

Contemporary Political Philosophers

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Methuen & Co
London

in: Crespigny and Minogue (eds.), *Contemporary Political Philosophers* (London: Methuen, 1976), 1-48.

Herbert Marcuse: The Critique of Bourgeois Civilization and its Transcendence

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Since Montesquieu and Hume, political thought has been faced with a problem of "civilization." Two considerations enter into the problem. The first is a judgment that modern men live within a comprehensible network of circumstances significantly different from those of earlier times. While there is much controversy about the ways in which these circumstances interconnect and about their sources, there is a good deal of agreement about the indicators which signal the civilized condition. Earlier writers on the subject stressed the emergence of a market economy and then the eruption of industrial production; drastic refinement in the division of labor; dramatically higher levels of national wealth and rates of increase; new forms of poverty; the spread of the work-ethic and habits of utilitarian calculation; the establishment of scientific inquiry, dissemination of its findings, and the application of findings in technology; new standards of education and the rise of public opinion; innovations in forms of organization and the displacement of traditionalist elites; and, generally, the decline of violence and "enthusiasm" and the rise of orderly new matter-of-factness and civil conventionality. Recent writers devise operational measures of social and economic "development" and may well concede the term "civilization" to a certain high range of readings on their indices. In any case, it is widely acknowledged that a distinctive constellation of social and economic factors somehow sets the scene for modern political life.

The second consideration defining the problem of civilization is uncertainty whether these new circumstances represent progress or corruption in morals and politics (or whether, as

some would insist, they simply define a new context for implementing unchanging principles). Early treatments of the problem tempt us to simple classifications, although even there closer scrutiny reveals complexity. We contrast the celebration of "Enlightenment" in the *Encyclopedia* with Rousseau's gloomy assessment of progress in the arts and sciences, or we compare James Mill's zestful appreciation for the new reign of commerce, calculation, and invention with Adam Ferguson's dismay about the eclipse of civic virtue in a polished and commercial society. But certainly in the next generation—as shown, for example, by John Stuart Mill's noted essay on "Civilization"—the problem appears to many to require a response more subtle than approving or decrying the new constellation. Civilization opens vast new opportunities for human achievement and satisfaction, Mill argues, but it also brings overwhelming new distractions from the cultivation of excellence as well as new forms of power prone to tyrannical abuse and impervious to existing controls.

For Mill and many of his contemporaries, the problem of civilization presents itself as a dilemma. More recent political writers sharing these concerns may well be classified by their response to the dilemma. Some conclude that moral and political-life must find ways of *managing* the irremovable tensions and conflicts attending the dilemma. Others see the possibility or necessity of *transcendence*: the dilemma can and perhaps must be overcome through radical transformation of the factors and of their impact. Herbert Marcuse exemplifies the latter response in our time.

Some commentators, in attempting to explain Marcuse's influence, have charged that he appeals to an immature incapacity for sustaining the demands of contemporary civilization, that he offers an emotional retreat from moral and political responsibility. We are not concerned here with the psychology of intellectual influence; we shall respect and consider Marcuse's claim to offer something very different. He undertakes to show that proposals for moral and political survival through piecemeal, continuous management of difficulties generated by civilization are untenable, that such proposals misjudge or misstate the forces at work. And he presents reasoned arguments on behalf of radical alternatives. But interpreting and assessing his

work are complicated by a circumstance which has attended discussions of civilization throughout.

However civilization has been conceived it has usually involved the idea of a new and perfected philosophical method congruent with the findings and procedures of the new natural sciences. Critics of civilization have consequently commonly considered themselves obliged to vindicate alternate approaches to argument and evidence, or, more generally, to define alternate roads to truth. Since Marcuse's presentations are strongly influenced by such considerations, systematic evaluation would seem to require primary attention to his discussions of philosophical method and epistemology. Yet such a course is not only very difficult—requiring as it does fairly elaborate treatment of idealist philosophical traditions—but also quite possibly unrewarding, since there is some reason to believe that Marcuse's *operating* method is not identical with his systematic reflections on method. For present purposes, then, we will not take Marcuse's work as the expression of a philosophical system. Instead, we shall look at his criticisms of the social and political thought which project continuous management of civilizational dilemmas, and then at his projection of transcendent alternatives. We shall limit ourselves to his writings since 1955. The whole treatment must, in all fairness to Marcuse, be considered provisional, since it does not take the work on the terms he has set, but rather takes it on the terms implicit in conventional discourse among English-speaking students of political thought. We are interested in the bearing of this thought upon an idiom of political thought strongly marked by the liberal-democratic approach to the problem of civilization.

A paper by John Chapman well summarizes this approach and indicates its response to our central theme.¹ Chapman contends that liberal thought builds upon an "ideal of human perfectibility, understood as that form of development of our potentialities, the outcome of which is a harmonious meshing of moral freedom and psychological need, in terms of both character and institutions." In relation to this ideal, the social changes

¹ John Chapman, "The Moral Foundations of Political Obligation," in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., *Political and Legal Obligation* (New York, 1970), pp. 148 f.

commonly referred to by the expression "civilization" manifest themselves as "individuation and rationalization." Far from assaulting the liberal idea, these tendencies are the "psychological, or characterological aspects of perfectibility." Civilization, in other words, generates the kind of man required by liberalism. This is so because the "harmony" envisioned involves an "ambivalence" held in "equipoise." Chapman finds "at the heart of liberalism a vision of the rational individual, capable of both competition and cooperation, a polarized and yet integrated personality, a man who was both economic and moral."

On this view, liberalism welcomes the very breakdown of emotional unity within and among individuals that is commonly decried by critics of civilization, who contrast the impact of this breakdown with the integral mobilization and unification presumed to have been involved in virtuous classical republics. The case is similar with regard to the erosion of institutional loyalties and their displacement by rational calculations of instrumental worth. Contrary to the fear of critics is "the liberal persuasion that individuality and rationality are processes that make for social and political integration." With all this said, it might appear that such a liberalism represents an unqualified affirmation of civilization. But there are darker echoes. The conditions described by liberal moral psychology as necessary to autonomy impose profound strains upon individuals and institutions, and the maintenance of the equipoise requires the most astute management. On balance, however, it may be said that Chapman sees in civilization at least as much opportunity as dilemma.

Marcuse accepts the liberal emphasis on "individuation" and "rationalization," but he denies that these processes—at least in the forms they have assumed in what he qualifies as "bourgeois" or "technological" civilization—contribute to the formation of moral personality, as the liberal writers epitomized by Chapman contend. Taking Max Weber as the prime theorist of rationalization and Sigmund Freud as the theorist of individuation, Marcuse attempts to show that these theories, when properly and thoroughly understood, reveal the contemporary system of civilization as a system of total domination. As

civilization advances, Chapman maintains, men constitute themselves as individuals having interests, duties, and rights; and they see the conditions which shape their destinies more and more as constellations of forces which can be understood so as to be mastered (or at least counted on). Marcuse responds that individuation culminates in a complete loss of self; and rationalization, in universally self-destructive irrationality. Civilization cannot be managed; it must be transcended. Thus, Marcuse believes that he has undermined the moral psychology of liberalism, that the moral personality whose autonomous operations are said to provide ethical legitimation for "free" institutions cannot exist without the most radical overturn of the world made by civilization and preserved by such institutions. Contrary to the claims of Chapman and others who agree with him, Marcuse concludes that modern social and political institutions do not embody a complex strategy required by modern civilization for managing tensions between freedom and authority, virtue and commerce, duties and interests, autonomy and dependence; they are, rather, repressive agencies staving off liberating revolution which will transcend existing civilization.

After reviewing the arguments attempting to show the "necessity" for such transcendence, we will consider Marcuse's accounts of the transcendent order. Chapman alleges, in the essay cited earlier, that Marx and his followers (including Marcuse) enter upon a "project of displacing institutions based on political and economic rationality by ones based on emotional and moral solidarity," in keeping with a "new vision of human 'perfectibility,' in which psychological unity replaces ambivalence as the defining category of human nature." If it should prove that Marcuse has in fact put forward such an alternative, the outcome would clearly contradict his own intentions. Marcuse's projections always intend a complex social entity characterized by distance among participants as well as by harmonious interplay. In a recent work, Marcuse assaults those who claim more than symptomatic significance for the emotional antiart of the counterculture: "order, proportion, harmony," he writes, "the idea, ideation of a redeemed, liberated world—freed from the forces of repression. . . . This is the static of fulfillment, of rest: the end of violence; the ever-renewed hope which closes

the tragedies of Shakespeare—the hope that the world may now be different.”² But Marcuse is not content to show the necessity or to explicate the hope for such an alternative.

He means to guide the political practice of his reader, to identify the forces and activities that can achieve what is necessary, that can fulfill the hope. It would appear a hopeless undertaking. If the forces pervading the existing order are not merely antithetical to ideals of perfectibility, but systematically destroy the capability for perceiving these ideals, let alone acting upon them—as Marcuse claims—what conduct can be meaningful, what can be done? Marcuse finds in Marxism a model for breaking through the vicious circle: a quantum of social and political energy is cast aside by the normal operations of the system, but not destroyed; its spontaneous reaction to this destiny sets in motion a chain of changes, first within itself, so that new potentialities are uncovered and vast new effective powers brought into play; these powers come to attack and then to transform the system. Putting the case so abstractly and in terms of physical metaphor removes it a considerable distance from Marx’s quite historical expectations about the proletariat, the communist movement, and the revolution. But it is necessary to put it so if we are to identify the common elements in Marcuse’s shifting strategies. At different times Marcuse sees the revolutionary force in the Marxist proletariat, in the rationalist tradition of philosophy, in social outsiders, in deeply repressed erotic instincts, in intellectuals, in the modes of high culture—in various combinations, never to his own satisfaction. What remains constant and seems firm is his determination to orient political practice to whatever appears to be the “revolutionary movement” at a given time. Inquiries into the sources and precise characteristics of the movement’s revolutionary nature and debates about ways of fulfilling its mission are then to be carried on within the orbit of the movement itself. Marcuse’s political views, in the narrow sense of that term, are consequently the least settled and the most difficult to expound systematically in relation to the major traditions of political philosophy. But they form an important part of Marcuse’s thought and will be considered.

² *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (Boston, 1972), p. 94.

The problem of civilization in political thought is thus to be seen in three compartments: questions of *necessities*, questions of *ideals*, and questions of *instrumentalities*. In the first, we want to know whether civilization imposes or reveals new tasks which social and political actors must perform if they are to survive. In the second, we ask whether and how our understanding of civilization affects our vision of a perfect order. In the third, we inquire into the norms constituting morally justified political conduct, asking whether these must be accommodated in some important way to our perception of the civilized condition. Marcuse shares with the liberal tradition here illustrated by reference to John Chapman the conviction that civilization makes a profound difference. He differs markedly in his reading of that difference. We shall consider his contentions and arguments as best we can within the limits we have set ourselves. The objective is not to judge Marcuse, but to advance inquiry into questions that contemporary political thought must answer.

Marcuse maintains that the political and social institutions established in the most civilized countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot manage the social strains generated by civilization, despite appearances to the contrary.³ At first, and perhaps for a prolonged period, the failure is disguised. Social order prevails; social production booms; social satisfaction abounds. Yet, for Marcuse, the fact of failure needs but to be uncovered: the seemingly liberal and democratic management proves to harbor a subtle despotism maintaining itself in important part by destroying the very civilization it purports to secure. Surface manifestations of civilization flourish, but the energizing principles are systematically corrupted. And, according to Marcuse, the new barbarism of refinement bred up in place of the principles cannot in the long run sustain *any* order, not even a blatantly despotic rule resorting to tyrannical techniques. Periodic political crises—rebellions and repressions—betoken and foreshadow the ultimate manifest failure. In the

³ A popular statement of the opposing view can be found in Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul E. Sigmund, *The Democratic Experience: Past and Prospects* (New York, 1969), especially pp. 3–87, by Niebuhr.

end, the "system" stands revealed as the ever more violent war of all against all; the center cannot hold.⁴

Writing in the 1930s, Marcuse had been satisfied that his critique of Hegel revealed the untenability of the liberal adjustment to civilization. The liberal tradition, which Marcuse saw as culminating in German idealism, does not identify the "constitution of liberty"; it misinterprets a phase in an ongoing historical process. And the contradictions become blatant in fascism. Under these conditions, to proclaim the old principles is to animate practices which will subvert and transcend the old order. "Happiness" has the central place among these proclamations. Once the working class inquires into the "use values" of the objects it is constrained to produce, once it demands the satisfactions of which it is so manifestly deprived, the movement toward liberation gets under way. "Reason" comes to imply comprehensive social and economic planning: even the most ordinary public discourse recognizes the irrationality of securing the economic realm from purposive human regulation. In the face of frank fascist oppression, even the call for political freedom in a principled liberal form, Marcuse maintained, points in a progressive direction: the struggle against the totalitarian state merges with the struggle against the social order whose fatal weaknesses such a state epitomizes. The crisis of revolutionary transformation was upon civilized society, Marcuse thought. Its own historic principles mobilize the forces arrayed against it, and the defenders of "civilization" against communism and subversion are revealed as bloody tyrants.⁵

When Marcuse returned to theoretical work, almost ten

⁴ Marcuse concludes a characterization of contemporary society thus: "As long as this is the history of mankind, the 'state of nature,' no matter how refined, prevails: a civilized *bellum omnium contra omnes*, where the happiness of the ones must coexist with the suffering of the others." *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, 1969), p. 14. In this preview of Marcuse's argument, we are deliberately invoking the memory of such eighteenth-century political thinkers as Montesquieu. Marcuse does not use "despotism," "barbarism," and "corruption" as they did. But the pattern of his argument, we suggest, corresponds quite closely to their earlier one. This observation says nothing about the merits of his case, it simply makes the case more familiar.

⁵ In retrospect, Marcuse maintains that these conceptions were conditioned by the impressions of the Spanish Civil War and the united front against fascism. See "Foreword (1965)" to *Negations* (Boston, 1968).

years after World War II, he could no longer speak of "crisis" in this sense, and he could no longer call up such a dynamic toward transcendence by invoking the old principles. The pursuit of reason, freedom, and happiness has been rendered coherent within the limits of the old system; that pursuit has been transformed so as to reflect and support the civilizational order.⁶ And yet Marcuse remains convinced that this order is to be judged not simply as undesirable because failing to meet criteria laid down by Marcuse as reflecting man's highest aspirations, or something of the sort, but is indeed to be judged as "impossible"—so antithetical to the needs of man in society that it must be transcended if humanity is not to be destroyed. But what can it mean to say that the "impossible" is existent and stable and seemingly invincible? Marcuse's distinctive argument during the past fifteen years has been above all a psychological one.⁷ The adjustment now demanded on behalf of civilization generates ever-mounting measures of aggression in all social actors; however, this manifests itself, quite possibly for a long time, in attitudes and actions supportive of the existing order or, at most, in outbursts which harm individuals while leaving the system intact. But at some fatal point, Marcuse expects, there will be cataclysmic destruction.

Such a reading of modern dynamics breaks sharply with the view that civilization vindicates itself by creating the space within which morally autonomous man can exist and function. On that view, illustrated above in John Chapman's argument, rationalization and individuation as social processes make it possible for a man to manage, with the help of liberal attitudes and institutions, the strains and challenges of civilization. The confrontation between the two positions can be seen as a contest in the area of "moral psychology": on the one side, a view of modern man ever more subservient to external forces and storing up ever greater potentialities and needs for viciousness;

⁶ See the "Epilogue (1954)" to the second edition of *Reason and Revolution* (New York, 1959) for a convenient summary of Marcuse's revised assessment.

⁷ Marcuse's social commentary is extensive and often polemical, and he often draws on earlier themes as well as on the contentions of other social critics. We cannot recreate the atmosphere of his writings, but must isolate what seems to be the central line of argument.

on the other, a view of modern man gaining in moral autonomy and responsibility so long as he does not lose his nerve. At its most interesting, this contrast does not appear to be an argument between "collectivism" and "individualism," or between "irrationalism" and "rationalism." Instead of depicting such universes in collision, we shall examine Marcuse's rendering of Max Weber and Sigmund Freud as theorists of the decisive social processes, and then consider his application of what he claims to be *their* most important insights for the diagnosis of our time.

While Marcuse's earlier work consistently treats fascism as an irrational reaction against the failure of liberal civilization to fulfill the promises of reason, he now commonly contends that he had been deceived by the irrationalist *doctrines* of fascism and that he now understands that fascism in *practice* is a consistent implementation, in rather special conditions, of the program implicit in the liberal conception of rationality. In his earlier view, liberal civilization appears to uncover the possibilities of rational mastery over circumstances but fails to pursue them, both because it equates reason with technology-directed science and because it remains committed to private property. Yet even these limitations define a productive one-sidedness, in Marcuse's earlier view: they create the conditions for their own transcendence, notwithstanding such crisis-manifestations as fascism. The logic of social reason, Marcuse thought, drives toward human liberation, and the obstacles in the way seem ever more evidently illogical and unreasonable, even to common sense. But in the work we are now considering, Marcuse credits the corrupt forms of rationality with extensive capacities for survival and self-perpetuation, without a recourse to political totalitarianism except for special circumstances such as those now seen to have produced nazism in Germany. Logic, reasonableness, and rational problem solving (and planning), as they are conceived and established in advanced technological societies, generate no revolutionary dynamic. It is the conception of revolution which now appears patently unreasonable and utopian, to disciplined thought as well as to general opinion, regardless of class. Dominant political agencies and social institutions can solve or at least manage

the problems which become visible, and the needs perceived by most individuals are met.⁸

According to Marcuse, it was Max Weber who identified and labeled the social process which gives modern industrial society its distinctive character. "Rationalization," as the process is called, structures the experiences and actions of men so as to make them calculable in terms of costs and benefits, and it organizes social action so as to allow maximally efficient implementation of decisions based upon such calculations. To subject events to human reason so understood, Marcuse comments, is to subject them to a "technical" mode of encountering the world, a vision of a universe of ultimate facts—including the needs of individuals and the requirements of systems—and a search for the manipulations requisite for optimal satisfaction of these demands. For Weber, rationalization is inseparable from industrialization. Moreover, in contrast to Marcuse's view, rationalization is seen to create the condition under which the responsibility and choice of individuals have their greatest impact; although it is also said to test men's moral and political capacities to the utmost—and perhaps beyond their strength. Once reason is restricted to the calculation of means and consequences, individuals cannot evade personal responsibility for their choice of ends. Weber acknowledges that such a high charge of responsibility may exceed the moral capacities of individuals and may paralyze some or even drive them to irrationality. Similarly, on this view, the development of legal-rational structures of authority, with the attendant emergence of bureaucracy and legalism, vastly enhances the possibilities for purposive political control on behalf of public objectives. This development too has its dark side in that it renders less probable the emergence of political leadership able to wield the new instruments: the bureaucratic structure of means comes to equate its self-preservation with ends of policy, and there is a loss of direction and vitality only too likely to be countered by a resurgence of charismatic or otherwise irrational power. Weber

⁸ "Thus irrationality becomes the form of social reason, becomes the rational universal." "Freedom and Freud's Theory of the Instincts," *Five Lectures* (Boston, 1970), p. 3. Marcuse shares with the Young Hegelian tradition the penchant for pointed paradoxical formulations.

himself had grave doubts about the outcome of these counter-tendencies which, in his view, accompanied rationalization. But, when he allowed himself speculation upon the moral implications of his findings, he saw the situation as the closest it was possible to come toward realizing liberal hopes for man. And many contemporary liberals find in Weber a sophisticated model for a theory affirming civilization, a model which specifies the social and psychological conditions for autonomy and analyzes the special dangers which accompany these conditions and to which they frequently succumb.⁹

Marcuse presents his own contrasting assessment of rationalization as a deepening of Weber's insights, as a consistent pursuit of the inquiry implicit in Weber's concepts, but illogically (and ideologically) aborted by Weber and his followers so that they could produce conclusions compatible with liberalism. But before considering Marcuse's distinctive adaptation of Weber's work, it should be noted that throughout his comments on technical rationality there also runs the familiar Marxist argument: that capitalist interests *distort* the inner logic of rationalization. According to this argument, Weber unreasonably equated the operating requirements of an industry producing for the sake of capitalist profits with the functional requirements of industry and modernization as such. Marcuse contends, on the other hand, that they are in fact increasingly in conflict. "The repressed final cause behind the scientific enterprise," he writes, is "pacified existence."¹⁰ The "consummation of technical reason" could really make for liberation,¹¹ and systematic public administration tends in its own nature toward the "administration of things," not the domination of man.¹² Even in its technical form, thus, rationalization sometimes appears in Mar-

⁹ Weber's argument on these points is conveniently available in his best-known essays, "Science as Vocation" and "Politics as Vocation," in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, eds., *From Max Weber* (New York, 1958). In addition to John Chapman, influential writers drawing on Weber's argument in this connection include Raymond Aron, Daniel Bell, Reinhardt Bendix, Benjamin Nelson, and Edward Shils.

¹⁰ *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, 1964), p. 235.

¹¹ "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber," *Negations*, p. 233.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 218, 223; see also *Soviet Marxism* (New York, 1961), especially "Preface (1960)."

cuse's later writings as a progressive and revolutionary concept whose full recognition in theory yields a damning indictment of capitalism and whose full realization in practice would constitute a liberated society.

From this standpoint, Marcuse charges that Weber misunderstands the tensions within modernity. Weber had imagined a conflict between rationalization and irrational resistance. In fact, according to Marcuse, there is conflict between rationalization and the historical forces which have brought it into being. Rationalization can provide a systematic ordering of resources for the satisfaction of human needs, but capitalism produces coerced subordination to the requirements of infinite productivity as well as destructive domination over nature; rationalization promises a "technification of domination," which implies a noncoercive coordination of social effort, but capitalism rests upon domination in the interest of a narrow ruling class.

Marcuse's more distinctive recent position is found superimposed upon this line of discussion, often in the same texts. Here he attacks technical rationality as such, and its presumed psychological bases and social manifestations. Capitalism corrupts society, from this standpoint, because it *perfects* technical rationality, not because it perverts it. Especially striking is the suggestion that an ordering force antithetical to human perfection can itself appear perfectible. A society ordered by and for technical rationality, it seems, need not frustrate men's expectations although it stifles their capacities: it will not be shaken by ever more intense crises; it may not generate ever more threatening resistances to its order. "When technic becomes the universal form of material production," Marcuse writes, "it circumscribes an entire culture, it projects a historical totality—a world." Although terms like "capitalism" and "socialism" continue to play an important part in Marcuse's writings, the focus turns from such social units of analysis as private property or commodity production to units of the sort more commonly studied by psychologists. Marcuse insists that these psychological units also require social and historical interpretation, that even so seemingly timeless a matter as human instinct must be seen as an historical product in some basic way. But it remains striking that Marcuse now assesses social patterns in terms of their

impacts upon and implications for human nature, and much less in relation to other social forces. His most elaborate treatment of technical rationality occurs under the headings of "one-dimensional society" and "one-dimensional thought," but these are found in a work significantly entitled *One-Dimensional Man*. The "world" defined by technical rationality is taken up within the man at home in it and willingly recreated by him in his actions. To understand this process and, as he conceives it, to show its ultimate irrationality and destructiveness, Marcuse professes to build upon Freud.

Marcuse understands Freud to have shown first, that mankind creates and recreates civilization as the "reality principle" gains superiority within the psychic economies of individuals, and, second, that the psychic effort to create and sustain such superiority exacts heavy costs. According to Marcuse, the "reality principle" has been in fact equivalent to the "performance principle"; and this requires above all the delay and restriction of pleasurable gratifications, so that psychic energies can be applied in a disciplined way to the tasks imposed upon men by a natural scarcity of the things men need and by the multiplicity of competing, gratification-seeking men. Man has to work, in short, and man must be governed; and the reality principle epitomizes the psychological organization which best adapts man to these requirements. In Marcuse's rendering at least, Freud's thesis resembles the utilitarianism of Hobbes and Hume, except that there is greater emphasis on the strains which attend such an order founded on renunciation. The performance principle, in any case, is presented as the psychological counterpart of technical rationality as a social fact.

Marcuse emphasizes Freud's conclusion that the psychological costs accompanying such organization of energies mount steeply as civilization progresses. Instinctual renunciation requires repression of instincts, and this can be achieved only by turning one expression of instinctual force upon others. Aggression, much of it turned by the individual upon himself, comes to be a major form of psychic energy. And civilized men are thus unhappy, often disturbed, and periodically wild. Freud saw these strains and disadvantages as ameliorable but ultimately inescapable costs of a process which he seems in general to value. When he concluded "Where id is, let ego be," he

suggested that men escape complete dependence on dark natural forces and the terror of uncontained warfare only if they accept painful renunciations and controls, since the generation of ego is closely linked to the experience with superego and to the rise of the reality principle. Like Weber Freud offers sparse and precarious prospects to the autonomous civilized man of liberalism, but cannot envision a better alternative.

Marcuse considers Freud's conception of the individuation supposed to accompany and in some measure to outweigh the sufferings produced by progressive civilization as not so much wrong as obsolete. Marcuse maintains that the processes which now order and control men's instincts no longer bring about the possibility of the individual somehow discovering an autonomous self within the interplay of developmental pressures and resistances which Freud describes. Social institutions for production and control harness men's instincts to institutional requirements without depending on the complex familial drama depicted by Freud. Men are socialized to their role as instruments of the apparatus by a pervasive and seemingly automatic system of rewards, penalties, and alternatives foreclosed. Marcuse argues in effect that the descriptions which contemporary behavioral psychologists offer correspond more closely to the facts of contemporary society than does Freud's account of civilization, but that the facts must be subjected to an interpretation informed by Freud. Marcuse sees the contemporary pattern of psychological formation directly comparable to the regression of the ego which Freud discovered in mob psychology. Individuation is shortcircuited. Men submit to a depersonalized ego-ideal to enter a mass collectively enlisted in the service of technical reality. No one is in charge. The institutions reproduce themselves.

Corresponding to this, in Marcuse's account—and proof in his view that Freudian theory is vastly superior to that of the behaviorists, even though their descriptions are more up-to-date—is a constant increase in aggression and destructiveness. The smooth and comprehensive regulation of impulses generates aggressive energies, but denies them outlet in acts of self-defence and self-assertion, since there are no controllers in sight. Repression of instincts produces guilt and anxiety. Aggression and destructiveness pervade society in ways which

cannot but lead to their further escalation. Marcuse stresses the aggressive component in modern uses of technological products; he returns constantly to automobiles which kill, in symbol and in fact, to aggressive intrusions upon remaining private spaces by noisy repetitions, militarization, mobilization against the enemies within and without, and escalating warfare. Freud had imagined that the costs of civilization could be borne. Marcuse argues that this judgment rests on an incomplete accounting. When the performance principle assumes full sway, Marcuse contends, civilization begins to undermine itself. At the apex of success and stability, civilized society becomes quite literally impossible.

The existing social order requires and induces a transformation in man, generating the "qualities which enable him to get along with others in his society."¹³ Marcuse constantly speaks of this effect as being produced by "systematic manipulation and control" (p. 253), but—as will be seen in connection with the supervening theme of domination—deliberate shaping seems not to be the most basic process Marcuse has in view. Social structures interact in a transformative way with psychological makeup, according to Marcuse, through a myriad of pushes and pulls which can only be comprehended as "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," he asserts, "in the trend of the economy, in technological change, in the domestic and foreign policy of a nation or a group of nations, and they generate common supra-individual needs in the different social classes, pressure groups and parties." (p. 252.) All social actors, it would appear, collaborate in this transformation work. Marcuse insists, against the neo-Freudian revisionists, that the adaptation reshapes the very

¹³ "Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society," *Negations*, p. 256. This useful synopsis of the argument Marcuse has been developing since *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, 1955) will serve as a reference for the ensuing discussion, with page numbers in parentheses. Marcuse's interpretation of Freud cannot be evaluated here. For contrasting assessments, compare Peter Sedgwick, "Natural Science and Human Theory," *The Socialist Register* 1966 (London and New York, 1966) and Paul A. Robinson, *The Freudian Left* (New York, 1969), p. 147.

organization of human instincts, not simply personality or character. The changes which have taken place, though imperfectly effectuated as yet, involve a whole new structure, an integral breach with the past. Similarly, no mere reform or adjustment can inaugurate a transcendent alternative. That too will have to involve, according to Marcuse, an instinctual revolution. But that issue will concern us later.

The existing psychological order subordinates life to death, Eros to Thanatos. Marcuse explains:

Now the (more or less sublimated) transformation of destructive into socially useful aggressive (and thereby constructive) energy, is, according to Freud . . . a normal and indispensable process. It is part of the same dynamic by which libido, erotic energy, is sublimated and made socially useful; the two opposite impulses are forced together and, united in this twofold transformation, they become the mental and organic vehicles of civilization. But no matter how close and effective their union, their respective quality remains unchanged and contrary: aggression activates destruction which "aims" at death, while libido seeks the preservation, protection and amelioration of life. Therefore, it is only as long as destruction works in the service of Eros that it serves civilization and the individual; if aggression becomes stronger than its erotic counterpart, the trend is reversed. *Negations* (p. 257).

And it is precisely such a reversal which marks the present age. Men's circumstances elicit mobilization of aggressive energy, especially against the individual himself, and this must take strength from the erotic. Marcuse cites, in this connection, what he calls "military mobilization" of societies, the radical divorce between productive work and satisfaction, the "conditions of crowding, noise, and overtness characteristic of mass society"; and he associates all this with the elimination of counteracting spheres, especially the devaluation of truth and aesthetics through an "administered language" and entertainment. The details of Marcuse's social and cultural criticism, although often pungently formulated, are not so very distinctive, after all. What makes his argument formidable as a whole is his conception of a "system" whose primary dynamics have been internalized within the structure of needs characteristic of its "victims" as well as its "beneficiaries," and whose momentum leads to universal death. Marcuse concludes:

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. (p. 268)

Triumphant technical rationality proves ultimately irrational not merely because it imposes deprivations far more stringent than could be justified by contemporary conditions of supply, and not merely because it generates within its administrators as well as its subjects a steadily mounting danger of lethal explosion, but also and above all because it converts into aggressive form the erotic libidinal energies required for the integration of any social order. Marcuse insists that sociality depends upon a good deal of instinctual energy in erotic form. If existing civilization converts this into aggressive and destructive drives, society reproduces itself in a manner ever more tenuous and susceptible to catastrophe. As noted earlier, the argument as a whole is strongly reminiscent of the way in which Montesquieu and his followers thought about tyranny and its presumed corrosive effects upon social union in progressive societies.¹⁴

In the older tradition tyranny was commonly defined as a political system constituted by power in its harshest form: the ruler's command secures obedience simply by virtue of his violent might and his subjects' fear. Marcuse says comparatively little about political power and might; his key concepts are, rather, domination and repression. The significance of this conceptual shift will become clear. Just now it is important to note that for Marcuse the ordinary, politically relevant conduct of

¹⁴ "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts," *Five Lectures*, especially pp. 22 f. The earlier writers distinguished between societies where despotism may well be appropriate, where it is sustained by a pervasive and stable slavishness generated by climatic, cultural, and other long-term factors; and societies where despotism arises as a result of abuses of power, but where it cannot sustain the links among men necessary for its own long-term existence. E. V. Walter has explored this tradition. See, for example, his *Terror and Resistance* (New York, 1969). This distinction is often conceived as a distinction between despotism and tyranny.

men in contemporary society must be understood as a product of "domination" just as, for the older tradition, such conduct was elicited, in tyrannies, by the ruler's exactions and impositions. "Domination is in effect," Marcuse writes, "whenever the individual's goals and purposes and the means of striving for and attaining them are prescribed to him and performed by him as something prescribed."¹⁵ But that definition appears broad enough to include any sort of ordered conduct, and Marcuse goes on to focus upon a more restrictive sense of the term. Like the conception of tyrannical power in the tradition, Marcuse's "domination" is to be contrasted with "rational authority":

The latter, which is inherent in any societal division of labor, is derived from knowledge and confined to the administration of functions and arrangements necessary for the advancement of the whole. In contrast, domination is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position.¹⁶

Under conditions of domination in the narrow sense, "social needs have been determined by the interests of the ruling groups at any given time, and this interest has defined the needs of other groups and the means and limitations of their satisfactions." (p. 3.) At its extreme, "there is an irrational transfer of conscience and the repression of consciousness."¹⁷ But we are left with an important uncertainty.

Is it indeed the case that "domination," as Marcuse understands it, requires a dominator as well as the dominated? When he speaks of the "exercise" of domination by groups of individuals having certain purposes, or when he refers to "ruling groups," it certainly seems so. Yet he also claims that "domination can be exercised by men, by nature, by things—it can also be internal, exercised by the individual on himself and appear in the form of autonomy." (pp. 1–2) Even if we remove from the last passage some overpointedness produced by Marcuse's decision—apparent in this essay only—to label all forms of repres-

¹⁵ "Freedom and Freud's Theory of the Instincts," *Five Lectures*, p. 1. Numbers in parentheses will now refer to this essay.

¹⁶ *Eros and Civilization*, p. 36. See also "The End of Utopia," *Five Lectures*, p. 81.

¹⁷ "Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," *Five Lectures*, p. 50.

sion "domination" in some sense, there remains a question. Marcuse has never resolved it in full.

In his discussion of "mass democracy," the major political form within which contemporary domination operates, in his view, this matter becomes quite important. At first he seems to be echoing C. Wright Mills's thesis in *Power Elite*:

Having control of the [giant production-and-distribution] apparatus [of modern industry], or even of its key positions, means having control of the masses in such a way, in fact, that this control seems to result automatically from the division of labor, to be its technical result, the rationale of the functioning apparatus that spans and maintains the whole society. Thus domination appears as a technical-administrative quality, and this quality fuses the different groups that hold the key positions in the apparatus—economic, political, military—into a technical-administrative collective that represents the whole. (p. 15)

Despite the puzzling ascription of a universal representative character to the dominant collective, Marcuse appears to describe a ruling group controlling the rest in furtherance of its own interests. But he goes on to build on the notion of representation instead:

This technical-administrative collectivization appears as the expression of objective reason, that is, as the form in which the whole reproduces and extends itself. All freedoms are predetermined and preformed by it and subordinated not so much to political force as to the rational demands of the apparatus. . . . (p. 16)

To the extent that there are individuals in ruling positions, it now emerges, they function more like Hegel's universal administrative class than like Mills's power elite: what is crucial is that the "reason" they represent is the antireason of technical rationalization, not that they rule for the sake of their privileges. Marcuse confirms this impression: "There is no longer an autonomous subject across from the object, a subject that governs and in doing so pursues its own definable interests and goals." (p. 16)

That would seem to reduce the distinction between domination and rational authority altogether to a judgment about what is "necessary for the advancement of the whole," and

leave altogether out of consideration the mode of control as such. While it is not meaningless to say that domination is any constraint upon action which steers it so as to uphold a system judged to be irrational or vicious, such a definition would not allow one to adduce the prevalence of domination as a major proof of irrationality or viciousness. Marcuse escapes the tautology only insofar as he shifts the locus of domination from the social or political, as ordinarily understood, to the psychological. Domination then proves to be a condition of individuals, not a condition of relations between individuals (although that does not mean that the individual's condition may not be a function of relations with others). There need not be a dominator, although there often is one.

To be dominated, it is only necessary to have one's instincts attuned to external demands emanating from the process which supplies and creates material needs, whether these demands come in the forms of commands or suggestions or even opportunities. Domination becomes complete, according to Marcuse, when individuals abandon the capacity of opposition or resistance. Without resistance, there is no way in which individuals can express their power. This is how Marcuse interprets the widely remarked decline of political conflict during the 1950s and early 1960s, and denies that it has anything to do with "consensus" in any sense of that term relevant to liberal conceptions of consent. Stating Marcuse's argument in the older language, we may say that for him domination has at its core the corruption of civic virtue.¹⁸

Enslavement in the ordinary sense, the enjoyments of individual liberty, consumer-sovereignty, man's ever-growing mastery over nature, totalitarian dictatorship, pluralist liberal democracy—all may be forms of domination if they build upon and reinforce an incapacity for saying "no," if they preempt the human power of resistance. But in the last analysis, on this

¹⁸ As so often, Marcuse's argument strikes classical chords: "I am free," you claim. But on what grounds—you who are enslaved to do so many things. . . . No literal bond of slavery compels you, no force from without moves your muscles; but if tyrants arise within your sick soul, how do you escape unpunished?" Persius, *Satura* 5, ll. 124, 127–31; cited in Robert D. Cumming, *Human Nature and History* (Chicago, 1969), I, 340, n.104. Cumming locates the passage in the context of "sermonizing in the Cynic-Stoic Tradition."

reading, each man reproduces his own domination, especially if he simply minds his own business. Though not only then. Political activity within the ordinary channels of such a society of dominated men—if it speaks the ordinary language and utilizes the ordinary instruments—cannot lift people out of their dependence upon the processes making for domination, and so simply reinforces the existing order, whatever the sincere professions of the individuals involved. Marcuse concludes that men are satisfied within a system approaching total domination. They are also, in his view, doomed to be destroyed by it—doomed to destroy themselves through it.

Marcuse himself calls his diagnosis “apocalyptic” and “eschatological,” and he insists that his vision of a transcendent alternative must properly be designated “utopian.” In the next section we shall describe that vision as best we can and, in the last, we shall try to follow what Marcuse has to say about the implications of his theory for political practice. Since the whole of the foregoing has been remorseless summary, it will hardly do to summarize once again. What is most noteworthy for the political theorist in the work reviewed so far, it has been suggested, is its insistence upon examining the social relationships and psychological attributes presupposed by the central principles and maxims of political theory, and its conclusion that liberal political language and practice fails to comprehend the problems posed by these factors under conditions of advanced civilization. The postwar period of Marcuse’s productivity revealed the shattering fact that liberal arrangements can create contentment without liberation.¹⁹ To express and explain this

¹⁹ There is also the very important fact, little reflected in the bulk of Marcuse’s most influential writings, that Marcuse served for fifteen years as political commentator on Central and Eastern Europe. *Soviet Marxism* presumably reflects these activities. In many ways this book is pivotal to any understanding of Marcuse’s thought. Soviet political life, as Marcuse described it, is marked by political despotism in its most direct sense, by moral preachings which almost parody the repressive morality of Western civilization, but also by the elimination of capitalist private property. Marcuse seems to conclude that the underlying spirit of communism as liberating alternative is nevertheless somehow there, manifested above all in the failure of the people to internalize the repressive norms (as witnessed by the reliance on violent techniques of rule and blatant interminable propagandizing); that there remains the live possibility therefore that the people will rise against their ruling institutions, once these

conception Marcuse develops a theory of despotism or tyranny relying on criteria very different from those found in the political tradition. There is a common factor, here designated as “corruption,” but it is treated very differently. We shall return to these themes in the last section.

Marcuse’s qualifications as utopian visionary are somewhat unusual. His thought and his writing lack the ingenious specificity and sensuous concreteness which mark great utopias: he always seems to tell rather than show. Nevertheless he conveys, to some influential audiences at least, a conviction that there is something out there, an actual alternative whose vital principles can be grasped. Perhaps it is as some of his harsher critics suggest, that his abstract categories offer empty though imposing vessels to be filled by the reader with whatever stuff his dreams are made of. As we shall see, Marcuse might not find such an objection as telling as the objectors might think.²⁰ We reserve judgment. If we are at all right about the logic of Mar-

institutions have performed their historically necessary task of building production beyond the constraints of scarcity; and that, since the internal masters are not in command, such an attack on external governors would yield liberation. Marcuse suggests that the Soviet political and social order provides a temporary and radically imperfect framework within which the major advances of civilization can be accumulated without incorporating its fatal dangers. That accumulation then makes possible a wholly new order. Schematically, in brief, his understanding of the Soviet order is very similar to his understanding of Western civilization: it is somehow possible to discern the “spirit” or “idea” or ultimate rationale moving a society, and that force has its locus, in the last analysis, in the psychological structure within its inhabitants. Though produced and reproduced by the institutional matrices defining men’s existences, these congruent “spirits” cannot be extrapolated from an account of social and political arrangements as such. Thus, “free” institutions may sustain despotism, and “despotic” institutions may foster liberation. Since Marcuse sees the need for a revolution against the Soviet state, his position can hardly be called pro-Soviet. His position does, however, imply a preference for the Soviets in any struggle with the Americans because their gains would be less likely to secure despotism in its most important sense. In any case, it may well be that Marcuse’s sustained attention to the harshness and ineffectiveness of the East contributed as much as his recognition of the tolerance and success of the West toward his turn from history to human nature as an ultimate framework for theoretical discussion.

²⁰ See David Kettler, “The Vocation of Radical Intellectuals,” *Politics and Society*, 1, no. 1 (1970).

cuse's ideas, his critique of liberal responses to civilization could stand without a projected alternative, as a doleful prophecy. But such an outcome would be altogether alien to Marcuse's own design. The notion of a transcendent alternative is not a consolation somehow added to a bleak prognosis, a "lullaby-song of Heaven" to soothe our dismay. There is an authentic ring of optimism in Marcuse's work.²¹ He is serene in the depiction of evil because he is confident that there is another world.

Marcuse would offer us a joyful science. The good order is above all an order in which men are happy. Priding himself upon continuities with Epicureanism, Marcuse claims that he can show how "the ancient desideratum of hedonism" can now be fulfilled. Happiness and truth need no longer conflict; happiness need no longer be located in the interstices of a harsh order required by imperious necessities. The structure of necessity itself, Marcuse argues, now commands that men make themselves happy. Marcuse conditions happiness upon a revolutionary restructuring of instincts. His account of utopia does not address itself to the problems of political power, as these have been stated in the liberal tradition of political theory. Like Marxist writers, Marcuse claims that these "problems" pertain to the irrational circumstances of contemporary civilization and not to the ordering of social relationships as such. He goes beyond the Marxists in anticipating a state of affairs which will dispense with power as a source of problems, and thus in attempting to undermine the premises upon which rest so many questions of political theory. Political power is indeed oppressive in existing civilization; but this whole mode of relating men, according to Marcuse, arises from the structure of human instincts as they have adapted themselves to the requirements of production and progress. And this can change. The "will to gratification" must replace the "logic of domination." In the happy society, no one would enjoy power. Marcuse insists that there can be a radically different organizing principle and or-

²¹ It would be worthwhile to compare Marcuse in this respect with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, with whom he shares so many ideas. They are also speaking of "hope," but the impenetrability of their writings on these themes may testify to their despair. Marcuse's utterances, in contrast, bear the marks of having glad tidings to tell.

dering force within the individual as within the society. As in his earlier work, liberation implies order. In depicting this alternate order, Marcuse refers primarily to two related classes of experience available to men at the present time and contends that these prefigure the essential qualities of all experience in utopia: love and aesthetic sensibility. We shall look first at these new human capabilities, as Marcuse sees them, and then at the patterns of relationships and actions corresponding to them, insofar as we can tell what Marcuse has in mind.

Marcuse argues that humankind created the instinctual structure depicted by Freud in a revolutionary adaptation to scarcity in nature and the promise of social productivity. The reality principle orders libidinal energies so that man can encounter necessities in a practical way. But the established form of the reality principle, says Marcuse, is the performance principle; repression and guilt purchase progress and civilization. Now, Marcuse holds, what was necessary and rational has become unnecessary and irrational. There can and must be a change in the political economy of the psyche: the "aesthetic principle as form of the reality principle" ²² will structure and direct the instincts. Marcuse tries in several different ways, drawing extensively on poetry and mythology, to convey the quality of the hoped-for new principle. We must be content to summarize his claims. Marcuse maintains that human fantasy, forms of eroticism which do not seek to master others, the capacity for play and artistic creation, and aesthetic sensibility all testify to the possibility that man can encounter the world in a meaningful way without the lust for domination and the repression, calculation, and anxiety which that lust implies.²³

That these modes of experience now largely serve as mere consolations and recreations supporting the dominant system does not negate their ultimate subversive significance, Marcuse contends. Libidinal energies can be redirected from their present channels of aggression, technical rationality, and exploitative genital sexuality. The sum total of human relationships

²² *Essay on Liberation*, p. 90. See also *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 150-51.

²³ See pt. II of *Eros and Civilization*, "Beyond the Reality Principle," p. 129. See also "Progress and Freud's Theory of the Instincts," *Five Lectures*; "A Biological Foundation for Socialism?" *Essay on Liberation*; "Nature and Revolution," *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*.

and activities can be charged with a diffuse but joyful erotic satisfaction. In the earlier writings of this sort, especially in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse distinguishes between the repression presumably necessary for the unavoidable self-discipline involved in socially necessary work and the "surplus repression" which attends the prevailing system of alienated labor and domination. Only the latter could be eliminated, while the former would simply be displaced from its central place in man's makeup. But that qualification is steadily eroding, as Marcuse comes to decide that work itself must be an integral part of the new happiness, providing direct gratification for new sorts of needs.²⁴

Marcuse nowhere discusses the ontogenetic process which would reproduce in the individual the instinctual structure corresponding to such a pattern of impulses and actions. In some measure, however, his conception is implicit in his judgment that Freud's account has become obsolete and that the organization of the instincts has in any case become a product of social-political forces and not of the intrafamilial dialectic. Just as the last revolution presupposed that radical transformation in the family which Freud recounts in the primal slaying of the father and its aftermath, so the forthcoming liberation of men, although measured by the reconstitution of the soul, presupposes social and political overturn. As already noted, Marcuse gives no more than a very general account of the social and political arrangements corresponding to this new psychological structure and presumably capable of sustaining it once it has been somehow established.²⁵

Obviously he envisions some kind of collective ownership of productive means and pretty certainly he intends an end to formal institutions of government.²⁶ Although "technology and

²⁴ *Essay on Liberation*, p. 91; see also pp. 20–22, where he expressly cites Nietzsche against Marx on this point.

²⁵ In *Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse appropriates the Soviet Marxist distinction between socialism and communism, speaking of a "First Phase, that is, the authoritarian bureaucratic development of the productive forces," p. 89. But he also insists that such a phase could only contribute to liberation if the new sensibility were already operative within it.

²⁶ There is considerable lack of clarity about this in the texts. In *Essay on Liberation* and "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse talks about "direct democ-

technique" are now central to the logic of domination, they must be retained and converted to the rhythms of the new order, since the triumph over scarcity which is the material foundation upon which utopia rests depends on the new productive capabilities. As already noted, Marcuse imagines that the continued operation of these resources can be freed from "technical rationality" and the rage for productivity. Marcuse speaks of "creative experimentation with the productive forces" and "play with the potentialities of human and non-human nature." "The productive imagination," he continues, "would become the concretely structured productive force that freely sketches out the possibilities for a free human existence on the basis of a corresponding development of material productive forces."²⁷

To fill in these very vague indications, Marcuse has turned in his most recent work toward some of the ecological writers, especially Murray Bookchin's notion of "liberatory technology."²⁸ Very importantly, the society would cease to be "pro-

racy" and rule by a genuinely "free and sovereign majority," whose members have somehow been educated for autonomy. In these passages, his position moves very close to that of a classical Rousseauist democrat, with added Kantian elements. But there is so little room in the ambitious discussions of the new psychological structure for the psychology of such citizenship that we cannot take these political arrangements as an integral part of the new society, but must refer them rather to the period of transition, seeing them as an alternative to the "educational dictatorship" which is also discussed in this context. In "The Left Under the Counter-Revolution," Marcuse expressly describes "a 'direct democracy' of the majority" as "the form of government or administration for the construction of socialism." *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, p. 54. But the limits of this stage remain unclear. Marcuse's inconclusiveness on these vital political questions is part of a pattern to be further discussed. See also *Essay on Liberation*, pp. 68–69 and 69n.; "Repressive Tolerance," in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, 1965, 1968), p. 105, and "Postscript 1968," pp. 122–23; cp. "Freedom and Freud's Theory," *Five Lectures*, p. 23 f. for an attack on the "idealist" conceptions of freedom and autonomy.

²⁷ "The End of Utopia," *Five Lectures*, p. 66. "A productivity that is sensuousness, play, and song," *Eros and Civilization*.

²⁸ *Counter-Revolution*, p. 61. Marcuse's own imagination flags rather badly whenever he wants to illustrate this conception, and he turns up with banal talk about parks instead of parking lots and an occasional romanticizing of folk crafts. See "The End of Utopia," *op. cit.*, p. 65.

gressive," in the sense of the old political economy; genuine contentment is a "stationary state." In a striking passage, Marcuse remarks that "freedom would no longer be an eternally failing project." He goes on to say:

Productivity would define itself in relation to receptivity, existence would be experienced, not as continually expanding and unfulfilled becoming but as existence or being with what is and can be. Time would not seem linear, as a perpetual line or rising curve, but cyclical as the return contained in Nietzsche's idea of the "perpetuity of pleasure."²⁸

As all this suggests, the release of eroticism which Marcuse espouses had astoundingly little to do with the pleasures of genital sexuality, and the cooperation and solidarity he has in mind involve no fusion of identities into some libidinal mass. He does speak of a "libidinous civilization," but soon makes it clear that he means by this the "idea . . . of an aesthetic sensuous civilization," as it had been foreseen by Friedrich Schiller in the letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*.³⁰

Writing in 1795, Schiller had sought a solution to two overlapping problems: how to recapture the classical capacity for civic virtue under conditions of commercial civilization—a question suggested to him by his study of Rousseau's *Discourses* and Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*—and how to bridge the gap between the requirements of morality laid down by Kant and the impulsions governing human conduct discerned by Hume, Helvetius, and other psychologists. When Schiller speaks of an "aesthetic state," it should be noted, it is as a dimension of existence intermediate between the "dynamic state" of powers in motion and the "ethical state" of unconditional duties. The playful involvement with beauty which constitutes this state affects the life of the whole community, but its actual denizens are few. Schiller

²⁸ "Progress and Freud's Theory," *Five Lectures*, pp. 40–41; see also *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 124–46.

³⁰ "Freedom and Freud's Theory," p. 23, pp. 41–42. The standard edition and translation of the work by Schiller is now Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, edited and translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford, 1967). Marcuse built especially on the series of letters between the Sixth and the Ninth, pp. 31–61, and then the Twenty-Seventh, pp. 205–19.

writes: "But does such a state of Aesthetic Semblance really exist? And if so, where is it to be found? As a need, it exists in every finely attuned soul; as a realized fact, we are likely to find it, like the pure Church and the pure Republic, only in some few chosen circles. . . ." ³¹ Marcuse acknowledges that the aesthetic ideal serves Schiller at least in important part as supplement and consolation for the requirements of life in a modern commercial civilization, but he contends that it is possible to abstract the design from its restrictive context and to pattern an entire countercivilization upon it.

This must not be misunderstood as a contention that all men can somehow become "artists." Following surrealist poets, Marcuse sees in art at its best an anticipation of the happiness which liberation can bring. But he insists that its embodiment in artistic work, in the narrow sense of "high culture," is itself a product of the repressive social order. If "the aesthetic function is conceived as a principle governing the entire human existence," ³² it may be that there is no place in utopia for artists, as there seems to be none for critical theorists. In any case, Marcuse is persuaded that Schiller offers the vital clue for the "solution of a 'political' problem: the liberation of man from inhuman existential conditions." "The play impulse," he contends, "is the vehicle of this liberation." In restating "the idea behind the *Aesthetic Education*," Marcuse emphasizes the moral intentions of the work, as well as its conception of order:

It aims at basing morality on a sensuous ground; the laws of reason must be reconciled with the interest of the senses; the domineering form of impulse must be restrained . . . To be sure, if freedom is to become the governing principle of civilization, not only reason but also the "sensuous impulse" energy must conform with the universal *order* of freedom. However, whatever order would have to be imposed upon the sensuous impulse must itself be an "operation of freedom." The free individual himself must bring about the harmony between individual and

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219. On the question of sexuality, Schiller writes: "taste throws a veil of decorum over those physical desires which in their naked form, affront the dignity of free beings; and, by a delightful illusion of freedom, conceals from us our degrading kinship with matter."

³² *Eros and Civilization*, p. 188. See in the same work "The Aesthetic Dimension," pp. 172–96.

universal gratification. In a truly free civilization, all laws are self-given by the individuals: "to give freedom by freedom is the universal law" of the aesthetic state; in a truly free civilization, "the will of the whole" fulfills itself only "through the nature of the individual." Order is freedom only if it is founded on and sustained by the free gratification of the individual.³³

Such a conception of order can be imagined to govern "human existence" in its entirety, rather than (as Schiller had thought) a narrow realm, only on the assumption of the psychological revolution that Marcuse has in view. He writes:

The life instincts themselves strive for the unification and enhancement of life; in nonrepressive sublimation they would provide the libidinal energy for work on the development of a reality which no longer demands the exploitative repression of the Pleasure Principle. The "incentives" would then be built into the instinctual structure of man. Their sensibility would register as biological reactions, the difference between the ugly and the beautiful, between calm and noise, tenderness and brutality, intelligence and stupidity, joy and fun, and it would correlate this distinction with that between freedom and servitude.³⁴

The "aesthetic state," it must be recalled, is not offered as the vehicle of that revolution, but rather as the condition congruent with its triumph.

Marcuse asks that we encounter this utopian projection through our imagination. We shall be content to observe it. In particular, Marcuse is concerned to deny that man must suffer deprivation and anxiety if he is to rise and remain above animal existence. Repressive civilization and domination had its justification so long as scarcity necessitated modes of labor discipline which in turn involved the generation of aggressive impulses necessitating coercive government. On the basis of plenty, men can attain to a new and higher humanity.³⁵ The projected Golden Age is not an age of prehuman passivity or angelic stupidity; it is a universal dance measure—complex, active, self-justifying. And, increasingly, Marcuse seems to

³³ *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 190–91.

³⁴ *Essay on Liberation*, p. 91.

³⁵ Cp. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford, 1888; 1958), p.

suggest that there are harmonies in nature which can set the tempo, if humanity will be receptive.³⁶

As with the critique of modern civilization, we cannot but be struck by the affinities between Marcuse's thought and the classicism of the eighteenth century. Although there are formulations borrowed from Nietzsche and vitalist writers, and there is an insistence on resources of the unconscious, all these materials are assimilated to the intellectual habits of the Enlightenment. Such historical comparisons have very limited use, given the complexity of the phenomena and the diversity of interpretations, but they will serve to underline the distance between Marcuse and the "irrationalist" tendencies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marcuse offers an account of an educational order when he turns to a consideration of the "best state," as did Plato and Aristotle, each in their way, and as did the modern rationalist writers, through John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, when they set out to counter what they took to be the dehumanizing consequences of commercial civilization. It is a practical education, measured by the character it builds and not by the knowledge it accumulates. And, almost certainly, it is an education without educators, a self-cultivation through participation in cultivating forms.

Marcuse will not allow us simply to contemplate this joyful alternative. If we regard it thus, it would be simply another of the cultural products which, in his view, lead us to forgetfulness of our mission even while they remind us of the possibilities, because the reminder itself gives a soothing joy. Marcuse insists that the transcendence of power politics and technical rationality must be perceived as an ideal. He demands that we order our moral and political practice according to this

³⁶ On the image of dance, see "Introduction," to Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. cxxxi f. The editors cite Goethe, Pope, Valéry, Nietzsche, T. S. Eliot, as well as Schiller himself. See also Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, and Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal*. In a recent essay, Marcuse takes as the epitome of the vision he intends Bertold Brecht's poem, "The Lovers," depicting the dancelike flight of the two cranes. *Counter-Revolution*, p. 119 f. On the question of nature, Marcuse speaks increasingly of the "liberation" and "domination" of nature. "Liberation of nature is the recovery of life-enhancing forces in nature, the sensuous aesthetic qualities which are foreign to a life wasted in unending competitive performances." *Counter-Revolution*, p. 60. See also the work of Marcuse's student: William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York, 1972).

ideal and, in effect, denies it all value if it is not a present possibility. Marcuse's attempts to depict a revolutionary politics and morals which will be a pursuit of happiness must concern us next. But we can say even now that Marcuse considers the projection of the utopian alternative as itself an integral part of such politics: it is necessary to reinforce the fleeting intimations which all men have that things can be altogether different. Breathing life into such a spark is a delicate matter; an excess of fuel can smother it. This is why, as hinted earlier, Marcuse may well be quite indifferent to charges that his utopian vision is vague precisely with regard to many of the matters which generated the "realistic" compromises of his intellectual predecessors. Then too, it must be recalled, Marcuse's critique of liberal civilization aims to show that those compromises are untenable. Taken as a whole, Marcuse's argument depends on his conception of the revolutionary movement. If the conception stands, the critique of civilization is a diagnosis of an infinitely promising crisis, and the utopian projection, the regulative ideal of an efficacious practice; if the conception fails, the critique may be Spenglerian prophecy, and the ideal, nostalgic invocation of antiquated cultural glories.

Marcuse's work contains, as we have seen, a critique and a utopia. His account of the universe within which meaningful political activity must be comprehended falls between these two. The principles of neither the old civilization nor the new can apply to it. The revolution must be seen as an entity having boundaries in political space and time like any other domain. Paradoxical as it may seem, Marcuse means to oblige his readers to citizenship within this polity. When he speaks of a "right of revolution," he may be understood to use the term "right" in the dual sense common in most Western European languages other than English: there is a lawful structure defining duties as well as secure claims against other conflicting demands. A revolution, in this sense, is not simply the forceful negation of some existing legitimacy. It is a counterregime, having its beginnings long before the old regime fails and continuing in power until it can be somehow displaced by the new order. Marcuse's writings on these subjects address themselves to problems at two very different levels. First, he means to char-

acterize the revolution in general, depicting its basic principles, powers, and processes. Second, he offers political commentary on the present state of the revolution, its particular prospects and requirements. Marcuse's thought at the first level is confident and quite clear. At the second level, however, Marcuse encounters grave problems, including periodic doubts whether there is anything more than a vague idea of revolution in existence and consequently whether there is anything at all that it makes sense to do. We shall consider some of these difficulties, as well as their implications, in conclusion.

In contrast to his earlier Marxian confidence, Marcuse comes increasingly to view the revolution as project rather than as burgeoning actuality. This shift in attitude has to do with the consolidation of welfare-state capitalism after World War II and with disappointment in the Soviet Union and communist parties. The shift also involves a reexamination of the tasks assigned to revolution: it is no longer a matter of radicalizing and completing trends already present in the existing society and in the immediate reactions against it, but a matter of tapping energies and capabilities which lie more or less securely passive—repressed and absorbed by the major forces shaping men's experiences. The revolution stands outside the society, wholly reforming the human resources which are somehow made available to it, transforming them into men fit for combat and other action. If we have understood the spirit of the happy society correctly, moreover, there is almost as sharp a divide between it and the requirements of revolution. Revolution demands direction, effectiveness, repression, organization, super- and subordination, violence; the utopian aesthetic state will constitute its order altogether differently. But then the question arises whether it will require another revolution to move from the revolution to its presumed result, and we might find ourselves caught up in the paradox of infinite divisibility.

Raising such a possibility forces us back to a fundamental issue which we have expressly sought to set aside in this treatment: the matter of philosophic method. Marcuse, after all, is justly renowned as a writer who introduced many to the Hegelian dialectic and to its place in Marx's thought; and the dialectic presents itself precisely as a logic or intellectual strategy able to comprehend qualitative change, the analogue in philosophical

and historical method to the mathematical techniques which dissolved Zeno's paradox. Has our account of Marcuse's thought brought us to incomprehensible changes and interminable transitions because we have left out his dialectical approach? Are we encountering problems which we have ourselves created? These are questions which a systematic treatment of Marcuse's thought would have to entertain in detail. We can simply assert a conclusion that it was Marcuse who was unable to make the dialectical conception work in attempting to deal with the relationships among corrupt society, utopia, and the revolution which is to intervene. Our recourse to the comparatively static models of Montesquieu as aids in expounding Marcuse's argument rests on the conviction that Marcuse actually organizes his materials into such structures, notwithstanding all the dialectical language. These remarks are not meant to suggest an assurance that dialectical methods *could* be made to work in political and social theory, in the way that Marcuse's philosophical program proclaims. It is possible that his departure from that program is a justifiable or even necessary accommodation to the substantive findings of his inquiry. Such questions cannot be addressed here. The main points are that Marcuse's later writings more nearly portray society as undergoing a sequence of distinct morphological incarnations than as caught up in a developmental dynamic, and that the epoch of transition itself takes on a surprising measure of integration, so that it is hard to say how it could begin or why it would end.

Let us turn to Marcuse's account of the structure of revolution in general. Marcuse's initial definition is quite ordinary: "the overturning of a legitimately established regime and constitution by a social class or movement having the objective of transforming the social as well as the political structure."³⁷ The expansion of the concept, so that it no longer refers simply to a certain class of events but also to a type of social entity, turns on the key word "movement." Marcuse constantly uses the term "movement" equivocally for revolutionary events and for the social actors—organizations and agencies as well as individuals—intending or acting in them. The problem of justifying

³⁷ "Ethik und Revolution" (Ethics and Revolution), *Kultur und Gesellschaft* 2 (Frankfurt, 1965), p. 131.

revolutions, for example, quickly becomes a problem of justifying revolutionary movements and revolutionary regimes.

In the tradition, we can distinguish two general approaches to the right of revolution. The first stresses the corruption which attends tyranny and sanctions a resistance which will purify the polity and displace the tyrannical regime with one having contrasting qualities of reason and morality. The second sees resistance as defensive, the resumption of a natural right to the use of violence for the securing of vital properties. From this standpoint, the prime objective is to force public power back into its legitimate channels. The major actor in the former conception is a virtuous competitor for power; in the latter, it is an innocent victim of abuse. Marcuse's critique of liberalism brings him clearly within the former camp. The right of revolution is a right of revolutionaries; it depends far more on their righteousness than on their having been wronged.

The measure of right, then, is the capacity to promote human freedom and human happiness when these are being systematically repressed. If justified in this way, the revolutionary movement may use violence against existing powers and the revolutionary regime may subject the people to a "compulsory education" which will strip away the accumulated slavish patterns of thought and action, the domination within.³⁸ General moral arguments against the use of violence do not apply, according to Marcuse, because they are always only selectively applied to actions against established regimes. The infliction of hurt is a pervasive fact of human history; the ethically relevant distinction is that between reactionary and revolutionary violence. The same applies to indoctrination and "totalitarianism." According to Marcuse, all systems rest upon the psychological formation of men; and, as we have seen, none, in his view, is more total in its control than the system reproducing modern civilization. The fact that the present political system takes the form of democracy does not alter the basic situa-

³⁸ "Repressive Tolerance," p. 100 f. For some revealing parallels, see the discussion of Savonarola in J. G. A. Pocock, "Custom, and Form, Grace and Matter: An Approach to Machiavelli's Concept of Innovation," in Martin Fleischer, ed., *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought* (New York, 1972), pp. 162-65.

tion, although, as will be seen, Marcuse frequently seeks democratic legitimation for the revolution. Existing democracy he variously describes as simply a sham behind which elites and interests rule or as a tyranny of a tyrannized majority. Controlled and/or corrupted wills cannot create obligation. In effect, Marcuse reverses the conventional presumptions. Once a revolutionary movement is constituted, meeting the criteria stated above, it is to be treated as the legitimate regime, presumably by its adherents as well as by all others within its claimed sphere; force attempted against this regime is then to be seen as illegitimate resistance. Marcuse repeatedly terms the violence perpetrated by revolutionaries "counter-violence," citing Robespierre as well as Marx in his support.

The revolution is an ethical entity, not only in its purpose but also in its means and in its inner constraints. Marcuse insists that "there are forms of violence and repression which a revolutionary situation cannot justify, because they negate the end to which revolution serves as means. Of this sort are arbitrary violence, terrorizing tactics, and indiscriminate terror."³⁹ But he appears confident that a revolutionary regime generates its own ethos, placing restraints on its own conduct as well as on that of others, to replace the internalized norms appropriate to the earlier condition. In no sense, then, can revolution be conceived as force out of control. There may be all sorts of violent risings against existing governments, revolutionary or repressive, but many of these, it appears, must be classed as "rebellions" or called by some other term expressly referring to the kinds of actions involved. Such events may be evaluated in relation to the revolution, being seen as preparatory or supportive or hostile, but unless they can be incorporated within the revolutionary movement itself, they lack ethical character, even if the standards of right they violate are no longer valid.

But actors involved in such actions all claim to be promoting human freedom and happiness. How can one know whether a particular claim is valid? Marcuse argues that the criteria are in principle objectively calculable. It should be possible to compare a projected alternative with the present, in regard to human freedom and happiness; and it should also be possible to

incorporate within the "brutal calculation" an estimate of the harm to be inflicted in the process of transformation for comparison with the harm attending nontransformation. He admits, however, that such a calculation can never be complete or certain. The real judgment can only come after the fact; we must now estimate probabilities, accept individual responsibility for involvement in an "historical experiment." Given a negative assessment of an existing system, there is a presumption in favor of forces moving against it—although that presumption can be overridden by recourse of those forces to impermissible means or some other substantial loss of ethical right. Marcuse places the individual actor in a curious and difficult position: on the one hand, he appears to be morally obliged to support the revolution, which is justified in punishing those who oppose it; on the other, he is given very little help in evaluating any particular claimant to the revolutionary role, especially if there should be competitors. Marcuse's position presumably is that this is an inescapable part of the human condition, not to be evaded by submission to presently dominant forces, whatever moral norms may be conventionally established.

Yet the discussion cannot remain at so general a level. Marcuse claims, after all, that social theory must provide an orientation to practice, that it must deal with the concrete historical present. We must then consider whether and how Marcuse sees the revolution in his own time. In an attempt to systematize ideas which are scattered in diverse political commentaries, we will relate his judgment to three aspects of revolutionary right. First, given the resources available to the society, can there be a social order which imposes substantially less repression on man, greatly enhancing his "freedom" and "happiness" as Marcuse understands those terms? Marcuse's critique and utopia say yes, without question. Existing legal and political institutions lack all moral right. This yields what we may designate an abstract right to revolution. The second aspect of the concept, as Marcuse applies it, refers to the actual availability of revolutionary forces—that is, some effective social energy which embodies the movement or gives quite specific promise of doing so. After Marcuse gives up the expectation that the industrial working class, operating through the organizations which have grown up since the time of Marx, represents

³⁹ "Ethics and Revolution," p. 139.

such a force, he links this aspect directly to the third: the question of a revolutionary ethos. The concrete right to revolution, then, depends on the existence of a movement, at least potentially powerful enough to capture power and integrated by a purposive will to attain the revolutionary end. In dealing with past revolutions, Marcuse treats this third aspect as a completion of right which often can only be discerned in retrospect, after the revolutionary regime has consolidated itself, and the rationale for actions motivated by quite diverse concerns becomes clear. It is a historical judgment.

With regard to the present, however, it does not appear as though the revolutionary force can be mobilized without the awareness of domination—presumably because the domination is so insidiously pervasive within the subjects of the existing order. As repeatedly remarked, Marcuse has great difficulty deciding whether men are now subject to revolutionary right and if so what it might dictate. He has no doubts about insurgents in national liberation movements, in relation to their own situations; but he does not appear to believe that partisanship with those forces extends their right to individuals and groups operating in metropolitan centers. His writings constantly monitor the activities of oppositional groupings in the advanced countries, and his judgments there are not clearly stated. Speaking to radical students in 1967, Marcuse said:

In monopolistic industrial society [the violence of suppression] is concentrated to an unprecedented extent in the domination that penetrates the totality of society. In relation to this totality the right of liberation is in its immediate appearance a particular right. Thus the conflict of violence appears as a clash between general and particular or public and private violence, and in this clash the private violence will be defeated until it can confront the existing public power as a new general interest. As long as the opposition does not have the social force of a new general interest, the problem of violence is primarily a problem of tactics.⁴⁰

This statement would appear to sanction "violence" against the system, where tactically justified, even though the revolutionary movement is not sufficiently well-established to

⁴⁰ "Problem of Violence and the Radical Opposition," *Five Lectures*, p. 90.

appear as more than the arbitrary actions of individuals or narrowly defined special groups. But the explication of Marcuse's "tactics" links them to that "brutal calculation" which is part of the criterion of revolutionary right itself, so that acts of violence which are tactically unsound would also appear not to be right. In his most recent essay then we find:

In the counterrevolutionary situation of today, violence is the weapon of the Establishment. . . . The revolutionary force which is destined to terminate this violence does not exist today. . . . Action directed toward vague, general, intangible targets is senseless; worse, it augments the number of adversaries.⁴¹

Despite some fluctuations, then, we can say that Marcuse finds the revolutionary right to be defective at the present time. The primary task he sets for "the left," or "the opposition," or even "the movement" to which he speaks, is the perfecting of this "right," the constitution of the revolutionary force. As a practical matter he denies the movement the full powers which pertain, in his view, to such a force. His diagnosis of the present situation consists of two parts: first, repeated surveys of recent social trends, in search of social energies antithetical to the prevailing system, energies which could presumably be converted to resources of revolution; and second, commentary on the political aspirations and activities of those who think of themselves as radical if not revolutionary opponents of the system, primarily students. The first sort of inquiry brings Marcuse repeatedly to the possibility that the working class is being pushed, despite everything, into conflict with the requirements of the system, especially with regard to work discipline. He also points in various ways to the presumed mounting frustration of technicians, the bitterness of outcast segments of society, the undermining of power by external foes of the system, the breakthrough of erotic and aesthetic forces in the form of various refusals. But he acknowledges most of the time that these have no necessary cumulative impact and that they need not propel events in a revolutionary direction. In the last analysis, everything depends on the activity of those who must found the revolutionary movement itself. At the conclusion of one

⁴¹ "The Left Under the Counterrevolution," *Counter-Revolution*, p. 53.

essay, in fact, Marcuse writes: "The search for specific historical agents of revolutionary change in the advanced capitalist countries is indeed meaningless. Revolutionary forces emerge in the process of change itself; the translation of the potential into the actual is the work of political practice."⁴² And that brings us to the political practitioners he has in view.

Theirs is primarily an educational task: they must generate the vision and the will able to provide the ethos for revolution. They must act so as to enhance their own critical understanding of the society and its alternative. They must foster in themselves that sensibility which can generate a "vital need for radical change" in themselves. They must build a new morality. And they must work against a total ethical closure within a society, helping to loosen social morale, where possible, so that other people may at some time become open to new and revolutionary possibilities. In Marcuse's terms, the present function of radical oppositionists is to develop the "consciousness" which may at some time integrate and animate a genuinely revolutionary movement. In the present situation revolutionary consciousness exists only in attenuated and uncertain form, and then only in social forces not "capable of subverting the established system in order to build a socialist society."⁴³ Even in dealing with forceful actions directed against major institutions of the society, Marcuse assigns primarily educational objectives and significance to the political activities he supports. Those activities are at most creating the barest outline of the political entity whose concerted effort will transform the society; they are incubating the spirit which will move the revolutionary force.

This view of contemporary radical political practice helps to account for an otherwise puzzling (or morally offensive) feature of Marcuse's writings on these matters. As we have seen, he assigns the most sweeping rights and powers to a revolutionary movement, especially with regard to violence; but his specific examples of the "violence" he approves are always instances of "disruption," usually quite innocuous cases of blocking traffic.⁴⁴ This is not disingenuous evasion of the conse-

⁴² *Essay on Liberation*, p. 79.

⁴³ "The Left Under the Counterrevolution," p. 53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; *Essay on Liberation*, p. 77.

quences of approving violence, it would appear, but application of a consistent though unclear principle—almost as though oppositionists were denizens of some Lockean state of nature which anticipates the norms of a proper civil order but concedes very few of the powers which such an order involves. The Lockean parallel becomes even more tempting when it is recalled how little membership in the oppositional movement requires of those who associate themselves with it. But we do not want to labor a suggestion intended to clarify only one aspect of a body of thought which is otherwise so antithetical to such models. Oppositionists can act in hopes of revolutionary vindication, but they may not presume too far upon such expectations.

Drawing on eighteenth-century parallels, Marcuse refers to the present as "the period of enlightenment," preparing the ground for the revolutionary movement and practice yet to come. Activities which many of the actors and their opponents see as direct steps in revolutionary politics, Marcuse interprets as steps in the self-definition of an intellectual and moral force which may in turn create the spiritual conditions within which revolutionary politics may flourish. Marcuse even places prime stress on such considerations in evaluating the significance of successful revolutionary movements outside the "advanced capitalist countries":

The Cuban Revolution and the Viet Cong have demonstrated: it can be done; there is a morality, a will and a faith which can resist and deter the gigantic technical and economic force of capitalist expansion. More than the "socialist humanism" of the early Marx, this violent solidarity in defense, this elemental socialism in action, has given force and substance to the radicalism of the New Left.⁴⁵

From another perspective, we can see Marcuse's appeal to his readers as moral exhortation to free themselves from the slough of corruption which presumably surrounds them, almost without regard to further consequences. "And even if we see no transformation," he said at the end of a lecture on "The Problem of Violence and the Radical Opposition," "we must fight on. We must resist if we still want to live as human beings, to

⁴⁵ *Essay on Liberation*, pp. 81-82.

work and be happy.”⁴⁶ This almost-stoic undercurrent only rarely comes to the surface in Marcuse’s work, not least because he doubtless does hope that it will be possible to create a world completely consonant with the needs of whole men, as he understands them. But there is an important interplay between Marcuse and his readers, in which he suggests to them that their ability to read and to understand what he says is already a sign that they are not wholly subject to the system of domination. Taking seriously what he is saying is already a “political” act, because it is opening themselves to possibilities within themselves which the corrupting system seeks to extirpate. If the “politics of transcendence” is revolutionary in character, it is preceded by a “politics” of “hope,” which may be defeated in all of its encounters with the power system. When revolutionary politics in the narrower sense actually commence, very few of the activists from the intellectual movement may be involved. Such a politics may even presuppose the destruction of that movement.⁴⁷

It is against this background that we must consider the question of Marcuse’s “elitism,” his notion of “educational dictatorship,” and his relationship to political democracy overall. Many commentators allege that Marcuse simply sweepingly assigns political authority to the self-styled radical intelligentsia, licensing all actions that they, as possessors of truth, might take. There are doubtless passages which justify such a reading; but the final argument—especially as amplified in his recent work—appears to be somewhat more interesting. Marcuse clearly insists that present political activity must not defer to the will of a majority which, in his view, has been turned tyrannical by the forces which dominate it. Those who have “knowledge and sensibility” must proceed, even if their actions are met with incomprehension or hostility by the masses of men.⁴⁸ Moreover, Marcuse urges special attention to the “intellectual and moral qualities of the leaders,” in assessing political groupings professing to be revolutionary; and he sometimes flirts with and sometimes simply advocates the idea of an “educational dictatorship” to replace the old regime and to force men to be free,

⁴⁶ *Loc. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ *Essay on Liberation*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ *Counterrevolution*, p. 32.

until they have been educated to the autonomy and sensibilities required by the new order.⁴⁹ But there is a distinction to be made. Elitism and intellectualism are the *necessary* attributes of the politics of hope—the prophetic and educational movement seeking to define and somehow to make available the “idea” of revolution. Revolutionary leadership, not to speak of “educational dictatorships,” pertain to a phase in a political movement having a far more popular character and pushed by forces far more widely dispersed than the special excellences of the prophetic order.

In discussing the political structure of the revolution, in other words, Marcuse reverts to the complex ambiguities of the republican democratic tradition, as they are also found in the work of Marx and throughout the history of Marxism. He speaks of “direct democracy” in the revolutionary regime, which “would assure, on all levels, genuinely free selection and election of candidates, revocability at the discretion of the constituencies, and uncensored education and information.” He adds, however, “such democracy presupposes equal and universal education for autonomy.”⁵⁰ In an attempt to depict a possible convergence between working-class oppositionism founded on the experiences of the work-place and revolutionary consciousness, Marcuse invokes the memory of the workers’ councils of 1919–20 as well as the Paris Commune, and he expressly denies the general suitability of the Leninist party with its avant-garde.⁵¹ The constitution of the revolution is heir to the *Social Contract* of Rousseau, with all of its difficulties concerning the preconditions of the general will and the relationships between lawgivers and people. It is not simply elitist, a direct rule by those presumed to be wise. And the erection of such a constitution is, in any case, not on the agenda at this time. Pursuing the parallel, we can say that the “politics of hope,” as we have called it, involves the formation of a prophetic order able to serve as lawgiver, not as tyrant or prince. Marcuse prefers the language of “education,” or, far more modestly, “potential catalysts of rebellion.”

⁴⁹ “Repressive Tolerance,” especially “Postscript, 1968,” p. 117 f.; and “Ethics and Revolution,” p. 135.

⁵⁰ *Essay on Liberation*, p. 69n.

⁵¹ “The Left Under the Counterrevolution,” p. 40 f.

The revolutionary movement, in sum, is still incipient. There are resisters and rebels who fend off the demands and powers of the system in various settings—often unconnected and even mutually antagonistic. Then there are those who are training themselves to recognize the common context within which these diverse practices belong, a movement toward revolution, and who will undertake in time to make a common language and outlook available to these diverse actors. As this educational influence takes hold among the rebels, as consciousness is raised, the rebels form revolutionary organizations; and these organizations are presumably greatly strengthened by popular social forces compelled to consider their situation by worsening conditions and freed to understand the oppression under which they live by the undermining of integrative social morale which is the major effect of rebellious activity. Now we can speak of a “right to revolution” in its full sense. There is a general will, a revolutionary ethos, a purposive entity. Then comes the struggle for political power in the narrow sense, the ousting of those who occupy positions of command. The revolutionary victors next have to devise organizational forms for bringing the new possibilities home to every person in the society, refashioning the structures within which men work and otherwise live their lives. Given Marcuse’s assumption that these possibilities coincide with the most profound, though repressed, human longings, it is then simply a matter of time until these disciplining forms dissolve. The intellectual elite whose work will have been so essential during the initial phases of the movement will not, in any case, ever come to power. Marcuse’s solidarity with the rebellious young is not, of course, an irrationalist celebration of their presumed vitality and strength. If they are, in his eyes, chosen, they are called to a demanding ministry of prophecy and, quite likely, martyrdom.

But there is a certain futility in the whole design. Irrationality and corruption have been depicted as so pervasive that it would seem that the conditions upon which the temporary republic of virtue is to be built would be continually crumbling. And it is hard to see how the projected sequence of phases could ever come about. Marcuse repeatedly welcomes resistant attitudes and practices which he subsequently discovers to be incompatible with the development of a revolutionary move-

ment. The contrast is perhaps clearest in comparing *An Essay on Liberation* (1967) with *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (1972). That sexual libertinism is likely to be a form of that “repressive desublimation” which alleviates psychic tensions without countering domination Marcuse had argued all along. But he finds the other aspects of the so-called counterculture also increasingly disheartening. The involvement with personal liberation, the breach with established decorum of language and style, and hostility to all authority undermine consciousness and efficacy. Moreover, the authoritarianism and dogmatism of radical groups reacting against these trends lead to sterility and isolation. The politics of hope appears to require a full investment of all available energies, in order to manage these difficulties and recover ground which steadily slips away. On the other side, the established order has enormous resources to defend itself. If the internal instruments of domination are in any measure compromised, there are always external weapons and the recourse to manifestly repressive politics. Notwithstanding what might appear to be the logic of his position, Marcuse does not imagine that fascist symptoms can be welcomed as harbingers of crisis and revolution. They must be countered, even if this means alliances with liberals and retreats from revolutionary postures. The political conception outlined above comes to appear quite problematical, and the concrete political tasks are less and less comprehended by the main theoretical perspective. This offers very little help in distinguishing fascist from liberal forms of the repressive civilization and its pervasive domination.

Where does this leave Marcuse? In addition to the problem of the complex argument sketched above, there are three incompatible tendencies in his writings. One carries forward the progressive developmentalism which is a major theme in his earlier writings. Despite everything, there is said to be a cumulative movement toward revolution under way; the old theory must be adapted to discern its new form, the contemporary political confusion must be viewed from a greater distance and allowed to straighten itself out. In the second tendency Marcuse will from time to time back off from his role as a teacher of prophets and take up the posture of “third person,” as “educator and intellectual” quite distant from political prac-

tice. This tendency we have earlier called "Stoic." Such a label is something of a provocation, since the internal freedom to be cultivated differs in content very materially from that envisioned by the ancient sages. But the break with corruption is a common theme, as is the emphasis on discipline and form. Marcuse, for instance, both betakes himself and invites his readers to the service of the concept, in the Hegelian sense, or to the recreation of aesthetic form. The third tendency may be called, in one general sense of that term, "apocalyptic." The revolutionary possibility will arise from a fortunate—or even providential—convergence of factors, provided only that the hopeful keep the faith. In a situation of total crisis for the system—at one point, Marcuse speaks of cataclysm—men will lack the normative clues which structure their lives, and they may be open to new laws.

Marcuse is wrestling with a recurrent problem in Western political thought, the politics of creating a new man. He means to reject the most prevalent answers: a philosopher who becomes a king, a divine grace, a cyclic return or secure providential development, a triumph of reasonableness, a crucible of violence. Men must make themselves through their own actions and there must be sense in what they do. But he sees men as encapsulated within systematic constraint and social entities, as crystalline forms; and it is not easy to see how such men can innovate and such structures change. Change itself, it seems, has such a structural embodiment—like a Roman god. Marcuse's affinity for classical dramatic forms does not always serve him in good stead, when it comes to the understanding of politics. His characters are too much of a piece, and his situations tend too much to have a single secret whose discovery reveals all. Perhaps things are more Shakespearean than that. These are countersuggestions, not arguments. We have been concerned above all to de-totalize Marcuse, not to refute him.

Marcuse offers a diagnosis of modern civilization as corrupt tyranny. This depends, as we have seen, on a conception of domination which renders irrelevant many of the ordinary concepts of political theory. Domination is a condition of the instinctual structure, and it is produced, under different circumstances, by many different sorts of social and political arrangements. Correspondingly, liberation involves a revolu-

tionary reordering of human responses, although Marcuse suggests ever more strongly that in this change *prima forma*, the instinctual basis for socialism, displaces a second nature imposed by custom and coercion. The attempt to portray the structure of political acts which could mediate between these two inner conditions does not succeed. Perhaps what is needed is a political theory of diverse forms of power, a conception which does not define away the interplay between power and resistances, and a better way of acknowledging the diverse ways in which structural changes take place.

Marcuse's achievement does not require defense here. He has reopened discussion of some of the most interesting problems of political theory. Our purpose has been primarily to show that this is so. Marcuse speaks of the need to create a "mental space" within which political thinking can take place. This he has helped to do. It does not seem as though political theory today can simply explore the rights and obligations which pertain to autonomous man without sober inquiry into the moral psychology presupposed by autonomy, nor will it do any longer simply to label critics of the ways in which individuation and rationalization proceed in modern civilization, as "obscurantists," "irrationalists," and proponents of a "sweaty mechanical solidarity." Marcuse's critique, as we have tried to show, forcefully reopens these debates. Much modern political theory, certainly since the eighteenth century, has been circumscribed by a wall of presumed "facts" and has guided itself by the presumed imperatives of the factual situation. Marcuse's utopianism has helped to tear open discussion about a lot of these ostensible "givens," to compel reconsideration of the necessities supposed to sustain these facts. In particular, his radical query about a stationary alternative to the progressive state has had considerable and valuable impact. Similarly, he has emboldened the work of political theorists who now question freely the inevitability of legal-rational or bureaucratic patterns of authority or organization, as sole alternatives to the traditional or charismatic or brutal command structures.

We have been least persuaded by Marcuse's conception of revolution as the locus for meaningful political practice. But it is important to note that Marcuse has contributed importantly to a renewed willingness to relate problems of legitimacy to cri-

teria of rationality. Editorialists for weighty newspapers rarely hesitate to welcome a coup by military men against some "demagogic" regime in Brazil or Chile or Greece which has carried on "ruinous" or "irrational" economic policies, for example. But for a long time political theorists fastidiously averted their gaze from such a superceding of consent-criteria. If nothing else, Marcuse has recalled attention to the fact that such calculations are a fairly ordinary part of political language, and that such arguments may have implications unwelcome to those who most benefit from them now. So then, we may conclude that if Marcuse has not developed an entirely adequate political theory, his work, if properly understood, can be very good for political theorists.

F. A. Hayek: Freedom for Progress

by ANTHONY DE CRESPIGNY

Hayek's political writings have too infrequently received the careful attention that they deserve and that has been given to his work in economics. Commentators have, for the most part, been quick to praise or attack his general liberal position without bothering to concern themselves much with the numerous and sophisticated arguments used to support it. The result has been that the real importance of this branch of Hayek's work has often been obscured in the heady atmosphere which ideological responses to it, favorable or unfavorable, have generated. Moreover, the general position attributed to him is typically not that which is so lucidly presented in his writings. He has been described as an exponent of *laissez-faire*, as being hostile to the public provision of social services, as being indifferent to the needs of the weak, as being authoritarian and antidemocratic, and so on. Yet there is nothing in Hayek's work to endorse any such assertions, and it is difficult to understand how presumably scrupulous critics came to make them.¹

Hayek is a liberal, but to say this is not very illuminating since there are different sorts of liberalism just as there are different conceptions of liberty. For Hayek, a man possesses "liberty" or "freedom"—he uses the words interchangeably—when

¹ For one example of misplaced criticism see Christian Bay's article "Hayek's Liberalism: The Constitution of Perpetual Privilege" in *The Political Science Reviewer*, 1 (Fall 1971). Bay accuses Hayek of being "a special pleader for a particular class interest," of having "an in-built preference for the demands of the strong over the needs of the weak," of being "essentially a social Darwinist," of producing a "closed system of thought," and of not being "philosophically radical." See pp. 110, 112, 115, and 123.