

The Political Thought of Herbert Marcuse

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MARCUSE HAS caught up with his following. *An Essay on Liberation** is a love-letter written to the young, and to the blacks too. But there was a time when Marcuse was above that sort of thing, his intellectualism proudly impervious to movements whose salient traits are, when viewed dogmatically, good looks and good intentions. He had a strict conception of what counted as serious. And the young and the blacks, if they were mentioned at all, were not treated as though they were serious or could matter very much. Indeed, Marcuse suggested that the young, anyway, were really working for the system by working against it. In the last two or three years, however, Marcuse's line has been changing. The change is systematized in *An Essay on Liberation*. The book is thus a revision of his general theory. At the same time, because of other things it contains, it can be seen as a provisional completion of his general theory. Altogether, its publication provides an occasion for looking at some main elements in the body of his work.

A distinguished body of work it is—there can be no doubt about that. To those who observe with delight a rich mind move slowly, but move purposively, over an almost impossibly difficult field, Marcuse's writings come as a precious gift. At a time when there is so much silliness and drunken rhetoric on the Left, Marcuse's arduousness is, in contrast, almost startling—though he does not need the contrast to win praise. After years of comparative neglect he now exerts considerable influence on serious writers, Left, left-liberal, and liberal. This influence will grow. On the other hand, he has become a figure of publicity: venerated by students who, as Marcuse himself says, have not read him; made into a symbol of all radicalism by the press; and denounced by the Pope and by the chief ideologue of the East German government (who, in their denunciations do not indicate that they have read him either), and by others as well, Left, Right, and Center, capitalist and Communist. Ignorance fuels the love and hate. The love and

hate have no objective correlative. It is as if Marcuse's fate illustrates the very tendencies of the mass age he diagnoses. The dénouement of the farce was the recent threat on his life (signed by the Ku Klux Klan, but thought by Marcuse to be the work of others).

We must close our ears to all this noise and try to hear what Marcuse is saying. I think that his analysis—as presented in *Eros and Civilization* (1955), *Soviet Marxism* (1958), *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), and in a number of articles—can be reduced to five theses.† There are uncertainties, ambiguities, a few inconsistencies, vagueness of reference, and some changes. But at this point it would seem to me that Marcuse believes that:

1) advanced industrial society, or the affluent society, in the West, with the United States farthest along, is preponderantly evil, both for the harm it does and the good it prevents, internally and externally;

2) on balance, and internally, the Soviet Union is worse in actuality, better in potentiality, but with no guarantee that it will in fact become better;

3) the evil of each system is not correctable

* Beacon Press, 91 pp., \$5.95.

† A list of Marcuse's writings up to 1967 is found in Kurt H. Wolff and Barrington Moore, Jr., eds., *The Critical Spirit: Essays in Honor of Herbert Marcuse* (Beacon Press, 1967). I have quoted from the above-mentioned books by Marcuse, and from the following articles by him: Preface (1961), *Soviet Marxism*; Prefaces (1961, 1966), *Eros and Civilization*; "Repressive Tolerance," 1965, and Epilogue, 1968; "Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture," 1965; "Socialist Humanism?" 1965; "Ethics and Revolution," 1966; "The Obsolescence of Marxism," 1967; "The Individual in the Great Society," 1968; "Liberation from the Affluent Society," 1968; "Varieties of Humanism," 1968. Some of Marcuse's early and late essays are reprinted in *Negations* (Beacon Press, 1968). Some of Marcuse's remarks at a symposium are printed in the *New York Times Magazine*, May 26, 1968. Portions of an interview with Marcuse are printed in the *New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 27, 1968.

In English, the following writings on Marcuse are most helpful: David Spitz, "Pure Tolerance," *Dissent*, Sept.-Oct. 1966; Richard Greeman, "A Critical Re-examination of Herbert Marcuse's Works," *New Politics*, Fall 1967; Allen Graubard, "One-Dimensional Pessimism," *Dissent*, May-June 1968; Maurice Cranston, "Herbert Marcuse," *Encounter*, March 1969; Peter Clecak, "Marcuse: Ferment of Hope," *the Nation*, June 16, 1969; Paul A. Robinson, *The Freudian Left* (Harper & Row, 1969); and Richard Poirier, review of Robinson, *the New York Times Book Review*, Oct. 26, 1969.

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peacefully, by those in control or by their likely heirs;

4) in the abstract, revolution *may* therefore be justifiable;

5) we *may* be witnessing the emergence of certain forces that could perhaps bring about qualitative, genuinely revolutionary changes in the West, while developments in the Soviet bloc are, if anything, more problematic.

It is clear that anyone who propounded these theses would not have many friends. Marcuse's characteristic tone of voice is condemnatory, and the scope of his condemnation is almost universal. Still, those who hate him usually misrepresent him. Pope Paul, a generally careful scholar and a brilliant reactionary, wrongly charges Marcuse with advocating uninhibited sexuality. Soviet-bloc theoreticians abuse him unjustly for claiming that the capitalist and Communist worlds are becoming ever more alike. I am not saying that if they read him, or read him more carefully, they would hate him less. They would simply have to hate him for reasons other than the ones they give. As for those who love him, they too would have to adjust their emotion after reading him. Even at his most indulgent to the young, as in *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse is austere, complex, and full of doubt. No, his thought is too delicate for the rough hands of the world. He is a philosopher, and should be approached as any other philosopher: with respect, not idolatry; with skepticism, not blunt dislike. Above all, he should not be approached with a literal mind. His ideal reader is the conscientious liberal, who is either happy in his liberalism, but shouldn't be; or unhappy in it, but doesn't quite know why.

Let us try to understand the reasoning behind Marcuse's beliefs. The first thesis is the most important: *Advanced industrial society is preponderantly evil*. One does not cheapen Marcuse's thought by saying that he is predisposed to condemn, that he is inclined to hold an apocalyptic vision. He has been proudly and grandly in the Marxist tradition since his early days in Germany, though he is certainly not orthodox. And for all the severity of his philosophizing, he is a romantic: the romanticism keeps breaking through in lyrical passages, such as those in *Eros and Civilization* and *An Essay on Liberation*, on the qualities of desirable life. Who can say which comes first, the Marxism or the romanticism? In any case, the combination conduces to intellectual rebelliousness. When that rebelliousness meets continuous disappointment—the failure of the European Left after the First World War, the Stalinization of the Russian Revolution, the coming of Fascism and Nazism, the successes of American capitalism after the Second World War—despair is natural. From despair comes rage, which gets transmuted—or sublimated, as Marcuse would say—into a total radical rejection. The re-

jection is not sullen, it is not rancorous; but it is unremitting and may, after a while, appear to others, even those sympathetic, as exaggerated, almost, *almost*, mad.

Marcuse's starting-point is the view that we live in a time of emergency.

... the whole society is in the situation of the theater audience when somebody cries: "fire!" It is a situation in which the total catastrophe could be triggered off any moment, not only by a technical error, but also by a rational miscalculation of risks, or by a rash speech of one of the leaders. ... The whole post-fascist period is one of clear and present danger.

Even without nuclear destruction, the present order contains the possibility for "the advent of a long period of 'civilized' barbarism."

Nuclear war, then, is Marcuse's deepest anxiety, as it must be that of any sane person. He is aware, of course, that no one now in power wants to wage nuclear war, at least not against another nuclear power. (He does say that it "seems" that in Vietnam only American "fear of the other nuclear powers has so far prevented the use of nuclear or seminuclear weapons against a whole people and a whole country.") The matter is more complicated. "The efforts to prevent such a [nuclear] catastrophe overshadow the search for its potential causes in contemporary industrial society." Marcuse contends that advanced industrial society, epitomized by America, is in its essence a militarist, bellicose, aggressive society. It lives on the preparations for war, the tensions of the threat of war, and the waging of war. It is *driven* into an imperialist career. Though the war in Vietnam may have begun, as it were, accidentally, it "has become a test case for the productivity, competitiveness, and prestige of the whole." Given that tendency, America permanently confronts the world with the chance that its inner drives will one day get so far out of hand as to plunge the world into nuclear calamity. (I know this transition sounds weak, but it's the best I can make of what Marcuse says.) Russia is not blameless. Marcuse knows that. But he seems to be saying that the United States is by far the biggest source of danger. I think he would subscribe to the Chinese assertion that the United States is the greatest enemy of the peoples of the world.

There is no doubt that the war in Vietnam has made Marcuse's opinions much more pointed. Before that war, however, Marcuse worried about America's proneness to militarism. In that respect, he built on the work of C. Wright Mills, among others.

WHY IS WAR the essence of the advanced industrial system of America? Marcuse's answer to this question of questions is not completely clear. Sometimes he stresses economic considerations, following the lead of earlier Marxist writers like Lenin, Hilferding, and

Rosa Luxemburg. Sometimes he offers a psychological explanation which relegates economic compulsions to a decidedly secondary position. It is not that over time he abandoned one theory for another: both exist in uncertain relation throughout his writings.

The economic theory seems to me much less compelling. No one can deny that there are economic interests—as there are personal, partisan, and bureaucratic interests—that need war and the threat of war to thrive. But Marcuse is not much concerned with particular interests (he is characteristically not concerned with particularities of any sort). His analysis is of wholes. He gives no room to accident. His aim is to indict a system and foreclose the notion of significant, partial amelioration. So that it is not simply a matter of Presidential vanity, party rivalry over a good reputation for patriotism, the courting of ethnic and religious minorities, the desire of the military for larger rather than smaller budgets and for an arena in which to gain honor and experiment with weapons, the avarice of the aerospace industries. Not even the “military-industrial complex” casts a wide enough net. The system as a whole is to blame: to the degree to which we all benefit from it, we are all implicated in its evil. Its evil is fated, not contingent.

Though he does not attain clarity, Marcuse avoids crudity. He says, “. . . the classical concept of imperialism is outdated; there are certainly no basic United States economic interests that would explain the war in Vietnam.” What then of an economic nature would explain that war, and prepare us to expect others like it or worse than it? First of all, there is the apparent necessary link between American prosperity and the maintenance of military expenditures. Marcuse refers to the “permanent defense economy,” and to the Welfare-Warfare or “Welfare-through-Warfare State.” The premise is that war creates demand and thus helps to sustain a high standard of living, and that in the absence of this grotesque artificiality there would be recession or depression. Marcuse does not develop that point. I suppose he thinks that it stands in no need of elaboration, that it has passed into the conventional wisdom, that everybody knows it to be true even though some try to ignore or lie about it.

But the fact is that it would be hard to find any economist who would agree with the bare proposition that there could be no general prosperity without a “permanent defense economy.” To be sure, a *rapid* demilitarization of the American economy would produce terrible strains; equally true, there are sectors of the American economy that have grown to have a vested interest in war. But if these particularities were left aside, important as they are, economists would go on to point to other, non-military ways of creating demand, preserving full employment,

and sustaining a high standard of living: some mixture of lower taxes, deficit spending, and public expenditure for civilian purposes. For America, at least, there is no impediment *a priori* to a permanent peace economy of general prosperity. The decisive factor would be the *political will* to create such a condition. Marcuse would be ready to declare that such a political will could never emerge. He may be right. Nevertheless, he would still have to distinguish economic necessity from political impotence. At this stage in the argument he would have to see that it is not capitalism *as such* that needs war to solve its contradictions. In our present and future reality war may intensify them. Vietnam may teach that lesson, even to those who rule. Only once, and in passing, does Marcuse perceive that. He says, “Corporate capitalism is not immune against economic crisis.” The huge ‘defense’ sector of the economy not only places an increasingly heavy burden on the taxpayer, it also is largely responsible for the narrowing margin of profit.”

ONE’S CONFIDENCE in Marcuse’s economic thought is not increased by some other remarks. He says that the weakness of capitalism derives from “the constant danger of overproduction in a narrowing world market”; and that Western capitalism has long since passed the stage where “it could grow on its own resources . . . market, and on normal trade with other areas.” So if Marcuse thinks, from one point of view, that war is made to prime the economic pump, he also thinks, from another point of view, that war is the servant of the exploitation of others, those in the Third World. The “classical concept of imperialism” is reintroduced. In the very passage where he calls it “outdated,” he writes:

In fighting against the wars of liberation, the affluent society fights for its future, for its potential of raw materials, cheap labor and investment. . . . Vietnam has to be seen in the global context: a triumph of the national liberation movement there may well be the signal for the activation of such movements in other areas of the world—areas far closer to home where basic economic interests are indeed involved.

More than that, defeat in Vietnam may be a signal for “rebellion at home.” Marcuse knows he is accepting some version of the “domino” theory. Nor does he depart from the classical concept of imperialism when he insists that capitalism is a global system, and that what is physically external to it—the backward countries—is in fact intrinsic to its functioning.

Without examination, Marcuse adheres to the assumption that the capitalist world stands in an exploitative position in relation to the backward countries. Yes, of course, American and Western European investments are great absolutely—if not relative to their total investments, or relative to

the needs of the backward countries themselves. And, yes, America and Western Europe practice an often cruel neo-colonialism, up to and including subversion of governments and military intervention, when indigenous forces threaten foreign interests. But questions remain. Is it true to say that America will always intervene to defend these interests? Is not intervention the exception rather than the rule? And when there is intervention, is it certain that the motivation is primarily economic, and not political or even, sincerely though foolishly, ideological? The test cases, in recent times, are American involvement in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. Do we find here the economic motivation at work, even in the indirect and extended sense Marcuse mentions? I do not believe the answer is yes. Furthermore, is it not true that foreign investments in the Third World are not only, not importantly, exploitative, but in effect better for those countries than no investments, better than nothing? Isn't the tragedy more one of neglect than exploitation? Marcuse himself acknowledges that the backward countries "depend, for the capital requirements of primary accumulation, on the advanced industrial societies and their imperial interests." We must say that the Western world helps to solidify the control of sometimes loathsome indigenous elites; that America is pathologically, stupidly, afraid of leftist movements in backward countries. But is it only evil this country has done abroad? I would be willing to say that no amount of good could morally outweigh the evil perpetrated in Vietnam. The evil perpetrated there, however, does not cancel the good done elsewhere. It only means that we cannot be forgiven the evil because of the good. But though the source of good is self-interested, and, even worse, morally infected, the recipients of the good are better off.

In sum, I do not think that Marcuse has demonstrated conclusively that Vietnam is the perfect exemplification of the policies the directors of the American economic system must follow if they are to keep it alive. In addition, I do not think that Marcuse has shown the roots of nuclear war are to be found in the advanced industrial system of capitalism. It may seem a paltry thing to say what I have just said. But I only wish to trace out the presuppositions and deductions of Marcuse's thought: nothing more.

I HAVE ALREADY said that Marcuse also offers a psychological explanation of America's proclivity to militarism and war. Perhaps some other word than "psychological" would be more appropriate—say, "sociological," or whatever. The term does not matter, except to convey the sense that there is present in Marcuse's writings another theory which is analytically independent from "the classical concept of imperialism." This other theory resembles nothing

so much as the rationale for the three superstates in Orwell's *1984*. (In places Marcuse refers to the Orwellian nature of the modern world.) The tendency to make a whole system out of preparing for war, threatening it, and periodically waging it, is attributed to the wish to preserve the prevailing relations of domination. We must notice that Marcuse does not spare the Soviet Union from the same attribution. I think it is correct to say, however, that America is more on his mind than the Soviet Union: because of its greater wealth and strength, America leads in all evil tendencies. He writes, "Neither the growing productivity nor the high standard of living depend [*sic*] on the threat from without, but their use for the containment of social change and perpetuation of servitude does." We do indeed move from "the classical concept of imperialism," if that concept assumes imperialism as a derivative of the quest for higher profits. What is at stake is not profits, or not profits alone, but power, power above everything else. Whose power? It would seem the power of the capitalists (in America). But the fact that Marcuse can so easily transfer his analysis to the Soviet Union must indicate that something like C. Wright Mills's "power elite"—made up of capitalists, the military, and the upper reaches of the executive branch of government—is the object of Marcuse's speculation. His description needs a larger base than the group of "monopoly capitalists." I think Marcuse moves in Mills's direction, and then goes past him, when he says, "... non-destructive full employment . . . requires the elimination of the particular interests which stand in the way of its fulfillment. Today, they include capital and labor, city and countryside politics, Republicans and Democrats. . . ." That is, nearly everybody; or, at least, the plural leaderships, those who manage what Marcuse calls the "subdued pluralism" of American life.

In Marcuse's view, the regime of war maintains the prevailing relations of domination by doing three things. It calls into being the Enemy as a device of social cohesion; it wastes resources that could otherwise contribute to the decline in the need for domination, through the amelioration of life; and it provides a sanctioned release for an internally harmless way of discharging the aggressiveness built up unceasingly by life in advanced industrial society. (Some of Marcuse's most brilliant writing is on the build-up and explosion of aggressiveness in modern life.) "The senseless war is . . . of the essence of the system."

Marcuse says, "One can dispense with the notion of an innate 'power-drive' in human nature. This is a highly dubious psychological concept and grossly inadequate for the analysis of societal developments." Yet I do not see how Marcuse can dispense with some form or other of this notion if his analysis is to be coherent. He cannot rest content with the view that the taste for domina-

tion is elicited only under the conditions of modern industrial life. Such a view would fly in the face of the historical record. The point is not to make the notion of a "power-drive" do too much work in social analysis, not to see all political behavior as the automatic outcome of one aspect of human nature. It turns out that Marcuse uses the notion of a power-drive. The only question is whether he uses it fruitfully.

CENTRAL to Marcuse's theory is that the exercise of power at home, by American and Russian leaderships, is comparatively bland. The power is there, and is enjoyed. But it meets little resistance: most people are almost unaware that they are ruled. The feeling of power, the sharp pleasure power affords, is not produced at the expense of the immediate subjects of it. "Looking at the facts, geographical and otherwise, I would say that mobilization is carried out and war is actually waged against (and among) semi-colonial and formerly colonial peoples, backward peoples, and have-nots, Communist or not." The Third World is therefore the victim of a ceaseless desire for power after power. The "have" nations share this common interest, while America, as usual, is the most blatant in pursuit of that interest:

The (objective) rationale for the global struggle is, not the need for immediate capital export, resources, surplus exploitation; it is rather the danger of a subversion of the established hierarchy of master and servant, top and bottom, a hierarchy that has created and sustained the have-nations, capitalist *and* communist.

The irony is that—and here, once again, I can only make an inference, at the risk of misstating Marcuse's position—without the assault on the Third World, the internal position of the leaderships in the First and Second Worlds would be threatened. Though a high standard of living helps to appease the masses, its psychological cost could not be endured without the factitious creation of an enemy, and the release of pent-up aggressiveness against him. Furthermore, societies in the Third World may one day be created that do not have the same relations of domination as the First and Second Worlds, and hence would by their example jeopardize these relations. Marcuse is thinking of Cuba, China, and North Vietnam.

Foreign policy flows from peculiar domestic considerations as it does under "the classical concept of imperialism"; but in the light of Marcuse's alternative, these considerations are not narrowly economic. And where Marcuse used to think that the Enemy for America was Russia, he now transfers the designation to the Third World (without dismissing altogether the rivalries between America and Russia). "Is the Enemy still communism *per se*? I think not." We must say, however, that for Marcuse to continue to believe that we live in a period of "clear and present

danger," he would have to see in the wars against the Third World the source of a possible nuclear war between the great powers. Unless, that is, the "clear and present danger" comes from elsewhere—the suicidal impulse. In a tentative but dark sentence, he says,

If Freud's theory is correct, and the destructive impulse strives for the annihilation of the individual's own life no matter how long the "detour" via other lives and targets, then we may indeed speak of a suicidal tendency on a truly social scale, and the national and international play with total destruction may well have found a firm basis in the instinctual structure of individuals.

Let it be clear that Marcuse charges no conspiracy. He rejects the suggestion that those in power consciously follow this scheme for perpetuating their domination. In that regard Marcuse's picture of the world is somewhat less sinister than Orwell's. It is also more cloudy. On the one hand, Marcuse says that he does not refer to

... individually experienced social needs, and consciously inaugurated policies; they may be thus experienced and inaugurated or they may not. I rather speak of *tendencies*, forces which can be identified by an analysis of the existing society and which assert themselves even if the policy makers are not aware of them. . . . These objective tendencies become manifest in . . . supraindividual needs and goals in the different social classes, pressure groups, and parties.

On the other hand, he says, "Social engineering, scientific management of enterprise and human relations, and manipulation of instinctual needs are practiced on the policy-making level and testify to the degree of awareness within the general blindness."

I do not think I understand Marcuse's meaning when he speaks of "objective tendencies" working independently of the conscious plans of the policy-makers. I do know that he feels he finds warrant for such a conception in the thought of Hegel and Marx on the philosophy of history: the meaning of developments is unknown to political actors, and becomes clear only after the pattern of action is completed. In Hegel and Marx, no reference is made to *unconscious* human motives: rather, political actors are seen as the playthings of some larger purpose, again not clearly named or defined. It would seem to me that all Marcuse accomplishes with these metaphysical ideas is to exonerate men from responsibility for their actions. At its most extreme, Marcuse's theory thus gives a lurid interpretation of the world while absolving those whose behavior supposedly makes the world open to a lurid interpretation. Even worse, if Marcuse is confronted with the charge that his description of American policy simply does not accord with the facts, he can too easily reply that he is not describing, he is interpreting. But where does that

leave us? At the mercy of our feelings: we agree with Marcuse if we want to believe the worst, or we dismiss him because we cannot bear to believe the worst, though it may be true. I would say that the degree of deliberateness in, the nature of the intentions of, American policy is a matter of supreme importance. It should not be disposed of by reference to anything "supraindividual." Nor should we disable ourselves from perceiving that the most routine intentions may issue in the most awful consequences, so preposterous has the scale of political power become, and yet so closed off from the reality of what they do are the ordinary mortals who wield that power. It is satisfying to the imagination to believe that motives are commensurate with results; but that sadly or happily may not be the case. Just once Marcuse shows he is alert to this consideration. He says, "... the affluent society itself hardly notices what it is doing..."

BUT HOWEVER adequate we may find Marcuse's analysis of the "clear and present danger," we must go on to see what he has to say on the conditions that help to keep the danger alive. Why do people put up with a structure of power that is so malign in its deeds and so portentous in its future possibilities? What is the life lived in advanced industrial society?

In brief, Marcuse's answer, often repeated, is that advanced industrial society "delivers the goods" for those who inhabit it. There is an astonishing standard of living for most of the people. From their point of view, the system works, life has never been better, life must keep on getting even better. The goose that lays the golden eggs should not be killed. The capitalist capacity to produce far exceeds the limits set it by Marx. The working classes have not become progressively more miserable. The reverse is true. That would seem a sufficient answer.

But Marcuse is not willing to rest there. In *One-Dimensional Man*, and elsewhere, he undertakes to expose the falseness of mass contentment. He wants to show that the goods delivered are, some of them at least, false goods; that the goods give false satisfaction; that underneath the satisfaction are terrible but repressed impulses; and that if the proper alternative to capitalism were to emerge, there could be real goods, real satisfaction, and few if any terrible impulses that had to be repressed. "There can be societies which are much worse—there are such societies today." But the affluent society is more than bad enough (even leaving aside its cost to those outside it), and in comparison to what it could be—the only philosophically valid standard—it is systematically evil.

If Marcuse's vision of the international situation is nearly Orwellian, his vision of the domestic situation in advanced industrial society approaches that of Aldous Huxley in *Brave New*

World. Marcuse makes much of planned obsolescence, waste, superfluous gadgets and luxuries, bloated abundance. These are the false goods. The indictment is familiar. Familiar though it is, it can stand repetition. And Marcuse dwells on the horror of sustaining such an expense of matter in a waste of shame. There is the pollution of the environment, the depletion of the inheritance of resources. And yet more awful, "The still prevailing impoverishment of vast areas of the world is no longer due chiefly to the poverty of human and natural resources but to the manner in which they are distributed and utilized." The contrast of overindulgence and underdevelopment is morally abhorrent. On these subjects, Marcuse speaks directly and eloquently to the affluent conscience. (One can say this, however, and still think that the envisaged redistribution of the world's wealth, if ever it could take place, would still leave enormous numbers uncared for, and create new problems of material sufficiency of a Malthusian sort.) A curse is on the bread we eat. May it be that none should be full unless all are? Marcuse helps to remind us, at a minimum, of the unconscious cruelty of health in the face of misery.

But I think, for all that, that Marcuse has overlooked some things in his rush to condemn. Are most of the goods false? Does not Marcuse grossly exaggerate the quantities at the disposal of the large majority in the affluent society? I do not speak of the poor, only of the great mass neither rich nor poor; say, 70 per cent of the whole. They live in luxury compared with most other people now alive or who have ever lived. But do they live in such a way that no obstacles stand in the way of a full realization of their will? Is it a matter of having every fancy, whim, caprice catered to? Is it not rather a matter of having a few more things than one needs; perhaps a few more things than one wants; a few things that one would not miss if one were to lose them? The society as a whole is affluent beyond the fantasies of early utopia. But look at the daily life of the millions. How much really could be taken away without the return of a stingy bleakness? Marcuse hates "healthy and robust poverty, moral cleanliness, and simplicity." But he thinks that a substantial diminution in the standard of living would only amount to a "reduction of overdevelopment." Surely that is a miscalculation.

Then, too, some portion of the wealth has gone into more education and the spread of culture throughout the society. Marcuse takes a complex view of this phenomenon: I shall come to it shortly. It is sufficient to say at this point that affluence has made possible a qualitative change in the level of awareness, of sophistication, of cultivation. This is not all, or mostly, an increase in shallowness or glibness. It is not all vulgarity. The cultural goods are not typically false, and huge sums of money are spent on them. Marcuse

makes the admission grudgingly: "... wide access to the traditional culture, and especially to its authentic *oeuvres*, is better than the retention of cultural privileges for a limited circle on the basis of wealth and birth." From this wider access has come the youthful rebelliousness in which Marcuse now places so much trust.

Lastly, there is an aesthetic argument for denying that the goods are false. The affluent society has its own unique and novel beauty. There has never been as much sensory richness as there is today, never as much facility of movement and connection, never as much remoteness from nature, never as much fluidity and plasticity, never as much rapidity of alteration in the surface of life, never as many temptations, never as many capacities, never as much actual surrealism, never as many breathtaking juxtapositions, never as many possibilities of experience. Marcuse knows it. These achievements are "... tokens of human ingenuity and power beyond the traditional limits of imagination." He concedes that "the willful play with fantastic possibilities, the ability to act with good conscience, *contra naturam*, to experiment with men and things, to convert illusion into reality and fiction into truth, testify to the extent to which Imagination has become an instrument of progress." But all Marcuse sees is abuse of these powers, the "obscene merger of aesthetics and reality." "It is with a new ease that terror is assimilated with normality, and destructiveness with construction." This judgment will not do. To say that the aesthetic defense of the affluent society is not sufficient is not to say that an aesthetic argument is irrelevant. Indeed, the aesthetic argument is more consolation than defense. But the affluent society has conquered regions of experience hitherto unknown or unexplored. The human record has been added to, in defiance of the pessimism of "eternal recurrence." There is something new under the sun, which only advanced industrial society has made possible. It is the over-rich soil in which beautiful, horrible flowers have grown. Without that soil, no flowers like these. Sometimes decadence has an unimpeachable fineness. If Norman Mailer, our best poet of technology, has done nothing else, he has made us understand that.

We must now ask why Marcuse thinks the goods give false satisfaction. The answer is that people are *manipulated* into wanting and liking what they buy; and into wanting more and more insatiably. The entire instinctual basis of people is formed for them; and it is formed in such a way as to make consumption compulsive, irrational, and inhuman. Marcuse lays great stress on the role of the mass media in constantly arousing desire, teasing it into renewed dissatisfaction, and sending it on the vain search for lasting satisfaction. Profits depend on this steady Tantalus-like pattern. And not just the profits of this or that interest, but the profitability of the system as a

whole. The chase for goods keeps the people enslaved to the prevailing structure of domination. "We may distinguish both true and false needs. 'False' are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice." Whatever else may or may not be the result of conscious effort on the part of the leaderships, the maintenance of men in bondage to consumption is most definitely so.

I DO NOT know how one settles the issue Marcuse has raised. We know about the pervasiveness of advertising, conspicuous consumption, the wildly trivial forms consumer sovereignty takes. We know that titanic energies go into the packaging and marketing of goods, into making people think that great differences exist among products that are substantially the same. We know that we memorize jingles, and jest in the slogans thought up by highly paid traffickers in human irrationality. We love our brands, while knowing we are conned. But is that the whole story, or even the important part?

I would suggest that Marcuse has perhaps taken the racket too seriously. I find he makes no reference to empirical studies on the actual impact of manipulative efforts on the minds of those allegedly manipulated. How does Marcuse know that the masses are taken in? Has he not accorded the media the awe they claim for themselves, without trying to ascertain whether or not they deserve it? I also find no reference to the powerful cynicism that is so marked a trait of American life. Marcuse wants too desperately to believe the worst. Furthermore, I think that Marcuse has failed to distinguish between manipulated wants and wants that would, as it were, naturally arise in any society that had a fair amount of money in its pockets. Men do not have to be manipulated into taking pleasure in consumption. The love of objects, of novelty, of convenience, of foolish expenditure is not a creation of advanced industrial society. The consumer's paradise is an age-long dream. Disgusting it is in some of its more extreme manifestations; but it is the paradise most men crave. Once some approximation of it has been attained, men will live in it gladly. Those outside would seize it, if it were offered, and not ask too many questions. What has held this country of immigrants together if not the fact that it is so truly in congruence with universal aspiration? Prosperity kills many fine things, but does so not through artifice.

The consumer's paradise is not a violation of human instincts. But some deliberate alternative to it would be. Think of the Chinese example. In the abstract, a case could perhaps be made for such violation, but violation it still would be. There is no cause for amazement, no need to look for complicated explanations of American behav-

ior. It is in continuity with all human striving. Once basic needs are satisfied, other needs are felt; and if they too are satisfied, they come to be felt as basic themselves. The very satisfaction of needs generates new needs. The only way of quieting the dynamism of the appetites is to live in a meager world that forecloses all hope of material change, or to make the world one Sparta: permanent poverty or universal terror.

BUT WHAT OF the human cost? The people have "... innumerable choices, innumerable gadgets which are all of the same sort and keep them occupied and divert their attention from the real issue—which is the awareness that they could both work less and determine their own needs and satisfactions." Much labor is idiotic, alienated, boring, repetitive. Reality is determined by the "performance principle." It creates deep unhappiness and resentment; it promotes feelings of aggressiveness. It is all the more unforgivable because it goes to sustain needless consumption. Though consumption is not perceived as needless, owing to manipulation, the nature of the labor done is perceived for what it is. And even manipulated consumption in the affluent society does not suffice to reconcile men to their labor. Yet they must labor. The system will not support them otherwise; the capitalist economy cannot function in any other way. It perpetuates an excessive need for labor.

The system reacts by stepping up the production of goods and services which either do not enlarge individual consumption at all, or enlarge it with luxuries—luxuries in the face of persistent poverty, but luxuries which are necessities for occupying a labor force sufficient to reproduce the established economic and political institutions. To the degree to which this sort of work appears as superfluous, senseless, and unnecessary while necessary for earning a living, frustration is built into the very productivity of this society, and aggressiveness is activated.

Because the aggressiveness is satisfied vicariously for the most part, through machines rather than direct personal and physical contact, and because the machines are at the disposal of seemingly impersonal collectivities rather than individuals, aggressiveness is not truly satisfied after all. Under advanced capitalism, "... the more powerful and 'technological' aggression becomes, the less is it apt to satisfy and pacify the primary impulse, and the more it tends toward repetition and escalation."

Marcuse's psychological description is internally coherent. As a display of imaginative power it is stunning. But how true is it? Grant that many workers dislike or hate their labor; do they feel it as senseless, or as greatly in excess of the requirements for maintaining a decent life? Do they feel that they are paying a high and unnecessary cost?

Does aggressiveness then build up as the direct result of this feeling? Or does it come about for other causes, some intrinsic to man, some intrinsic to all labor, some intrinsic to industrial life under any system of political economy, some intrinsic to mass society under any system of political economy, some intrinsic to civilized life under any system of political economy? The conclusion seems irresistible: the elimination of capitalism would not eliminate the mortal play of aggressive impulses. As long as men must labor, frustration and aggressiveness are inevitable. Indeed, the elimination of labor may make the problem of aggressiveness worse. Marcuse says, "... the 'abolition of labor' does not seem to be the problem of the future, but rather how to avoid the abolition of labor. . . ." The specter is *boredom*. Marcuse seems to see boredom as a problem only for the future of societies as we know them. I think this is an illicit circumscription. In any case, to talk of the elimination of labor, or even a drastic reduction of it, is beside the point. The material problems of the world will demand labor for as long a time as we can foresee.

All in all, I believe that Marcuse's attempt to undermine the legitimacy of mass contentment in the consumer society is largely unsuccessful. There is too much plain assertion, too much easy pessimism, too many tenuous connections in the development of the argument. The deficiencies peculiar to capitalism, though great, are in my opinion minor when compared to the terrors of modern life: the existence of nation-states, the existence of nuclear weapons, the growth in population, the misery of great numbers of people, the desecration of the environment in behalf of mere survival, the perniciousness of some technological tendencies, the powers and problems that accrue to ordinary human beings who must be extraordinarily good if they are to be adequate. At one point Marcuse acknowledges the obvious: "... even the most authentic socialist society would inherit the population growth and the mass basis of advanced capitalism." But he is not stayed by this observation. He hurries on. Capitalism intensifies some of these problems, just as it alleviates others. It has evils besides, which Marcuse does not explore. But it is not the Enemy he is looking for. Beyond that, the expanded political-economic concept of advanced industrial society does not locate the Enemy. By using it, Marcuse does not demonstrate with a large enough degree of certainty that there is an unbreakable tie between the internal structure of America and little or nuclear wars, or between it and an impulse toward mass suicide.

All that I say could be right, however, and still not touch upon the other aspect of Marcuse's indictment. Advanced industrial society is preponderantly evil not only for the harm it does but also for the good it prevents. Its knowledge and

wealth are used, at least partly deliberately, to block the creation of a great good, the Good Life. The Good Life could be had, or efforts toward reaching it could be made, if the present system did not stand in the way. Marcuse has a utopian vision to go with his apocalyptic vision. His writings contain the extremes of affirmation as well as of negation. We should look briefly at what he loves. The major texts are *Eros and Civilization* and *An Essay on Liberation*.

Marcuse thinks that a demand for specific blueprints of the new society is meaningless. The new society will be created by liberated men, and no one can prophesy how they will create. It is more profitable to determine what is *not* conducive to a free and rational society than to determine its content in advance. Still, Marcuse is willing to anticipate in a tentative manner. He is convinced that the rational use of techniques and resources on a global scale would end "poverty and scarcity within a very foreseeable future." But that is only a beginning, and the goal is not reached with the addition of workers' controls over the means of production. Domination and exploitation would remain in the form of a "bureaucratic welfare state." The world has advanced, however, to the point where the means are on hand not only to do away with poverty and scarcity, and with inequalities of power, but also with "surplus repression." A genuinely free life is potentially available to all. The improvement of life is only a step on the way to the transformation of life.

The transformation of life would consist in the creation of an aesthetic reality, a reality in which relations between men and men and between men and things are permeated with the erotic, though not in the sense of genital sexuality. Sexuality would be less intense but more diffuse: it would be "polymorphous." There would be an increase in the feminization of life. There would be a "pacification of life." The image of man is "... the determinate negation of Nietzsche's superman: man intelligent enough and healthy enough to dispense with all heros [*sic*] and heroic virtues, man without the impulse to live dangerously, to meet the challenge; man with the good conscience to make life an end-in-itself, to live in joy a life without fear." In the eighth chapter of *Eros and Civilization*, "The Images of Orpheus and Narcissus," Marcuse produces his most beautiful passages, climaxed by this cry:

The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is *song*, and his work is *play*. Narcissus' life is that of *beauty*, and his existence is *contemplation*. These images refer to the *aesthetic dimension* as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated.

Art would no longer be a separate segment of life, more beautiful than life, condemning life by its beauty while consoling men with its beauty. The art would be the life. Imagination would ex-

haust itself in conduct and in material creation, and not seek refuge in the intangible, the abstract, and the unrealizable. Art as we know it would be abolished because reality as we know it would be abolished.

Marcuse respects certain limits. In his critique of Norman O. Brown (originally published in COMMENTARY*), he insists that some kind of property must exist in the good society; that human otherness cannot be wholly effaced, and that Brown is wrong to dream of its effacement; that pleasure cannot be conceived of as a constant state:

To be sure, *alle Lust will Ewigkeit*, but this Eternity can only be that of ever returning moments of joy, of the ever-returning solution of tension. Tension can be made nonaggressive, nondestructive, but it can never be eliminated, because (Freud knew it well) its elimination would be death. . . .

Elsewhere he goes so far as to say that "'Alienation' is the constant and essential element of identity . . . and not, as it is made to appear today, a disease, a psychological condition." But these remarks do not detract much from Marcuse's joyous affirmation.

TO THOSE who have read him, especially among the young, Marcuse's utopianism may very well be the element they find most compelling. Imprecise though it may be, this utopianism catches the often unuttered longings of many hearts. It is not for me to take issue with another man's utopia, or to try to persuade those under its influence to forsake it. All that would be a futile endeavor, even if I were inclined to make it. The only question it is seemly to ask is: Does Marcuse's utopia prefigure a reality attainable if the present reality were somehow dismantled, or is it only a utopia? I ask a political question. As we have seen, part of Marcuse's indictment is that a great good is now blocked. If Marcuse's definition of that great good were only an impossible fantasy, some of the force of Marcuse's indictment would be lost. Room would of course be left for other definitions. But for our discussion they do not count.

The heart of the matter is whether the world could ever have the material basis to sustain the quality of life Marcuse desires. Are there the resources? Would so little labor be required that large amounts of "free time" would be at the people's disposal? That is, can poverty and scarcity be abolished for everyone in the world, and abolished despite a shortening of the work-day? Such questions cannot be answered, even roughly, without much more scientific inquiry than Marcuse or anyone else has made. These are the questions Marcuse forces on his reader. They cannot be met with mere assertion or with wishful

* "Love Mystified," February 1967.

thinking. I certainly cannot answer them myself. But my suspicion is that if global political and economic arrangements were more rational, some small progress in the alleviation of the poverty and scarcity of the Third World, and of sectors in the other two, could be made. But it would be made at the expense of the majority in the more advanced portions of the earth. And it could not be made if labor-time were cut. I feel sure that Marcuse has grossly inflated the potentialities of science and technology. Or, to put it the other way, he has grossly underestimated the actual misery of the world, the intractability of its most elemental problems. I am simply reinforcing the points I tried to make when discussing Marcuse's analysis of the relations between the Third World and the rest of the world, and of the standard of living in advanced industrial society.

Marcuse's optimism is supported by two considerations. The first is faith in automation; the second is the view that the good life could be had without the kind of abundance now supposedly present in the advanced parts of the world. For Marcuse, automation means that mental energy will almost completely replace physical energy in the processes of production: "The workers would cease to be the 'principal agents' of material production, and become its 'supervisors and regulators.'" It may be that the need for physical labor will decrease significantly in the industrial sector. But what about the other sectors? More important, would mental and supervisory work be free from tensions and frustrations? Would it take up appreciably less time than work now does? Marcuse vacillates before these questions. At times he says that any sort of labor, except artistic and philosophical labor, must be alienated, must be unfree and unsatisfactory. The aim is to lessen it as much as possible, and reserve liberation for free-time. At other times he distinguishes between labor and work (non-alienated labor). Work can become play, and the imperative to lessen work as much as possible vanishes. "Thus it is the purpose and not the content which marks an activity as play or work. A transformation in the instinctual structure . . . would entail a change in the instinctual value of the human activity *regardless of its content*." But I think he vacillates between equally unsatisfactory conjectures. The conjecture of greatly lessened labor-time does not square with the necessities of material production. The conjecture of the transformation of work into play does not square with the near certainty that whatever the spirit in which work is done, work will remain work, and rarely become play.

Similarly, he vacillates on the question of abundance:

The material as well as mental resources of civilization are still so limited that there must be a vastly lower standard of living if social productivity were redirected toward the univer-

sal gratification of individual needs: many would have to give up manipulated comforts if all were to live a human life. . . . The reconciliation between pleasure and reality principle does not depend on the existence of abundance for all.

Yet he also says, "Non-repressive order is essentially an order of *abundance*: the necessary constraint is brought about by 'superfluity' rather than need. Only an order of abundance is compatible with freedom." I do not find that he ever decides the issue for himself. I think he is caught in a self-defeating cycle: there can be no liberation without abundance, but there can be no abundance without alienation. The means for abundance hurt the ends for which abundance is itself the means. Talk about the possibility of liberation without abundance seems to me radically inconsistent. Talk about non-alienated work seems to me terribly unrealistic.

THE Soviet system is worse in actuality, but better in potentiality. The major text on this theme is *Soviet Marxism*. To read it is to understand why theoreticians in the Soviet bloc ought to loathe Marcuse. The few pronouncements of theirs I have seen, however, are off the mark. They claim that Marcuse's point is that the capitalist and Communist systems will one day "converge," and must do so because they are essentially two variants of the same thing: industrial economy. Now it is true that Marcuse thinks that the Soviet bloc could very well come to the same end as the Western system; but he would also seem to think that the more natural tendency would be for the Soviet system to develop in a more acceptable direction than the West. Indeed, it would take a calculated and monstrous act of will on the part of the Soviet leadership to choke off that tendency. They may wish to make that act, and they may succeed. It is impossible to say with any certainty. But Marcuse is convinced that conditions are more favorable in the East than in the West for the coming of a liberated society.

But the actuality under Lenin, Stalin, and their successors is something else again. It is worse than the West. Quite simply, "With all its limitations and distortions, democratic tolerance is under all circumstances more humane than an institutionalized intolerance which sacrifices the rights and liberties of the living generations for the sake of future generations." And,

Still, for the administered individual, pluralistic administration is far better than total administration. One institution might protect him against the other; one organization might mitigate the impact of the other; possibilities of escape and redress can be calculated. The rule of law, no matter how restricted, is still infinitely safer than rule above or without law.

And, the culture of Eastern Europe under social-

ism is "gray-on-gray." Speaking on a specific matter, Marcuse says that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is a "brutal expression" of Soviet power policy, and "one of the most reprehensible acts in the history of Socialism."

In addition to these remarks, there is the thorough analysis in *Soviet Marxism*. What is amazing about this book is that it is a proving-ground for the arguments Marcuse later turns against advanced industrial society in *One-Dimensional Man*. There is of course no step-by-step repetition of the pattern. The many differences between systems would preclude that. The American system is far more affluent; its history is significantly dissimilar; its institutional life rests on other norms; it is capable of a more aggressive foreign policy; its global influence is altogether greater. Though the two systems share some qualities, especially some evils, the fact is each has some peculiar evils. Or, they pervert the same sorts of things differently.

If language is vulgarized, made into an instrument of public lies, infected by the manipulations of the behavioral sciences, and enslaved to empirical reality in the West, it is changed into magic, into ritual incantation in the East. The Soviets systematically confuse what is with what ought to be: they speak as if what is, is already what ought to be. If Western reality destroys art by exceeding it in everyday reality, and by spreading it cheaply to the masses, Soviet "socialist realism" kills off the power of art to challenge imperfect reality. If the West subjects men to the bondage of unnecessary labor in order to preserve the power structure, the Soviets hold out the promise of a society in which all men are converted into technicians and engineers, and thus renege on the hopes of Marxist humanism. The Soviet "competitive work morality" is proclaimed "with a rigidity surpassing that of bourgeois morality." Common to both systems is the spread of the idea that security is better than freedom. Common to both systems is the "socialization of privacy," where the private space of the individual is invaded by the noise, the clamor, the oppressive values of the mass. More strongly present in the Soviet system is the "politicalization of ethics," which means that the realm of the individual conscience is repressed, and replaced by the authority of centralized leadership. By doing that, by trying to cancel the very possibility of a conflict between the individual and the state, the Soviets threaten to end "dual morality," and with it, "an entire period of civilization."

IT is a staggering indictment. And one would think that having said all this, Marcuse would simply write off the Soviet bloc. But he clings to hope. The main source of his hope turns out to be the main source of his fear: the international rivalry between the two

power blocs. Marcuse's reasoning is complex. Its premise is that "The history of Soviet society seems to be fatefully linked to that of its antagonist." The peril, real or imagined or invented, from the Soviet Union has made the West stronger and more cohesive. It has allowed the growth of a war economy and thus saved capitalism from its inner weaknesses. It has facilitated the spread of American control over the capitalist economies of other Western countries. It has given America its Enemy. At the same time, the Western threat strengthens the entrenched bureaucracies in the Soviet system, by giving them a pretext for keeping power totalitarian and for diverting productivity to military uses, and away from a free, or more free, life. But there are pressures in the Soviet Union to "catch up" with the West: the pressures come from quasi-Marxist ideology, and from the desire to show that state socialism is superior to advanced capitalism. The very "backwardness" of the Soviet economy militates against expenditures for waste and destruction. The nationalized economy offers fewer obstacles to a rational economy. But to catch up, the Soviets must try to thaw the cold war, and therefore lay the basis for greatly increased civilian productivity. And by trying to thaw the cold war, the Soviets also contribute to the undermining of the Western system. The Western system would be undermined by internal economic contradictions, which would be heightened in conditions of peace, and by the "contagion" of successful socialism. But there is nothing in Marcuse's analysis to suggest that he thinks the West will cooperate in its own demise: "... as long as the East-West conflict remains a determining economic and political factor, it precludes the decisive transformation. . . ." Because of the weight of the international situation, Marcuse calls his hopes for the Soviet system "eschatological" and "utopian." He nevertheless feels he must utter them.

The only comment I wish to make about Marcuse's indictment of the Soviet system is that for all its harshness, it may not be harsh enough. It seems to me that in his allocation of blame for the existence of a totalitarian system in the Soviet bloc, he overplays the role of the West. I have no doubt that the Western threat has been, and still is, perceived as genuine. But how important has this threat been as a cause of totalitarianism? How important is it to the continuation of totalitarianism? Is there any evidence for believing that the Soviet system would become more civilized if it had less dangerous enemies? Is there not some inner momentum that accounts for the totalitarian record? Surely state and party controls have always been far in excess of the security needs of the Soviet system. Surely cruelty has been made normal. By now, may it not be that totalitarianism has become ingrained, and that no change in the international situation would seriously alter it?

THE systems are not self-correcting. It must be obvious from all that we have seen so far that Marcuse does not believe that peaceful evolution will lead to the elimination of radical evil or to the introduction of real good. To the contrary, the prospects are that eventually the evil will become even greater: the thrust to war is the natural thrust of established society. And the presence of spurious good, and its likely growth, help to ward off the emergence of real good. To say it again, both West and East are implicated in the horror, though not quite equally.

Without violent alteration, Marcuse sets very narrow limits to what can be done merely to ameliorate life, to achieve a net increase in unambiguous good. He does not adhere to the view that *in all cases* the worse things get, the better the chances for revolutionary upheaval. He is aware that unexpected crisis in America may, without prior enlightenment and organization, lead to an even worse life than the one we have now: "... the most immediate force of rebellion may be defeated, or become the mass basis of counterrevolution." No, real suffering could very well be stopped by the peaceful workings of the two systems. In America, poverty could be abolished, and the opposition may finally end the war in Vietnam; and certain humanistic values could be taken care of. In Russia, a reduction in personal private unhappiness could be achieved. All these things are positive advantages: only a nihilist could think otherwise. But the systems can go no farther. The cost of their benefits is insanely exorbitant.

If it were only a matter of the leaderships, and of vested minority interests, the situation would be a good deal less frightening. But it is Marcuse's cardinal point that the masses in both nations accept their systems. If the Soviet system is totalitarian in the conventional sense, it still is true that terror does not by itself hold the system together. It is possible that repressions from above may meet repression from below. "The Soviet system would then repeat and reproduce that determinism which Marx attributed to the basic processes of capitalist society."

In America, and potentially in other Western capitalist societies, the process of acceptance is more thorough. Marcuse speaks of a new sense of the word "totalitarianism" which applies to America. "For 'totalitarian' is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests." We have already dwelt on Marcuse's analysis of the way in which instincts and mind are controlled in advanced industrial society. We must now see why he thinks such control is so pervasive that "totalitarian" is suitable to describe it.

There is a growing passivity of the materially

satisfied people. But "... there is at the same time a growing dependence of the elected leaders on the electorate which is constituted by a public opinion shaped by the predominant political and economic interests. Their dominion appears as that of productive and technological rationality." The social machine works so smoothly that it would be mistaken to think that the great mass must make a conscious effort of adjustment. "Mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual. . . . The result is not adjustment but *mimesis*: an immediate identification of the individual with *his* society and, through it, with society as a whole." The social bonds of primitivity reappear at the highest level of technical sophistication. While the role of the stern father has declined in the family, other authorities also assume a bland exterior. When they are not hidden they appear all too publicly to retain their aura. Because authorities are depersonalized, they no longer provoke and punish the desire to revolt. The individual ego "... has shrunk to such a degree that the multiform antagonistic processes between id, ego, and superego cannot unfold themselves in their classic form." The majority is "... 'closed,' petrified; it repels 'a priori' any change other than changes within the system." Only the universities are reformable from within. By practicing "repressive tolerance," democracy "would appear to be the most efficient system of domination." Intolerance is felt only by those marginal groups that actively threaten the system. Those who are merely critical or eccentric are tolerated, and for good reason: they strengthen the system by making it appear that the system is more humane and more open to change than it really is. They provide diversion and entertainment for the mass. The worst aspect of "repressive tolerance" is that the great majority tolerate the system which, unknown to them as manipulated creatures, threatens and deprives them. Marcuse is trying to show that the very things on which the democratic system most prides itself work to the most deadly effect. The background conditions of inequality and legal violence deprive freedom of its substance, and make it largely formal—a charade. All is infected at the source, and appears in a distorted or perverted form.

If one were to confine oneself to the evil of nuclear war, one could probably agree with Marcuse, and say that a peaceful evolution to a world free of nuclear peril is not likely. On that score, there is ample warrant for the deepest despair; the systems do not seem to be self-correcting. (Who can imagine any way out? There is no precedent for our danger.) But on other matters, is it right to think that America, anyway, is incapable of some changes beyond the limits set by Marcuse's analysis? He did not—no one else did either—predict the civil-rights movement, the peace movement, the urge to more participatory democracy, the youthful cultural revolution, the

radicalization of the young. All these things he praises after the fact; and only very recently has his praise become warm.

More than that, these things have arisen out of the same conditions that Marcuse finds ripe only for a new totalitarianism. He never traces the origins of what he admires. He loves the dialectic, but he has never applied it to middle-class life. If these late developments are not organically related to the middle class, whence have they come? They have come from affluence, from middle-class domesticity, from middle-class liberalism, from the new instruments of mass culture. They have not been imposed from without. They are not simply defiance or rejection: nothing as mechanical as that. The middle class has prepared the way for them both by its shortcomings and by its strengths. And as no one predicted their coming, so no one can predict their destination. Who knows what the future holds for American culture? Things may get worse, but they may get better. And the worse and the better may be symbiotically dependent. I do not see how, at this time, the maxim, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, could possibly be taken as the key to the future. Now, less than ever. The rigidity of Marcuse's theory is truly oppressive.

REVOLUTION *may be justifiable*. Revolution, in Marcuse's opinion, is necessary if the time is to be redeemed. This is a preliminary proposition. It does not necessarily follow that revolution is justifiable: the evil of violence may be even greater than the evil of acquiescence. Revolution not only kills, uproots, corrupts, breaks ties with the past, and removes good with bad; it also is unpredictable in its effects. It may fail. To say, therefore, that revolution may be justifiable is to take a further step. Only after an anguished examination, and one that is, in the nature of the case, highly speculative, can one be prepared to hazard the contention that revolution may be justifiable.

Marcuse undertakes the anguished examination, and, I believe, concludes that revolution may be justifiable. To put it better: Marcuse seems to believe that revolution is morally justifiable in the abstract, despite its awfulness. He nowhere makes the flat assertion; but I do not see how any other inference can be drawn. At the very least, his sympathies are strongly with all forces seeking a break with the present. The main text is an essay called "Ethics and Revolution," and there are some relevant passages in "Repressive Tolerance." When writing on this subject, Marcuse is free from a historicism that would sanction any atrocity in the name of progress. He drops his Marxism—to put it crudely and ungenerously—and speaks like a bourgeois rationalist. The argument is painstaking, and contains, as it must, a perplexed and unsteady movement.

He takes it for granted that in the Third

World, revolution against oppressive regimes is not morally problematic: the evil endured is too palpable for any alternative to be worse. As far as Russia is concerned, the scale of the revolution would be smaller. He says, ". . . the ruling strata are themselves separable from the productive process—that is, they are replaceable without exploding the basic institutions of society." But the transition to a free society would still have to come about by revolutionary means, "even on the foundation of a fully nationalized and planned economy."

His main argument deals with revolution in America and Western Europe. "The proposition 'the end justifies the means' is indeed, as a general statement, intolerable—but so is, as a general statement, its negation." Marcuse lets that tension dominate his thought. He is aware that if all life is held sacred, the entire revolutionary enterprise is morally indefensible. But he seems unwilling to make the injunction against the taking of life into an absolute. He takes refuge in the fact that historically men have not acted on the principle of the sacredness of life. Furthermore, the established order sacrifices life daily. Would the lives lost in revolution be more than those lost in the normal operations of the established order? Yet the calculus of sacrifice is "inhuman." It is odious to quantify death, and lesser suffering. But what other method of reasoning is possible?

Then, too, it is certain that the established order not only works intolerable evil, it also forecloses the attainment of positive good. Should not that positive good be included in the calculus? "What seems to me most important in the European New Left is the deep conviction that unless a socialist society is *essentially* different from the established society, no matter how good it may be it is not worth fighting for." Yet the comparison of present evil and future good is just as odious as the comparison of the sacrifice exacted by the present and that exacted by the forces working for the future.

These considerations can never justify the exacting of different sacrifices and different victims on behalf of a future better society, but they do allow weighing the costs involved in the perpetuation of an existing society against the risk of promoting alternatives which offer a reasonable chance of pacification and liberation.

But no revolutionary situation can justify "arbitrary violence, cruelty, and indiscriminate terror." These means kill the ends for which revolution is made. The Soviets went beyond the rational requirement for coercion: the Moscow trials, the permanent terror, the concentration camps, and the dictatorship of the party over the working classes cannot be justified. Yet where would civilization be without such violent movements as the English Civil War, and the American and French Revolutions? On balance, a rev-

olutionary movement "would, in terms of the calculus, allow the presumption of historical justification." But that is only a presumption; and it is "subject to correction" as events unfold.

I think it could be rightly said that Marcuse has given us the more or less correct *form* that any argument in behalf of revolution must take. He has asked the right questions, and pondered the excruciating dilemmas. Two things, however, must be said. First, Marcuse's position is acceptable only if one accepts his premise that the prevailing system is in fact preponderantly evil, and is not self-correcting. This is an obvious point. Second, the notion of preponderant evil must itself be examined. It is my view that Marcuse gives too much weight to the good prevented in his moral calculus. I think that the old utilitarian precept that pain is the more important category than pleasure is sound; it means that the infliction of pain on some to give or enhance the pleasure of others is morally unacceptable. The proper reckoning is pain against pain, suffering against suffering—the suffering (present and future) under the present system weighed against the suffering created by violent revolution. Insofar as the good life means more than the absence of radical suffering, it cannot be used as a main reason to support revolution in the abstract. Involved in revolution are not small sufferings—inconveniences, annoyances, petty frustrations. Death and destruction are involved, not only for the "guilty" but for the innocent as well. The good life does not justify death and destruction, unsatisfactory though present life may be. Marcuse would have to confine himself to the comparison of pains if his argument, formally, were to be not more or less correct, but simply correct.

THERE are emergent forces that give hope. Central to Marcuse's concept of revolutionary action is that a revolution, to be morally acceptable, must be made by men who are, up to a point, already liberated. They must feel a vital need to live in a liberated society, and they must be free of present vested interests. In our time, revolutionary groups must, before they act, possess a consciousness of the possibility of a non-repressive existence:

... the consciousness of this possibility, and the radical transvaluation of values which it demands, must guide the direction of such a change from the beginnings, and must be operative even in the construction of the technical and material base. Only in this sense is the idea of a gradual abolition of repression the *a priori* of social change—in all other respects, it can only be the consequence.

Without such a prior liberation the system will go on as those who control it want it to; or it will be overturned by men who bear the deforming characteristics of the system they overturn, and thus be replaced by a new system of oppression.

Revolution demands organization, but if it is to achieve a morally acceptable result, it cannot be the work of an elite who are only the reverse image of the masters, and who manipulate an unprepared, an unfree mass. The revolutionaries need not, however, be a majority: "Once the chain is broken, the majority would be in a state of flux, and, released from the past management, free to judge the new government in terms of the new common interest." Marcuse concedes that there has never been a revolution in accordance with the pattern he sets out.

Until fairly recently Marcuse saw little reason to hope. *One-Dimensional Man* was written by a man who "vacillated" between despair over the imperviousness of the systems in the East and West, and in the Third World as well, to qualitative change, and the tendencies that moved toward breaking the domination. Actually the predominant tone of the book was pessimistic. So much was dependent on events in advanced industrial society; yet the rigidity was greatest there. In a forlorn conclusion he referred to the "substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable." He failed to see in any of them a revolutionary consciousness.

But since that time his hopes have risen. They have risen with the Vietnam war: both the resistance of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese and the radicalization of American youth have encouraged him. (The events of May 1968 in France took place after the composition of his last book, *An Essay on Liberation*.) I do not know of any writing in which Marcuse discusses the Cultural Revolution in China, but I would be surprised if that, too, did not contribute to the diminishment of his gloom. He is now prepared, in any case, to join a number of elements and see in them a considerable revolutionary potentiality—though he certainly makes no prediction of ultimate success. Among these elements are: 1) the national liberation movements; 2) the new strategy of the labor movement in Europe; 3) the underprivileged (but especially the activated blacks) in the affluent society; and 4) the "oppositional intelligentsia" in the Western world.

It is evident that in his new hope, Marcuse places the greatest emphasis where he has always placed it: on developments in advanced industrial society. The other elements are, in the long run, more important. They after all comprise millions of men. But I think Marcuse is saying that they must await the proper conditions in America, especially. The "oppositional intelligentsia" of this country are the indispensable "catalytic" agent. In the forefront of the oppositional intelligentsia are the students.

In Marcuse's eyes students are not themselves the revolutionary class—there can be no revolution without the workers—but its prefigurement.

They answer, however, to the requirements Marcuse holds out for a revolutionary class: they are, or are on the way to becoming, liberated. Their very instincts rebel against the manipulation and *overdevelopment of life in advanced industrial society*. In their language, their music, their dress, and their consciousness, they have broken with the society in which they live. Their clownishness is itself weighted with philosophical meaning. They are, as it were, biologically different, new; "protest and refusal are parts of their metabolism." Marcuse even extends his indulgence to the intrusion of politics into the university, the one domain he had hitherto held sacred.

At the beginning of the present youth movement Marcuse was skeptical. The "hot" and the "cool" life, though liberating to those who led them, were vehicles "of stabilization and even conformity." They left "the roots of the evil untouched"; and they testified "to the personal liberties that are practicable within the framework of general oppression." Worse, private release weakened the intellect and thus prevented the perception of the terror of the whole system. Liberation should express itself as *greater self-repression*. But from roughly 1966 on, Marcuse has changed. The conversion does not seem to stem only from a desperate urge to find something to believe in, but also from an engagement of affections and sympathies. To be sure, Marcuse still indicates that a purely private release from the prevailing standards leaves the system intact, even stronger. He is ironic about "the wild ones" and the "non-committed, the escapists into all kinds of mysticism, the good fools and the bad fools. . . ." He knows that liberation can become faddish pseudo-liberation or can be exploited by the market. But when personal liberation does not destroy political activism, as it may, but is joined to political activism, the ideal blend has been reached.

WHAT THEN is to be done? Should the oppositional intelligentsia strive for an "educational dictatorship," a "dictatorship of intellectuals"? Marcuse is tempted. He argues that an elite already rules, and that its replacement by another, non-repressive one would not make things worse. But he says that a terrible risk is involved. Dictatorship is dictatorship. To say that an educational dictatorship would not be more harmful than the present elite is to offer a "weak excuse" for it. " . . . The alternative to the established semi-democratic process is *not* a dictatorship or elite, no matter how intellectual and intelligent, but the struggle for a real democracy." The struggle for a real democracy means the struggle to break "the tyranny of public opinion and its makers in the closed society."

How then is that to be done? Marcuse advocates something he calls "liberating tolerance" or "discriminating tolerance," the contrasting terms

to repressive tolerance. This includes the use of demonstrations, confrontations, extra-legal resistance, as well as the attempt to enlighten consciousness by teaching, writing, spreading the word. Words are deeds, deeds are words. The aim should be to deny tolerance to all advocacy of war and of the resistance to helping the poor, and to deny it by coercion. The distance between advocacy and act is so small today, that certain advocacies must be repressed, if their "clear and present danger" is not to materialize. Toleration is justified by the contribution it makes to the truth, where truth is defined as that which conduces to the pacification and amelioration of life. To permit the toleration of all views is to permit the toleration of untruth: there are not two sides to every question. To accept tolerance for the truth while permitting tolerance for untruth is, in the present, to accept the triumph of untruth over truth. The system is immeasurably stronger than its adversaries: it rests on an indoctrinated, unfree majority. The Left must slant information to break indoctrination. Of course, in some realms like private life, the academy, science, religion, there must be total tolerance. But not in the public realm. " . . . Within a repressive society, even progressive movements threaten to turn into their opposite to the degree to which they accept the rules of the game." And, "the democratic process . . . is discredited to such an extent that no part of it can be extracted which is not contaminated." Illegal and extra-parliamentary tactics are therefore morally defensible. And they alone can bring a shift in the prevailing distribution of power. A conspiracy does not exclude the Left from a powerful voice: it is simply too small and poor. It must make its impact in any way it can, in the hope that one day it will create a "subversive majority."

Marcuse's theory of toleration is the most notorious part of his work. Both for the way in which he reduces the system's tolerance to another and covert form of manipulation, and for the way in which he redesignates apparent intolerance as real tolerance, he has earned a reputation for verbal sleight of hand and, more seriously, for preaching the very totalitarianism he claims to hate. He is thought to contribute to a cynicism about one of the few unmistakably good features of contemporary life; a feature, furthermore, that has been bought with blood over the past three centuries. He adds defamation to injury when he seeks the cover of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* for views that Mill could not possibly have sanctioned. The case becomes all the more appalling when it is remembered that Marcuse is a refugee from a kind of systematic intolerance he has never had to face in the country that took him in and gave him refuge.

I think that the attack on Marcuse's theory is just. There have never been social conditions in which total toleration has been practiced that fit

Marcuse's scheme. Mill disliked majority opinion in Victorian England no less than Marcuse dislikes our majority opinion. Mill saw in the power of custom as relentless a foe to liberation as Marcuse sees in the technological creation of the mass mind. Mill worried about the majority impulse to punish deviation as much as Marcuse does. Mill no more thought that the majority wanted to be liberated than Marcuse now does. Mill viewed his political system much as Marcuse views ours: Mill did not think that the English political system worked by impartial reason, but by the clash of equally partisan, selfish, and narrowminded interests, each with a fragment of the truth, but among whom, for all their passion, no truly radical disagreements were apparent. Mill wrote against the same background of inequality and legal violence that Marcuse does. All Mill sought was the sufferance of the homogeneous majority for the gifted minority. Though he did not value toleration only for its social utility, he did think that the gifted minority would make an indispensable contribution to progress.

I do not see how Marcuse can invoke Mill's name. As an abstract theory of toleration, which Mill's was, Marcuse's deserves the abuse it has received. It is laughable. But I think it must be said that because of the manner in which he has chosen to present his views, he has disguised his true intention. He writes about toleration when he really means to write about the moral justifiability of revolution against a democratic political order he does not really think democratic. And he writes, as I have said, with the burning conviction that we live in so dangerous a time that the established system cannot be allowed to continue much longer. Naturally, if he writes for an audience accustomed to revere the principle of toleration, he must weaken that principle in order to shed legitimacy on the illegal opposition. It is a matter of clumsy rhetorical strategy, not a matter of producing a philosophical treatise on the nature of toleration. If you think that there is a "clear and present danger" you will not care about toleration; if you do not think so, you will find Marcuse's theory of toleration sophistical.

It is a great burden, then, that Marcuse puts on the radical young. By their exertions they are to take a non-revolutionary but pre-revolutionary situation and bring it to a head. They are the vanguard. Their natural allies are the blacks. If automation and temporary peace combine to generate a crisis, then perhaps workers will be on their side. Perhaps the technicians will more and more feel the absurdity of the system which

their skills keep going. In any case, for the great problems of the world to be faced, advanced industrial society must be profoundly altered. The Third World movements can come to fruition only if the capitalist order begins to disintegrate. "The chain of exploitation must break at its strongest link."

* * * *

MARCUSE GIVES us a vision of the modern world. It is not sufficient to score easy points off him, or to dismiss him as hysterical. He raises all the issues every conscientious man must care about. The only adequate answer to him is another vision. I do not have one. In concluding, all I can do is offer a few assertions to go with the criticisms I have made.

The deepest ills of the world—nuclear danger, overpopulation, human misery—do not come from affluent capitalism. The nuclear danger would exist no matter what the system of political economy was, as long as there were not a unitary world state. There are no revolutionary forces working to create such a state. The tension that aggravates the danger has little to do with capitalist economics, but rather derives from human interests and motivations that are not economic in nature. Affluent capitalism does not create overpopulation. Its waste would not be nearly enough to remedy the misery of the Third World. By tracing ills to affluent capitalism, Marcuse tries to prove them corrigible. They may not be corrigible. The world may be, probably is, in worse shape than even Marcuse says it is. In the face of its greatest problems, the whole world is blameless and hopeless.

On a lower level, there is no certainty that little wars must be perpetually fought. There are emergent tendencies—some of them praised by Marcuse—that may, just may, make a repetition of Vietnam unlikely for some time to come. The American system has possibilities for good which Marcuse does not wish to see, or does not wish to explain as emanating from that system itself. The American young are American young. They have attained some liberation. Some of them represent an extraordinarily high human type. If they engaged in coercive action they would forfeit their liberation, they would become corrupt. The tyranny of action is that cruel. They would have little to show for their corruption. To urge them to coercive action is to lead them to failure whether they made a revolution or not. They would experience the failure of failure or the failure of success.

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