piece of the 'word-magic' he claims to deplore. Because he fails to define it, he does not delimit a relatively precise concept for use in an analysis, and he therefore blurs the distinction between very different kinds of society, e.g. those of Nazi Germany and of the United States or Great Britain. It is not merely that he uses the term 'totalitarian' irresponsibly, but that he gives it no clear meaning and therefore, in using it, creates a conceptual confusion whereby he improperly classifies together societies such as those mentioned, which actually differ greatly with respect to the kinds of freedom they sanction and the degrees thereof that their members may exercise. I suggest the following definition: 'Totalitarianism is a system of government or a social organization whereby those in authority attempt to control the basic forms of social life that arise directly from man's personal
nature and political activity and thereby to abolish freedom and to maintain total control over the individual’s personal, moral, and social life. A paradigm case of totalitarianism is the system envisioned by Plato in his *Laws*:

The main principle is this—that nobody, male or female, should ever be left without control, nor should anyone, whether at work or in play, grow habituated in mind to acting alone and on his own initiative, but he should live always, both in war and peace, with his eyes fixed constantly on his commander and following his lead; and he should be guided by him even in the smallest detail of his actions—for example to stand up at the word of command, and to march, and to exercise, to wash and eat . . . in a word, he must instruct his soul by habituation to avoid all thought or idea of doing anything at all part from the rest of his company, so that the life of all shall be lived *en masse* and in common. . . .

Now, Marcuse expresses his contention that we are controlled by powers over which we have no control (*ODM*, pp. 5–8, 49 n, 244–6, 250 ff.; *RT*, *passim*) by stating that our society is totalitarian. Is our society sufficiently like what Plato envisages and what Hitler achieved to warrant our calling both those societies and ours ‘totalitarian’? Or is our society sufficiently different from those to warrant our calling it non-totalitarian? Notice that a society that includes totalitarian elements may nevertheless, on the whole, be non-totalitarian. The question is arguable in terms of specific similarities and dissimilarities, but Marcuse prefers begging the question to discussing it.

In the matter of liberating us from our repressed state, Marcuse does not specify in detail what form this ultimate liberation will take. Although he denies that any person or group has the authority to specify what needs should be satisfied (*ODM*, p. 6), by the end of *One-Dimensional Man* he tells us that an alliance of ‘the most advanced consciousness of humanity and its most exploited force’ is our only chance for liberation (*ODM*, p. 257). Thus, the presupposition of his programme is irreducibly elitist. The alliance’s ‘knowledge’ of what are our ‘true needs’ is to determine matters despite our denial that the needs are ‘true’. ‘The process [of liberation] always replaces one system of preconditioning by another; the optimal goal is the replacement of false needs by true ones, the abandonment of repressive satisfaction’ (*ODM*, p. 7). ‘In the last analysis, the question of what are true and [what are] false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves, but only in the last analysis; that is, if and when they are free to give their own answer’ (*ODM*, p. 6; my emphasis). And in ‘Repressive Tolerance’, he writes that ‘the forces of emancipation cannot be identified with any social class, which by virtue of its material condition, is free from false consciousness. Today, they are hopelessly dispersed throughout the society . . .’ (*RT*, pp. 111–12). Moreover, although he believes that ‘the reversal of the
[repressive] trend in the educational enterprise at least could conceivably be enforced by the students and teachers themselves, and thus be self-imposed . . . ' (*RT*, p. 101), he does not explain how they or the other 'forces of emancipation' distinguish true needs from false needs. Not only does Marcuse assume that when people are ‘free’ they will give exactly one answer, and not only does he not adduce any evidence that his liberated society will be any less repressive than he alleges ours to be, but the elitist nature of his society should make us doubt the plausibility of his assurance that it will be.

Marcuse does state, somewhat indefinitely, what ‘liberated life’ will be. To understand his idea, we need to consider some Freudian theory upon which it is based. Freud wrote

that man, having found by experience that sexual (genital) love afforded him his greatest gratification, so that it became in fact a prototype of all happiness to him, must have been thereby impelled to seek his happiness further along the path of sexual relations, to make genital erotion the central point of his life. . . . [I)n so doing he becomes to a very dangerous degree dependent on a part of the outer world, namely, on his chosen love-object, and this exposes him to most painful sufferings if he is rejected by it or loses it through death or defection. The wise men of all ages have consequently warned us emphatically against this way of life; but in spite of all it retains its attraction for a great number of people.

A small minority are enabled by their constitution nevertheless to find happiness along the path of love; but far-reaching mental transformation of the erotic function are necessary before this is possible. These people make themselves independent of their object’s acquiescence by transferring the main value from the fact of being loved to their own act of loving; they protect themselves against loss of it by attaching their love not to individual objects but to all men equally, and they avoid the uncertainties and disappointments of genital love by turning away from its sexual aim and modifying the instinct into an impulse with an inhibited aim (*Civilization And Its Discontents* (1930), translated by Joan Riviere, London 1951, pp. 69–70).

Freud theorized that the repressed genital instinct not only expressed itself as benevolence, but as artistic or scientific creativity. In short, the repressed instinct is sublimated, i.e. there is a modification of aim and of object. Freud went further and contended that since

no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct’s persisting tension; and . . . [since] the backward path that leads to complete satisfaction is as a rule obstructed by the resistances which maintain the repressions . . . there is no alternative but to advance in the direction in which growth is still free . . . [*Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1920), translated by James Strachey, London 1950, p. 56].

And the only direction in which growth is free is that in which socially accepted forms of sublimation move us.
In the light of Freud’s theory of culture’s dependence upon repression of instincts, we can understand Marcuse’s notion of the ‘liberated life’. He holds that ‘all civilization has been organized domination’ (EC, p. 34) and that, although our coming to grips with the realities of life demands a considerable degree and scope of repressive control over the instincts, the specific interests of domination introduce additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association. These additional controls arising from the specific institutions of domination are what we denote as surplus-repression (EC, p. 37).

Surplus-repression, according to Marcuse, is the repression needed to uphold class domination (EC, pp. 38–9, 87 f.; EL, pp. 17, 23–4). To eliminate surplus-repression is to transform libido so that the entire person is eroticized, so that life is creative and satisfying. To do that is Marcuse’s goal.

The life of libidinously free individuals is the life of ‘the new sensibility’, a foretaste of which is the psychedelic trip, which ‘involves the dissolution of the ego shaped by the established society… an artificial and short-lived dissolution’ (EL, p. 37). What is needed, according to Marcuse, is a revolution in perception, a new sensorium, that will help to free our sensibility from domination by the ‘rationality of the established system’ and combine it, instead, with ‘a new rationality’ (EL, p. 37). But he does not define either ‘rationality’, and I am left to believe that each is to be defined in terms of the value-preferences in whose service it is enlisted. Rationality is the exercise of reason, and reason is an abstract capacity of human beings. But Marcuse’s two ‘rationalities’ are not two kinds of rationality, but merely ‘false rationality’ and ‘true rationality’ according to his own valuational fiats.

Although there can be no liberated life without our first transforming society, an approximation to liberated life in one sphere is today’s rebels’ denial of the beautiful in this culture, … its all too sublimated, segregated, orderly, harmonizing forms. Their libertarian aspirations appear as the negation of the traditional culture: as a methodical desublimation…. They now oppose to… the most sublime [musical] achievement of this culture their own music, with all the defiance, and the hatred, and the joy of rebellious victims, defining their own humanity against the definitions of the masters. The black music, invading the white culture, is the terrifying realization of ‘O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!’—the refusal now hits the chorus which sings the Ode to Joy, the song which is invalidated in the culture that sings it. Thomas Mann’s Doctor Faustus knows it: ‘I want to revoke the Ninth Symphony’. In the subversive, dissonant, crying and shouting rhythm, born in the ‘dark continent’ and in the ‘deep South’ of slavery and deprivation, the oppressed revoke the Ninth Symphony and give art a desublimated, sensuous form of frightening immediacy, moving, electrifying the body, and the
soul materialized in the body. Black music is originally music of the oppressed, illuminating the extent to which the higher culture and its sublime sublimations, its beauty, have been class based (EL, pp. 46–7).

The foregoing passage is very odd, but it is representative of Marcuse’s writing. It makes vague assertions that remain unclarified and unsupported. First, what is meant by saying that Beethoven’s music was class bred. Consider his Third Symphony, which was written to honour Napoleon Bonaparte, who was at that time

the symbol and embodiment of the new world of freedom and hope which the [French] Revolution had held forth to mankind. . . . Moreover, Beethoven’s first overt expression of sympathy with the new order of things (Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité) was in the ‘Eroica.’ . . . the ‘Eroica’ was his first obviously revolutionary music.¹⁵

In which ‘class’ was Beethoven’s music ‘bred’? It celebrated the ideals of the French Revolution, but the suggestion to compose the Symphony came from General Bernadotte or from Rudolph Kreutzer (Secretary to the Legation) and it was paid for by Prince von Lobkowitz. Was the music ‘bred’, then, in the exploited proletariat of the French Revolution, or in the military, or in the bureaucracy, or in the nobility? Moreover, was the Symphony a ‘dangerously immoral composition’, as those at the Conservatorium of Prague held it to be? Can the questions be answered, even in principle? Surely not! They are just silly. And Black music no more ‘revores’ the Ninth Symphony than does, let us say, Stockhausen’s Klavierstück XI. Yet, in that work, improvisation plays so great a role that ‘the work’ does not exist as a single composition, but is created anew at each performance.¹⁶ It goes without saying that a composer’s music reflects his feelings toward his milieu, as do an audience’s preferences reflect theirs toward their milieu, but those feelings are much more complex and unconscious and undirected than Marcuse’s sociological analysis of music would have us think. Music is indeed changing today, but so was it changing in Beethoven’s day. Witness his ‘immoral’ Third Symphony! Second, the fact that the joy and brotherhood of Schiller’s text to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony have not, on the whole, been achieved in our culture is a curious reason to ‘revores’ the Symphony. If Marcuse wants to believe that the ‘sublimated’ Ninth Symphony should be exchanged for The Who’s¹⁷ smashing their instruments against loudspeaker enclosures, since they and their audience are libidinally free whereas the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its audience are not, that is his prerogative. But he gives his readers no reason to believe that what he suggests is sensible or that the ‘free’ people would be leading better or happier lives than the ‘unfree’.
Marcuse envisions a transformed society in which transformed libido as ‘elemental, instinctual, creative force’ (EL, p. 88) creates a ‘sensuous environment’ and a new sensibility. The latter, he believes, will ‘register, as biological reactions, the difference between the ugly and the beautiful, between calm and noise, tenderness and brutality, intelligence and stupidity, joy and fun...’ (EL, p. 91). It is by no means clear what is meant, for example, by ‘registering’ the difference between intelligence and stupidity ‘as a biological reaction’. But no matter. For Marcuse admits that he cannot say what the specific institutions and relationships of his new society would be (EL, p. 86). His term ‘transformation’ is not an empirical concept, but a piece of primitive word-magic whose function is to obstruct understanding while expressing an implicit judgement and a personal reaction: although Marcuse does not know what a ‘transformed’ society would be, he does know that it would ‘transform’ mankind and he favours doing that. The language of ‘transformation’ is that of the enthusiast, not of the scholar. Under those terms, his enthusiasm may be matched by someone else’s aversion, and the matter may be left at that. In so far as I can form a concept of life under his ‘new sensibility’, it seems to me to be directed primarily by the passion for extemporizing and experiencing, by the will ‘to acquiesce in the chaotic rule of emotion’. His ideal man seems to be a barbarian, in that he is the man who

regards his passions as their own excuse for being; who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause or by conceiving their ideal goal. He is the man who does not know his derivations nor perceive his tendencies, but who merely feels and acts, valuing in his life its force and its filling, but being careless of its purpose and its form.

It seems to me that the human race has already done better than that.

The fourth main issue in Marcuse’s work concerns inevitability and autonomy. Marcuse is a technological determinist, i.e. he believes that a person’s values are strictly determined by those of the established society of which the person is a member. (It is not clear to me what is meant by saying that a society, in contradistinction to a majority of its members or to a specific set of its members, has values. Indeed, although I believe that ‘society-talk’ of this sort is misleading at best and nonsensical at worst, I shall use it so as to be faithful to Marcuse’s way of putting things.) I shall discuss his determinism only briefly, for its erroneousness is easily demonstrated. It is straightforwardly false that our technological society generates only those values and needs that benefit it. Our mass education, however repressive it actually is, continually causes people to make valuations and to recognize needs that are potentially disruptive to the status quo. In principle,
education in our society encourages free inquiry and reasonableness, although what occurs in practice usually corrupts this professed objective. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the incompetence and stupidity of most classroom teaching, to corrupt is not to obliterate, and imperfection is not extinction. Libraries, which include Marcuse’s books as well as lucid and profound criticisms of our society and government, give the public free access to ideas whose implementation would be incompatible with satisfying the interests of Marcuse’s ‘technological society’. There is, in short, nothing inevitable about our having the values we have and the needs implicit in them. Marcuse’s ‘technological determinism’ is just a myth. Its acceptability derives, I think,

from a desire to resign our responsibility, to cease from judging provided we be not judged ourselves and, above all, are not compelled to judge ourselves—from a desire to flee for refuge to some vast amoral, impersonal, monolithic whole—nature or history, or class, or race, or the ‘harsh realities of our time’, or the irresistible evolution of the social structure, that will absorb and integrate us into its limitless, neutral texture, which it is senseless to evaluate or criticize, and which we resist to our certain doom. This is a mirage which has often appeared in the history of mankind, always at moments of confusion and inner weakness. It is one of the great alibis, pleaded by those who cannot and do not wish to face the facts of human responsibility, the existence of a limited but nevertheless real area of human freedom, either because they have been too deeply wounded or frightened to wish to return to the traffic of normal life, or because they are filled with moral indignation against the false values and the, to them, abhorrent moral codes of their own society, or class, or profession, and take up arms against all ethical codes as such, as a dignified means of casting off a morality which is to them, perhaps justifiably, repulsive. Nevertheless, such views, although they may spring from a natural reaction against too much moral rhetoric, are a desperate remedy. Those who hold them use history as a method of escape from a world which has, for some reason, grown odious to them into a fantasy where impersonal entities avenge their grievances and set everything right, to the greater or lesser discomfiture of their persecutors, real and imaginary. 20

According to Marcuse, the impersonal forces are biological, and transformed libido dressed in his own socialistic garb will liberate mankind.

The last of Marcuse’s five main theses is that revolution is the only chance of liberation because to work within the democratic process is to have one’s opposition to the status quo deflected by ‘the system’. Marcuse’s whole programme is anti-rational: his assumption of impersonal forces that determine our values and needs, his pseudo-knowledge of ‘true needs’, his unwillingness to countenance facts that would falsify his statements, and his obscure language. Rationalism, in the sense I have in mind, is

the awareness of one’s limitations, the intellectual modesty of those who know how often they err, and how much they depend on others even for this knowledge. It is
the realization that we must not expect too much from reason; that argument rarely settles a question, although it is the only means for learning—not to see clearly, but to see more clearly than before.\textsuperscript{21}

Part of rationalism is the recognition that truth is not manifest and that 'the search for truth demands (a) imagination, (b) trial and error, and (c) the gradual discovery of our prejudices by way of (a) and (b), and of critical discussion.'\textsuperscript{22}

I want to argue two things: first, that the truth about what is good for people is to be discovered by (a), (b), and (c), supplemented by critical discussion; and second, that trial and error in social matters is more likely to eliminate harm and to produce good than is revolution and is therefore the more sensible policy.

I have already remarked that Marcuse neither specifies in detail what needs are 'true needs' nor tells us how he knows them to be that nor offers 'a blueprint of the specific institutions and relationships which would be those of the new society' (\textit{EL}, p. 86). To be sure, an intelligent and sensitive person can reasonably conjecture about what is in another person's interest or what the person wants; and if it is in the first person's power, he may create situations in which the other person's acts confirm or disconfirm that he has the postulated interest or desire. Thus, if I believe that you really would like to eat Spezzatino of Chicken Piemontese now, since I would, I can serve a portion to you; and if you are not hungry, or if you dislike chicken or wine sauce or parmesan cheese, you will not eat it. In that situation, I imagine what you want to eat, try and err, and thereby learn of my particular prejudice, i.e. the ungrounded belief that what I would like to eat now you would want to eat now. I might learn of it more easily by asking and then being told what I discover by trial and error. This food-example is a simple model of more complex social situations. So ends my first contention.

My second contention can be stated as simply. Were I to force people who dislike Spezzatino of Chicken Piemontese to eat it, I should not eliminate their wanting a tasty meal and I should cause them the harm of having to eat what is distasteful to them. But unless, by trial and error or by critical discussion of my proposal to serve that to them, I discover what they want to eat and what they want not to eat, I shall act on my prejudice that they would like to eat what I would like to eat. I shall act outside the democratic process of consulting those I serve and considering their expressed desires, and I shall therefore not serve them well. Thus, trial-and-error and critical discussion of alternative courses of action are a more sensible way to satisfy people's needs than is revolutionary force. With this model, I end my second contention.\textsuperscript{23}

Marcuse, of course, maintains that to express opposition to the status quo
democratically is to have the opposition deflected by 'the system'. This, no doubt, is sometimes true. But a system should not be judged exclusively by its perversions. In the United States, for instance, democratically expressed opposition often is effective. I cite but three examples. An individual citizen can cause a federal regulatory agency to issue a 'cease and desist' order against a large corporation, causing it considerable inconvenience and forcing it to act in the public's interest. I myself have done this. More striking, I think, are two examples drawn from criminal law. In *Gideon v. Wainwright*, a convicted criminal serving his sentence petitioned the Court, which overturned his conviction and ruled that, in future, states must provide counsel for criminal defendants who are financially unable to provide their own; and until 1953, it was doubtful that federal constitutional claims raised and decided on the merits in state criminal cases could be re-examined by a federal court in a habeas corpus proceeding, when *Brown v. Allen* held that they could. An increasing number of habeas corpus petitions were subsequently filed by state prisoners, and the Court reaffirmed its doctrine in *Townsend v. Sain*. There are indefinitely many other instances of effectively expressing opposition to 'the system' from within it. In criticizing the United States as irrationally as he does, Marcuse fails to mark the distinctions between it and the totalitarian society for which he mistakes it.

Against the prescription for utopian revolution, this caution should be raised:

... of all political ideals, that of making the people happy is perhaps the most dangerous one. It leads invariably to the attempt to impose our scale of 'higher' values upon others, in order to make them realize what seems to us of greatest importance for their happiness; in order, as it were, to save their souls. It leads to Utopianism and Romanticism. We all feel certain that everybody would be happy in the beautiful, the perfect community of our dreams. And no doubt, there would be heaven on earth if we could all love one another. But ... the attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell. It leads to intolerance. It leads to religious wars, and to the saving of souls through the inquisition. And it is, I believe, based on a complete misunderstanding of our moral duties. It is our duty to help those who need our help; but it cannot be our duty to make others happy, since this does not depend on us, and since it would only too often mean intruding on the privacy of those towards whom we have such amiable intentions. The political demand for piecemeal (as opposed to Utopian) methods corresponds to the decision that the fight against suffering must be considered a duty, while the right to care for the happiness of others must be considered a privilege confined to the close circle of their friends. In their case, we may perhaps have a certain right to try to impose our scale of values—our preferences regarding music, for example. (And we may even feel it our duty to open to them a world of values which, we trust, can so much contribute to their happiness.) This right of ours exists only if, and because, they can get rid of us; because friendships can be ended. But the use of
political means for imposing our scale of values upon others is a very different matter. Pain, suffering, injustice, and their prevention, these are the eternal problems of public morals, the ‘agenda’ of public policy (as Bentham would have said). The ‘higher’ values should very largely be considered as ‘non-agenda’, and should be left to the realm of laissez faire. Thus we might say: help your enemies; assist those in distress, even if they hate you; but love only your friends.²⁷

Epilogue
My comments on Marcuse’s work have been entirely negative. Whatever the force of my criticisms, however, I have not meant to deny that consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him . . . to the commodity form [and makes him dependent] on a market ever more densely filled with merchandise’ (EL, p. 11). Nor have I meant to deny that the desire indefinitely to increase Gross National Product leads to an allocation of productive resources among industries and businesses that is exceedingly wasteful and inefficient. Finally, I have not meant to deny that numerous injustices flow indirectly from the political organization associated with corporate capitalistic economies. Yet the correctness of Marcuse’s belief that these evils exist does not entail the desirability of his new sensibility or of his proposed methods of achieving it.

Marcuse almost seems to believe that his recognition of evil carries with it a sound programme for eliminating evil.

[Our doctrine] is a spiritualized conception, itself the result of the general reaction of modern times against . . . flabby materialistic positivism. . . . Anti-positivistic, but positive: not sceptical, nor agnostic, nor pessimistic, nor passively optimistic, as are, in general, the doctrines (all negative) that put the centre of life outside man, who with his free will can and must create his own world. [We] desire an active man, one engaged in activity with all his energies. . . . It must be forbidden to publish newspapers which do not conduce to the [common] welfare. We demand the legal prosecution of all tendencies in art and literature of a kind calculated to disintegrate our [liberated] life, and the suppression of institutions which militate against the above mentioned requirements. (Cf. EL, pp. 7, 24; EL, pp. 21, 28, 90; EL, p. 91; RT, pp. 100–1; RT, pp. 88–89, 105–6).

Notice the ‘Cf’. I am not quoting Marcuse, but asking you to compare the cited passages in his writings with those I did quote, which are by Mussolini and Hitler.²⁸

I have not juxtaposed the names of Marcuse, Mussolini, and Hitler to disparage Marcuse, but to show that slogans cannot solve social problems. What is needed is specific proposals applicable to concrete contexts. The vagueness and emotionalism of slogans lead the unwary to believe, quite erroneously, that very confused and misguided proposals are worthy of their
allegiance. Good intentions are no safeguard here, although Marcuse seems to think they are. Although we may deplore much of what we find in the world and may hope even to achieve utopia, I see no reason to suspect that history will not continue to be what Gibbon said it was: 'little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind'.

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NOTES

1 Eros and Civilization, Boston 1955, 1966; One-Dimensional Man, Boston 1966; 'Repressive Tolerance', in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, A Critique of Pure Tolerance, Boston 1965, 1969; and An Essay on Liberation, Boston 1969. Hereinafter, these works are cited respectively as EC; ODM; RT; and EL.
3 Ibid. p. 107.
4 Ibid. p. 108.
5 Ibid. p. 110.
6 Ibid. p. 111.
7 William James, On Some Of Life’s Ideals, New York 1912.
8 Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, 2 vols., Boston 1935.
9 William James, Talks to Teachers on Psychology, London 1899; but cf. Pragmatism, New York 1907, p. 297, where he utterly rejects evil and expresses the desire 'to make a universe that shall forget its very place and name'.
11 Lorenz mentions that the ethnologist and psychoanalyst Derek Freeman has shown 'that head hunting is so intricately interwoven with the whole social system of some Bornean tribes that its abolition tends to disintegrate their whole culture, even seriously jeopardizing the survival of the people' [loc. cit. p. 261 (my emphasis)].
13 Consider the following. The principle of legality (which roughly corresponds to nulla poena sine lege), by which State officials' penalizing individual citizens is limited by the prescription and application of specific rules, was abolished in Germany in 1935. The German Act of June 1935 included, for instance, the statement that 'Whoever commits an offense against the honor of the prestige of the Head of Government shall be punished with penal servitude from one to five years' [Art. 282]. Compare that law to the due process guarantees of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Also compare the Chinese attitude toward Chairman Mao’s teachings with Plato’s statement about fixing one’s eyes constantly on one’s commander. Yet, according to Marcuse, Chinese society is not totalitarian (EL, especially).
14 It is interesting to consider the relative degree of ‘repression’ in the classless or nearly classless society of the USSR and in the highly stratified society of eighteenth-century England.
17 The Who is my illustration, not Marcuse’s.
23 The simple models just presented have profound implications for social theory. See, for instance, Roscoe Pound, ‘Survey of Social Interests’, Harvard Law Review, 57, 1943, 1 ff. Socially, what is best is a cultivated neutrality in the catalogue of interests until evidence rationally persuades us of the desirability of one rather than another.
29 Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, London 1776–88, ch. 3.