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## **A tribute**

### **HERBERT MARCUSE: METAPSYCHOLOGIST (1898-1979)**

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Herbert Marcuse's main contribution to twentieth-century consciousness is not what those unacquainted with his work think it to be. He did not borrow subtheories from Marx and Freud to bring them together in a new ideology to serve the youth rebellion of the 1960s. He turned Freud's psychology into a theory of objectivity, and Marx's political economy into a theory of consciousness to produce for the Western world a systematic critique of post-war Western culture as a part of his more general critique of modern industrial civilization.

For the purpose of his critique, Marcuse found Marx insufficiently radical. Marx's attack on capitalism was actually an attack on nineteenth-century industrial civilization. It was becoming increasingly irrelevant to the post-industrial Western culture built on a totalizing system of mass communications and an ideology of normality-producing deadening uniformity. The first helped co-opt the consciousness of those who were 'objectively' oppressed by the system, so that the potentially revolutionary proletariat of Marx became a valued part of 'organized' capitalism. The second used the irrationality of rationality to reduce modern social consciousness to a systematic legitimization of institutionalized violence and oppression, so that all ideas of normality became in effect a justification for what Marcuse called surplus repression.

To Marcuse, the basic problem of organized modern capitalism was one of occupied human consciousness under the oppressive culture of the affluent society. Freud entered his vision primarily as a man who rejected the discontinuity between normality and abnormality, and between adulthood and childhood. Marcuse recognized that once these discontinuities were rejected, normality became a charter for socially valued character traits, and adulthood became a product of a systematic brainwashing called socialization or child rearing. Marcuse's plea was for the liberation of a being akin to Rousseau's natural man: primitive, polymorphous perverse, eroticized

in his entire being.

I use the word primitive deliberately. Marcuse *was* a believer in the doctrine of progress; he *did* believe in cultural and political stages and in historical preconditions. But his work was one of the first hesitant Marxist attempts to jettison the racist elements in Marx's attitude to the Third World. To Marx, the urban-industrial and technological civilization was, definitionally, the end-state of human history. Primitivism, expressed in the 'idiocy of village life' and in the ahistorical Asiatic mode of the unorganized and unorganizable peasantry, was for him only the first faltering step towards the true civilization. Marcuse differed. He implicitly rejected the Marxist axiom that the pristine power and glory of the industrial civilization could be – and should be – reinstated by altering the civilization's faulty production relations through revolutionary intervention. He recognized that not merely the social relations of modern technology and that of modern industrial organization were wrong, but the very content of modern technology and the very principles of industrial management were alienating. There was in Marcuse also a vague awareness that modernity itself, an euphemism for the post-Enlightenment Western culture, had become a pseudo-culture which could not be assayed in terms of Enlightenment values (because these values themselves were open to serious criticisms) and that Marx's critique of the technocratic culture was partial, not because it went too far – as twentieth-century liberals fighting a nineteenth-century ideology fondly believe – but because Marx could not or did not go farther.

I am not sure if Marcuse sensed that Marx's concepts of false consciousness and declassing – being parts of an idea-system trying to ensure its own survival – had, in effect, helped place Marx outside history by promoting the idea that Marxism was the only fully declassed, true consciousness. Certainly, an orthodox Marxist analysis ends once it reaches a Marxist interpretation of any phenomenon. In such an analysis, there is no interpretation of interpretation – no Marxism of Marxism. That is, there is no attempt to locate the Marxist interpreters themselves in an historical context in Marxist terms. At most, there are self-justifying interpretations of other Marxists to show the latter to be hidden conspirators against, or renegades from, 'true' Marxism in league with the forces of international capitalism and counter-revolution. Marxism at this plane becomes a demonology subservient to the Marxist establishment.

I have little doubt that Marcuse would have admitted this reading of his dissent. For him, the ultimate authority was critical reason, which, for all its radical associations, is only marginally different from the expression Philip Rieff, a dyed-in-the-wool liberal, has employed to describe so successfully Freud's ideology, namely, 'analytical attitude'. Overtly, Marcuse's Freud is a rebellious social critic, mainly by virtue of his theory of repression.

Underneath, he is a social critic because he repudiates the ideology of over-socialized hyper-normal adulthood and the psychopathology of everyday life, and pleads for unending criticism or criticism of criticism. Marcuse's Freud recognizes the possible falsity of all interpretations of false consciousness.

For all his allegiance to the idea of progress and historical stages, it is this rejection of the ideologies of adulthood and normality and that of final interpretation which makes Marcuse relevant to Third World psychologists trying to reclaim for their societies the human dignity, self-esteem and autonomy they have been deprived of by the uniformizing world-view and the construction of human nature in post-Enlightenment West. It is at this plane that Marcuse transcends his personal embedment in Western civilization and his unfamiliarity with non-Western civilizations, their theories of secular and non-secular salvation, and their concepts of critical reason and universal science. Marcuse was a living protest against the conventional conservative concepts of success and achievement, and against the scientific ideas which legitimize the psychopathology of everyday science masquerading as the normal science of professional psychologists. Mourning him is mourning an ally against the ideology of an apolitical, instrumental and technocratic psychology, subservient to the various versions of the dominant political consciousness of the world.