

The Temptation of Herbert Marcuse

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HERBERT MARCUSE has been called the philosopher of the New Left. If this title is warranted—and I believe it is—then we have in the New Left not only a rejection of American society, but a rejection of the traditions of Western civilization. What is remarkable, however, is that the New Left can disrupt colleges and universities, the guardians of civilization, and frequently be assured of apologists within those very colleges and universities. Herbert Marcuse is not one of their apologists so much as one of their teachers. What lures many of these innocents and not-so-innocents to his teaching is its utopianism. This utopianism appears to provide an attractive alternative to American society. It is seemingly based on a solid and comprehensive critique of contemporary liberalism and the conservative vestiges of nineteenth-century liberalism. It condemns not only economic but intellectual and moral laissez-faire. And yet, as we shall see, this new utopianism is itself rooted in the underlying principle of modern liberalism, a principle which Marcuse develops to its ultimate logical conclusion and, in so doing, poses a threat to the very existence of civilized society.

Now to elucidate the character of this threat, I shall divide this essay into four major parts. First, after a survey of his key writings, I shall discuss Marcuse's threefold critique of American society. Second, I shall reconstruct the philosophical foundations upon which that critique is based — a "psychologized" historicism pointing to unrestrained gratification of desire. Third, I shall examine, briefly, his alternative to American society — his erotic utopia. Fourth, I shall set forth the means by which Marcuse would bring this utopia into existence — a politicized Academic Establishment. I hope to show that, insofar as Marcuse is the teacher of the New Left, the New Left is the Last Left of Western civilization.

In *Eros and Civilization*, published in 1955, Marcuse presents what may be termed a Marxist interpretation of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*.¹ Without seeming to reject Freudian psychology, Marcuse nevertheless argues, contrary to Freud, that repression of the libido is not a necessary precondition of civilization, but only of a civilization limited by want and toil, that is, by eco-

¹ *Eros and Civilization* (New York, 1955), hereafter cited as EC.

conomic scarcity. In *One Dimensional Man*, published in 1964, Marcuse undertakes a critique of advanced industrial society.² He argues that the affluence and even the high degree of freedom enjoyed by American society constitute subtle forms of repression. In 1965, Marcuse distilled and politicized the teaching of these two books in his essay, "Repressive Tolerance."³ The title of this essay appears paradoxical. What does "repressive" mean? And how can tolerance, or what Marcuse calls pure and impartial tolerance, be repressive?

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse uses the term "repressive" and "repression" synonymously with "restraint," "constraint," and "suppression"; and these terms, he says, designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes (EC 7). Bearing this in mind, how is pure or impartial tolerance manifested in American society, and why is it repressive? In pursuing this inquiry, I shall refer to three sources of repressive tolerance which come under Marcuse's attack, and these I shall call the Economic, the Political, and the Academic Establishments.

I

According to Marcuse, repressive tolerance is generated by an economy based on planned obsolescence, an economy committed to the production of waste (RT 102; ODM 3-12, 49-52; EC 88-91). While the economic establishment may produce useful and beneficial things, its existence depends primarily on the production of frivolous and even harmful things. And while it may sometimes satisfy "true" needs, more often it manufactures a multiplicity of "false" needs (ODM 4-5). Furthermore, the products of the economy, including the output of the entertainment industry, "carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumer more or less pleasantly to the producers" The effect is to produce factitious needs together with a "false consciousness . . . immune against its falseness" (ODM 12). Meanwhile, "true" needs, which, Marcuse says the individual must determine for himself, these needs are repressed (ODM 4-6, 245; EC 91). Nor is this all. For by manufacturing artificial needs on the one hand, and by gratifying them

² *One Dimensional Man* (Boston, 1964), hereafter cited as ODM.

³ "Repressive Tolerance," in Robert P. Wolff, *et al.*, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, 1965), pp. 81-117, hereafter cited as RT.

on the other, there is engendered among the vast majority a feeling of satisfaction not only with the economic establishment, but with the political establishment as well. As a consequence, the system renders the majority unreceptive to radical change. Its very tolerance is repressive.

However cogent this critique of the economic establishment may appear, we must distinguish the critique itself from its philosophical foundations, especially from the meaning of repression which underlies it.

Suppose a married man with two or three children, and with just enough money to make a down payment, purchased a new Cadillac — this, solely for its prestige value, the “need” for which was engendered by an alluring TV commercial. Marcuse would no doubt call this a false need. But why should the satisfaction of this presumably false need be *repressive*? One might answer by saying it resulted in the repression of true needs, more important needs. We must recall, however, that for Marcuse, true needs are needs which the individual must determine for himself. No institution or “tribunal,” he contends, “can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide what needs should be developed and satisfied” (ODM 6). Now to speak of needs which the individual *determines* for himself, or to speak of needs which are to be *developed*, indicates that Marcuse regards needs and wants or desires as synonymous. Common sense would argue, however, that we do not always need what we want, and we do not always want what we need. Indeed, Marcuse seemingly admits this distinction by admitting the distinction between “true” and “false” needs. Yet it is nevertheless true that he identifies needs with wants (ODM 1, 6, 245). We may even say he identifies needs with demands. For his statement that no institution or “tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide what needs are to be developed and satisfied” means that the economic system should be based on the capitalist principle of supply and demand, where the supply is to be determined solely by the demands of each individual consumer! This principle is the ancestor of a famous Communist principle, abbreviated by Marcuse to read: “to each according to his needs” (ODM 41; EC 137). But inasmuch as Marcuse’s individual determines his own needs, the abbreviated principle should read: “to each whatever he wants or demands.” This means that the economic system must have the capacity to satisfy the demands of each and every

individual however capricious they may be. Less than this is repressive. Perhaps I will be charged with having exaggerated the implications or utopian expectations of Marcuse's argument. Let me therefore turn to his critique of the political establishment.

This establishment, Marcuse reminds us, bestows official tolerance to all political parties; to Fascist as well as Communist; to parties of the Right as well as to parties of the Left; to parties of aggression as well as to parties of peace and humanity (RT 85). In addition, it tolerates various ways of life, bohemian and non-bohemian. Yet this very tolerance, Marcuse complains, is what makes American society so intolerably repressive. For by means of such tolerance it secures the loyalty of the vast majority of citizens and renders them unreceptive to radical political change. Against so massive and conservative a majority, protest groups are reduced to impotence. According to Marcuse, the test of a truly free society is whether it prevents a subversive minority from becoming a majority (RT 100). That subversives have the opportunity to persuade the majority by exercising the constitutional right of freedom of speech is not enough. Nor is access to the mass media which, he admits, gives voice to all points of view. For, as he tries to explain, the very meaning of words used in political debate has already been fixed by the Establishment. As a consequence, the conservative majority, upon hearing new and radical ideas, evaluate these in terms of ordinary language, a language which all but precludes rational persuasion to linguistic meanings opposite the established ones (RT 96). In other words, ordinary language itself is repressive, for it preserves the *status quo*.

In contrast, genuine political debate, Marcuse points out, presupposes that the language of debate is open; that the people are capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis of knowledge; that they have access to authentic information; that their evaluation is the result of *autonomous* thought (RT 95). Such conditions, Marcuse argues, do not prevail in American society. The mass media, which he regards as mere instruments of the political and economic establishments (RT 95), do indeed give voice to all points of view. But what is the result? Stupid opinions are treated with the same respect as intelligent opinions; misinformed people may talk as long as well-informed people (RT 94). Meanwhile, vital information is so fragmented that trivia is juxtaposed with tragedy; exotic commercials with unmitigated horrors. Propagated

is "a mental attitude which tends to obliterate the distinction between true and false, information and indoctrination, right and wrong" (RT 97). In short, the mass media, says Marcuse, are engaged in the systematic moronization and brutalization of the American people. But if genuine debate is not possible, if the vast majority are not receptive to the arguments of a subversive minority, much of their freedom is illusory. Real freedom, he emphasizes, is autonomy or self-determination. Such freedom is repressed by the toleration of sense and nonsense.

Again we must distinguish the cogency of Marcuse's critique — here of the mass media — from its philosophical foundations. Notice that Marcuse, in the spirit of Rousseau's education of *Emile*, has extended the meaning of the term repression to include anything that hinders autonomy or self-determination.⁴ It is from these grounds that he denies the right of any institution to determine what needs should be developed; for this would condition the individual to prefer certain goods to the exclusion of others, and thus propagate a false economic consciousness. (Conservative critics of a planned economy might learn much from Marcuse.) Similarly, no institution, he suggests, can arrogate to itself the right to determine what political opinions are to prevail; for this would condition the individual to prefer the existing political system over others, and thus propagate a false political consciousness. (Libertarians might also learn much from Marcuse.) In both cases, self-determination would be hindered; the individual would be repressed.

From Marcuse's understanding of what constitutes repression and self-determination it follows that the individual, to be truly free, must live as he likes (EC 174, 208). But to live as he likes, he must have or receive whatever he desires; hence the economic and utopian principle "to each whatever he wants." Nor is this all. For to live as he likes, the individual must also live in the kind of society he likes. But inasmuch as his likes may change, the form of this society shall have to change whenever he wishes it to change. In other words, he shall have to live in what Marcuse calls a "polymorphous society."⁵

⁴ Note, however, that *Emile* was educated to become, eventually, a citizen and statesman, one living in a *closed* society. Marcuse has radicalized and depoliticized Rousseau's teaching, denying the fundamental tension between the needs of the individual and the needs of a good political order.

⁵ Not to be identified with a "pluralistic" society whose political institutions are virtually fixed.

Many intelligent and moderate citizens may regard this teaching of Marcuse as so farfetched as to fail to take it seriously. They would do well, however, to compare the language and logic of his teaching with the incredible demands and expectations of radical groups across the nation. The intelligent and moderate citizen may think it borders on the irrational to expect a society to tolerate its own subversion, when the vast majority of its citizens regard it as basically decent, especially when the subversive minority has failed to persuade the majority that a radically different form of society would be preferable. He may deem as rhetorical nonsense Marcuse's reply that the majority is not open to rational persuasion, the meaning of words having been fixed by the Establishment. Perhaps he would point out that the opinions of the Supreme Court, especially during the past fifteen years, strikingly reveal that the meaning of such terms as freedom of speech, equal protection, and a host of other legal concepts are not only *not* fixed, but utterly fluid. He might go on to argue that the changed meaning of these concepts has contributed to radical changes in American society. But if he were to respond in this manner, he would only have touched the surface of Marcuse's argument. Let us probe a little deeper.

I said a moment ago that Marcuse's critique of the mass media is indirectly a critique of the political establishment. But to the extent that the mass media have moronized and brutalized countless men, women, and children, may this not also be a reflection on the character of the Academic Establishment? Indeed, can it be that this Establishment is the ideological source of repressive tolerance?

Marcuse's most extensive critique of the Academic Establishment is to be found in *One Dimensional Man* (ODM 170-199; 15-16, 114-120, 156-158). This critique is directed against the school of *positivism* and two of its offshoots, *behavioralism*, associated with the social sciences, and *linguistic analysis*, also called *ordinary language*.⁶ In one form or another, positivism dominates

⁶ To judge from *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse seems unaware of the fact that the school of *ordinary language* is critical of logical positivism, in particular, of its emotivist or noncognitivist theory of moral judgment. See, for example, George C. Kerner, *The Revolution in Ethical Theory* (New York, 1966). But what is at issue here is not the adequacy of Marcuse's scholarship so much as the *political* character and tendencies of his teaching. Hence, in what follows, I deliberately ignore the differences between logical positivism and ordinary language, although I agree with Marcuse that both deny transcendental values.

American education. Its adherents propagate the doctrine that there exist no universal or objective standards by which to distinguish good ends from bad ends, right conduct from wrong conduct. Stated another way, value judgments, unlike factual propositions, are neither true nor false; they merely denote the emotive state or subjective preferences of their adherents. From this it follows that there are no objective or rational grounds for preferring one end or mode of conduct over another, which is to say, in effect, that all values are theoretically equal. But to teach this is to promote toleration of all values; it is to promote pure, which is to say, repressive, tolerance.⁷ Such a teaching, says Marcuse, undermines any desire or incentive to bring about radical change. As he points out, so long as linguistic analysts do not have as their primary purpose critique and transcendence of the values or ideology which ordinary language conveys, they reinforce the *status quo*. Or so long as behavioralists are concerned merely to describe and predict human behavior, without criticizing the ideology governing that behavior, they too reinforce the *status quo*, hence, the Establishment (ODM 15).

II

What is striking about Marcuse's critique of American society is that it is fundamentally a critique of *moral relativism*, the relativism propagated by the three establishments, especially by the Academic Establishment (ODM 99). It is all the more surprising, then, to discover that Marcuse is himself a relativist, one belonging to the school of *historicism* (ODM 217, 229; EC 109-111). According to historicism, each historical epoch is governed by a particular *weltanschauung*, a perspective on life that dominates its morality and politics, its philosophy and religion, its art and its science. This means that the validity of all ideas regarding the true, the good, and the beautiful is relative to the historical epoch in which they predominate, which is to say, there are no transhistorical or eternal standards. But if there are no such standards, on what grounds can Marcuse criticize the standards of the Establishment? If there are no transhistorical standards by which one can distinguish a good society from a bad society, how can he condemn American society? Let us try to reconstruct Marcuse's answer.

⁷ On the other hand, to teach that all values are theoretically equal is to provide "justification" for tyranny no less than for liberal democracy. But the question of tyranny will be considered later.

From *Eros and Civilization* we learn that the essence of being is the striving for pleasure (EC 113, 42). This striving for pleasure is hindered by nature, by nature's scarcity (EC 16, 33, 35-36). Nature does not make adequate provision for man's needs or desires (ODM 238); hence the individual is compelled to work and toil and to struggle against others for survival (EC 74). Human life in this Hobbesian state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." This condition, especially the fear of violent death, forced men to band together and to form societies for their preservation and comfort.⁸ Thereby, the struggle against nature became institutionalized. Laws or conventions were established to govern the relations, especially the property relations, among men. A hierarchy of functions, together with a division of labor, greatly increased the capacity to satisfy vital and other needs (EC 14-15, 74-76, 81). And yet, such is the penury of nature that man's struggle for survival did not cease. Struggle took the form of class conflict, conflict between the haves and the have-nots. The oppression of man by nature eventuated in the oppression of man by man (EC 33-34).

Now history is the process by which man strives to overcome nature, to break the fetters imposed on him as a result of the cruelty and poverty of nature (ODM 236). History is man's struggle for freedom. In this struggle reason and imagination develop (EC 13-14, 172). Man forms ideas about himself and nature, ideas to serve his needs or desires, ideas designed to increase his control over nature as well as nature (EC 13-14, 99-101). Formerly, men thought that the ideas prevailing in their society exemplified natural or eternal laws. In fact, the prevailing ideas of any society reflect the interests of the ruling class — the Establishment; hence, so long as the established ideas are believed to be eternally true, they hinder the further conquest of nature; they hinder the emancipation of man from work and toil and servitude; they hinder man's progress in freedom. Progress in freedom requires the negation of the established ideas of freedom.

We have been told that the established ideas of freedom in American society involve the toleration of opinions and practices

⁸ It is not clear whether Marcuse really accepts Freud's hypothesis regarding the origin of society in the primal horde (EC 14-17, *et seq.*). Indeed, his interpretation of Freud reveals that he is much closer to Marx on the question of origin. On the other hand, compare Marcuse with Rousseau of the *Second Discourse*.

which hinder the individual from determining his own needs; they hinder self-determination. But the needs of man — even his instinctual needs, according to Marcuse — are *historical* (EC 11-12, 120-122). If so, the question arises: What is the nature of the self that is to determine its own needs? To the Marcusean historicist, man has no nature; that is, it is the nature of man to have no nature, no intrinsic or permanent nature (EC 120). Nature is the realm of necessity, of repression — the ultimate cause of pain. The self is the realm of freedom, of indeterminate striving for pleasure. Furthermore, and as Marcuse repeatedly emphasizes, there are no higher and lower pleasures (EC 29, 99, 144, 157, 128-240). What are called higher pleasures are merely sublimations of the so-called lower — and in our civilization these sublimations are usually repressive. All pleasures, hence all desires, are morally equal.⁹ This is the fundamental reason why the individual is the final judge of his own needs, and why no institution or tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to determine what needs or wants or desires should be developed and satisfied. Here we see the most radical egalitarianism underlying the equally radical libertarianism of Marcusean thought. Here we see the Marcusean standard for evaluating the repressiveness of any society. That standard may be reformulated as follows.

Repression is caused by obstacles to the gratification of desire. The removal of all obstacles to the gratification of desire is freedom. Apart from natural necessity, one of the main obstacles to the gratification of desire is the distinction between the higher and the lower. The rejection of this distinction means that all desires are equal. Given the equality of all human desires, the extent to which the desires of each individual are gratified determines the extent to which a society is free or repressive. Marcuse's critique of American society thus springs from a relativism based on absolute egalitarianism.

Now the rejection of the distinction between the higher and the lower is nothing less than a rejection of self-restraint. To Marcuse,

⁹ Compare Marcuse's contention that the instincts are beyond good and evil (EC 206), and Hobbes's statement that "The desires and other passions of man are in themselves no sin." *Leviathan* (Oxford, 1955), Michael Oakeshott, ed., pp. 83 *et seq.* See *ibid.*, on the following topics (and compare with Marcuse): *Nominalism*: pp. 21, 23-25, 32; *imagination*: pp. 31, 43; *reason*: pp. 29, 46, 104, 436; *freedom*: p. 84; *cultural relativism*: p. 104. Consider, however, how Hobbes's influence is mediated by Rousseau, Marx, and Freud.

self-restraint is a form of repression — an internal process of repression (EC 207). The reason is this: the concept of self-restraint means the rule of the higher or better part of our nature — say reason — over the lower part of our nature — say bodily desire. Self-restraint is the last inner obstacle to the gratification of such desire.

We have here a doctrine of nihilism, but which I prefer to call activist *hedonism* (EC 114). For again, the essence of being is not pleasure but the *striving* for pleasure. Paraphrasing Hobbes, it could be said that, for Marcuse, the essence of man is the striving for pleasure after pleasure that ceaseth only in death.¹⁰ It is this endless striving that is essential to the concept of a self whose nature is to have no nature. This is a self without form, without law, without norm. Perhaps it is the alienated self of our times. This self has been described with profundity by Professor Leo Strauss in a speech delivered in 1963.

The “self” is obviously a descendant of the soul; that is, it is not the soul. The soul may be responsible for its being good or bad, but it is not responsible for its being a soul; of the self, on the other hand, it is not certain whether it is not a self by virtue of its own effort. The soul is a part of an order which does not originate in the soul; of the self it is not certain whether it is a part of an order which does not originate in the self.¹¹

Certainly the Marcusean self does not defer to anything higher than itself. Hence it is no wonder that those who harbor such a self lack guidance, to say nothing of thought and discipline.

Instead they have what they call sincerity. Whether sincerity as they understand it is necessary must be left open until one knows whether sincerity is inseparable from shamelessness; sincerity is surely not sufficient; it fulfills itself completely in shrill and ugly screams. . . . Their screams are accusations hurled against “society”; they are not appeals to human beings uttered in a spirit of fraternal correction; these accusers believe themselves to be beyond the reach of accusation; their selves constitute themselves by the accusation; the self as they understand it is nothing but the accusation of the scream. Every accusation presupposes a law; accusations of the kind voiced by them would require a holy law; but of this they appear to be wholly unconscious.¹²

¹⁰ *Leviathan*, pp. 63-64.

¹¹ Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1968), pp. 61-262.

¹² *Ibid.*

Returning to Marcuse: to propagate a doctrine which denies the existence of any law transcending the self is to teach youth that there are no intrinsic limits on what man may do; that there is nothing permanent or eternal that man must respect and obey; that the only law is the law of change — ceaseless, normless, restless change.¹⁸ In the place of anything eternal and immutable Marcuse offers *History*: history, thrusting us ever forward into the future, emptying the present of all meaning, of all relevance; filling it with incredible expectations and discontent. This said, we turn to Marcuse's utopia.

III

If pleasure is the ultimate good, it would seem that that society is best which maximizes pleasure. We must again point out, however, that no institution has the right to determine what needs — hence what pleasures — should be developed and satisfied. Accordingly, Marcuse takes his bearing not on pleasure so much as on pain, that is, on the negative. It follows that the best society, to begin with, is one which removes the causes of pain. In the Marcusian utopia, therefore, disease and toil will be eliminated; all vital needs will be satisfied; and all nature will be pacified — it will have been pacified by science. Science will have made possible a fully automated economy, thus providing for an abundance of leisure. So much leisure, however, could lead to the pain of boredom. To avoid boredom Marcuse prescribes Marx's "interchangeability of functions" (EC 138).

Having emancipated man from want, fear, and pain, science will have virtually conquered the Reality Principle, and will have thereby liberated Eros or the Pleasure Principle. Repressive sublimations of the id will no longer be necessary. Religion, morality, and other forms of authority will have been dispensed with (ODM 234). For "Man is free," we learn from Marcuse, "only where he is free from constraint, external and internal, physical and moral — when he is constrained neither by law nor by need" (EC 171). In this libertarian utopia each individual will be wholly autonomous, will be his own lawgiver (EC 174). Life will become display,

¹⁸ Marcuse's animus against law and civilization (EC 215-216; ODM 237) reminds one of certain ancient Gnostic sects who regarded all law and civilization — indeed, the very order of the cosmos — as intolerably repressive. See Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1963), 2nd ed., pp. 320-340, on "Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism," also printed in his *The Phenomenon of Life* (New York, 1966), pp. 211-234.

creativity will abound. For now, with the individual no longer repressed by natural necessity, nor by such conventions as marriage and the family, the id may be gratified in an infinite variety of ways — directly as well as indirectly through nonrepressive forms of sublimation (EC 176, 184-185). Science will have enabled man to dispense with the superego.¹⁴

Just as Marcuse's utopia renders obsolete the domain of the superego, so does it render obsolete the domain of politics. In the tradition of Marx and Lasswell, Marcuse regards politics as a mere struggle for power, a struggle between the haves and the have-nots. Of course, this struggle is to be traced not to some innate power drive, but to the scarcity of nature (ODM 44; EC 120). With the scientific conquest of nature politics can be relegated to the dust heap of history. Expediency, compromise, the problems of reconciling the private and the public interest, of balancing freedom and authority, will cease to exist (RT 87). In the Marcusean utopia, the relation between man and man will have become thoroughly eroticised. Love will have taken the place of power (ODM 235).

Here we can see from another perspective why American society is so repressive, and why Marcusean disciples make such seemingly unreasonable demands upon the Establishment. For we are to measure its repressiveness, not by comparing the present with the past, but by comparing it with the utopia of the future (EC 92). Accordingly, the Establishment is repressive because it has not completely eliminated poverty. It is repressive because it has not eliminated pain and untimely death. It is repressive because it imposes legal restraints and fosters moral restraints on individual conduct, thus preventing the individual from immediately gratifying all his desires. Finally, it is repressive because, by refusing to tolerate its own subversion, it hinders progress toward utopia.¹⁵

Now the question arises: how does Marcuse propose to over-

¹⁴ Perhaps it will be thought that with this liberation of the id there may ensue libidinous if not other forms of conflict. Marcuse does not deny this; although he believes that in his utopia even conflict will be gratifying (EC 208). Besides, conflict will be minimized by what Marcuse calls the Superid (EC 209). The Superid, he hypothesizes, might constitute some kind of "libidinal morality" which will serve to "delay and detour" gratification of the id, and thus impose some inner restraint upon the individual (EC 207).

¹⁵ When all is said and done, Marcuse's utopia would be inhabited by what Nietzsche called the "last man."

come our repressive society? And what will be the character of the transition period between this society and his utopia?

IV

We have seen why it is virtually impossible for any discontented minority to persuade the conservative majority to adopt radical ideas of social change. That the minority should accept the *status quo* is intolerable for Marcuse. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that progressive movements that agree to work within the laws laid down by the Establishment are reactionary; that freedom of speech and assembly and even participation in protest demonstrations and civil disobedience may become instruments for absolving the tyranny of the majority (RT 84). From this it follows that violence alone can bring about the transition from repressive to nonrepressive society. Indeed, according to Marcuse, violence, that is to say, violence from the Left — revolutionary violence — is the upward propelling force of history, it is the instrument of human freedom. Those who refuse to resort to violence against the institutionalized violence of the Establishment only perpetuate the *status quo* and thus join the Establishment (RT 103, 116-117). This invitation to violence — which appears in “Repressive Tolerance” — has been accepted. But few realize what Marcuse’s invitation logically entails.

At the very outset of his essay Marcuse writes: “The realization of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed” (RT 81). What this means is that anything that is well-established, anything well-settled, anything generally accepted — be it opinions, practices, institutions, or even the very meaning of words — is repressive and intolerable. For change, progress, is the law of life — the law of history. Anything long established must be negated according to the dialectic of history. (I might note in passing that in Marcusean thought we see planned obsolescence on a cosmic scale.) What is to be borne in mind, however, is this: the present is a fetter on the future and must be shattered by revolutionary violence. Freedom, says Marcuse, requires the *systematic* tolerance of the Left and the *systematic* withdrawal of tolerance from the Right. Freedom requires that the Establishment tolerate its own subversion, that tolerance be withdrawn from de-

fenders of the *status quo*. Freedom will therefore require the withdrawal of tolerance, not only from deeds, not only from words, but as Marcuse expressly declares, from *thought* itself (RT 109-111). This can only mean that the Marcusian utopia will be preceded by a reign of terror. Is terror — is tyranny — the logical outcome of dialectical historicism?

When Marcuse says that the meaning of words must remain open, he means that any concept must be understood to embody contradiction. For example, freedom, dialectically speaking, embodies repression and must be understood to require repression so long as mankind has not conquered nature. Similarly, democracy embodies in its meaning dictatorship, and must be understood to require dictatorship so long as all existence has not been thoroughly pacified (ODM 52, 235). Until that distant time the meaning of words must remain open. Until that time, therefore, the very meaning of one's thoughts, one's values, one's beliefs, one's loyalties, one's very sense of identity must remain in doubt. This is not only the precondition but the condition itself of Marcuse's utopian society, a society without form, without laws, without moral standards. Such a polymorphic society, he contends, was always the promise of democracy. For democracy, he declares, was meant to promote "openness to qualitatively different forms of government, of culture, [of] education," indeed, even different forms of "human existence" (RT 85). In other words, democracy requires that "society" become a vast and ceaseless experiment in different ways of living. This explains why nothing must become well established, not even one's sense of personal identity. A polymorphous society requires polymorphous men. Only in such a society can the self be absolutely free — free in its utter indeterminacy. Is it not the case, however, that the highest degree of indeterminacy is realized by matter — which is almost infinitely malleable but furthest removed from freedom? Perhaps the reduction of man to matter is the dialectical precondition of absolute freedom, assuming that this reduction makes possible the scientific conquest of death.¹⁶ If this is so, absolute freedom must be preceded by absolute tyranny. Whatever the case, Marcuse's polymorphous society requires that each self be in a state of utter doubt as to who it is, what it is, and where it is going. This may be the promise — it may even be the reality

¹⁶ See Marcuse's interest in Freud's conception of the death instinct (EC 122-126).

— of democracy. But it is a formula not for pacifying but for terrorizing human existence. Of course, it is the Maoist formula for permanent revolution. The question remains: who is to guide this revolution?

In "Repressive Tolerance" Marcuse calls for shattering the tyranny of public opinion (RT 106). Who shapes public opinion? Is it the mass media? Who shapes the opinions propagated by the mass media? Who educates our newscasters, reporters, and journalists? Who educates the manipulators of Madison Avenue? Who provides a variety of behavioral scientists for the economic and political establishments? Can it be that Marcuse sees in the Academic Establishment the instrument for overturning these other establishments; of breaking the tyranny of public opinion; of bringing about the systematic withdrawal of tolerance from thoughts or ideas which preserve the *status quo*?

In "Repressive Tolerance" he urges that students must be taught to think against the Establishment, against the "predominant framework of values" (RT 113). What prevents such teaching, according to Marcuse, is the seemingly value-free or neutral character of education, an education based on positivistic science. This education, he declares, must become *consciously* political, which is to say that education must become indoctrination (RT 112). Lest the reader should think that Marcuse is here in contradiction with his earlier Rousseauian position regarding individual freedom or self-determination,¹⁷ he should bear in mind that we are dealing with a dialectical historicist who is unbound by the law of non-contradiction. Thus, in *One Dimensional Man* we are informed that such is the dialectic of history that a value-free and non-teleological science may be in the process of accomplishing its own negation; that science makes possible the "quantification of values" and their translation into "technical tasks" (ODM 232). This means that science will have to become *behavioral* science, that it will have to become *social* science, that it will have to become *ideological*. But here are Marcuse's own words:

Instead of being separated from science and scientific method, and left to subjective preference and irrational, transcendental sanction, formerly metaphysical ideas of liberation may become proper objects of science. But this development confronts science with the unpleasant task of becoming *political* — of recognizing

¹⁷ See above, p. 7.

scientific consciousness as political consciousness, and the scientific enterprise as a political enterprise (ODM 233).

Now what applies to the positivism of natural science applies to the positivism of social science, as any historicist knows. This means that Marcuse's earlier critique of positivism was based on historicist grounds. Positivism is valid for the historical epoch which is now drawing to a close. A new epoch is dawning, or so Marcuse suggests. What is to govern the transition between the old and the new is the negation of positivism. This negation of positivism is embodied within the very meaning of positivism. The very fact that positivism is ethically neutral and value-free renders it ideological. It propagates the notion that all values are equal. But the notion that all values are equal means that all needs or wants or desires are morally equal; that there are no higher or lower needs, wants, or desires. This being the case, no institution can justly arrogate to itself the right to determine which needs, wants, or desires are to be developed and satisfied — or which values are to prevail. We see, therefore, that the ideology of positivism combines libertarianism on the one hand, with egalitarianism on the other. Marcuse has carried this ideology to its ultimate logical conclusion.

Here, then, is the tempter of the Academic Establishment, an Establishment which may have helped to spawn, in the New Left, its own negation. If so, perhaps there is much in the Academic Establishment that needs negation. I should point out, however, that radicals of the New Left are not the only critics of contemporary education. Indeed, they were not the first to say that much that passes today for education is without relevance. How, indeed, can an education which is value-free be relevant? Relevance means importance. Importance involves gradation; some ends or values are more important than others. But what are the most important ends of education? Positivism is precluded from answering this question from the outset. For positivism, all ends are equal; and any choice between ends ultimately rests on subjective or non-rational grounds. We must not forget, however, that the positivistic enterprise, by claiming to be good, makes a value judgment which must also rest on subjective or nonrational grounds. In other words, positivism cannot prove that positivism is good. For all it knows, it may be very bad, or at least irrelevant. One thing is certain: an educational enterprise that is value-free or ethically neutral cannot, on principle, condemn those who disrupt colleges and uni-

versities. It cannot show that the education it provides is good or even better than that demanded by radical students. It cannot wholeheartedly defend liberal education.¹⁸

Liberal education ultimately means education in human excellence. This requires wholehearted dedication to the quest of how man should live. The quest of how man should live is a quest for wisdom, and science does not pretend to give us wisdom.¹⁹ Wisdom requires balance — including a critique of the special disciplines of academia as well as of common sense. It also requires self-restraint or moderation. In Marcuse's thought, the word moderation is conspicuous by its absence. This follows from his denial of distinction between the higher and the lower, between the noble and the base. So long as liberal education holds fast to this distinction, there will be moderation, and, with *moderation*, the possibility of wisdom.

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¹⁸ See C. E. M. Joad, *A Critique of Logical Positivism* (Chicago, 1950), pp. 9-20, 143-152. Joad's concluding chapter on the demoralizing influence of logical positivism is prophetic of the character of campus revolt.

¹⁹ But see L. Susan Stebbing, *Philosophy and the Physicists* (New York, 1959), pp. 8-13, *et passim*.