

Capitalism Nature Socialism

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and Pragmatism

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Jomo KS

India's Reds and Greens
at Loggerheads

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Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society*

By Herbert Marcuse

Thank you for the warm welcome. I am glad to be able to address the wilderness class. Actually, I'm not sure what to say because I don't see any more problems. As you know, President Carter has turned over some thirty-six million acres of wilderness land to commercial development. There isn't much wilderness left to preserve. But we still will try, nonetheless.

What I propose to do is to discuss the destruction of nature in the context of the general destructiveness which characterizes our society. I will then trace the roots of this destructiveness in individuals themselves; that is, I will examine psychological destructiveness within individuals.

My discussion today relies largely upon basic psychoanalytic concepts developed by Sigmund Freud. At the outset, I would like to define, in brief and oversimplified manner, the most important Freudian concepts I use. There is, first, Freud's hypothesis that the living organism is shaped by two primary drives, or instincts. One of these he called Eros, erotic energy, life instincts; these terms are more or less synonymous. The other primary drive he called Thanatos, destructive energy, the wish to destroy life, to annihilate life. Freud attributed this wish to a primary death instinct in human beings. The only other psychoanalytic concept I want briefly to explain is what Freud calls the reality principle. The reality principle can simply be defined as the sum total of those norms and values which are supposed to govern normal behavior in an established society.

*"Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society," a talk delivered shortly before Herbert Marcuse's death in 1979, is published here for the first time, with the gracious consent of Peter Marcuse. Copyright © 1992 by Peter Marcuse.

The last thing I will do today is briefly to sketch the prospects for radical change in today's society. Radical change I define as a change, not only in the basic institutions and relationships of an established society, but also in individual consciousness in such a society. Radical change may even be so deep as to affect the individual unconscious. This definition enables us to distinguish radical change of an entire social system from changes within that system. In other words, radical change must entail both a change in society's institutions, and also a change in the character structure predominant among individuals in that society.

In my view, our society today is characterized by a prevalence in its individual members of a destructive character structure. But how can we speak of such a phenomenon? How can we identify destructive character structure in our society today? I suggest that certain symbolic events, symbolic issues, symbolic actions illustrate and illuminate society's depth dimension. This is that dimension wherein society reproduces itself in the consciousness of individuals and in their unconscious as well. This depth dimension is one foundation for maintenance of society's established political and economic order.

I will offer three examples of such symbolic events, illustrations of society's depth dimension, in a moment. First, I want to point out that the destructiveness of which I have spoken, the destructive character structure so prominent in our society today, must be seen in the context of the institutionalized destructiveness characteristic of both foreign and domestic affairs. This institutionalized destructiveness is well-known, and examples thereof are easy to provide. They include the constant increase in the military budget at the expense of social welfare, the proliferation of nuclear installations, the general poisoning and polluting of our life environment, the blatant subordination of human rights to the requirements of global strategy, and the threat of war in case of a challenge to this strategy. This institutionalized destruction is both open and legitimate. It provides the context within which the individual reproduction of destructiveness takes place.

Let me turn to my three examples of symbolic events or happenings, instances which illuminate society's depth dimension. First, the fate in Federal court of a State nuclear regulatory statute. This statute would have placed a moratorium on all nuclear installations in the state which lacked adequate means of preventing deadly atomic waste. The judge in question invalidated this statute because he held it

to be unconstitutional. Brutal interpretation: *viva la muerte!* Long live death! Second, the letter on Auschwitz which appeared in a large newspaper. In this letter, a woman complained that the publication of a photograph of Auschwitz on the first page of the paper was (and I quote) "a matter of extremely bad taste." What was the point, the woman asked, of bringing up this horror again? Did people still need to be conscious of Auschwitz? Brutal interpretation: forget it. Third and last, the term "nazi surfer." Along with this term goes the symbol of the swastika. Both the phrase and the symbol are proudly adopted by, and applied to, surfers (and I quote) "totally dedicated to surfing." Brutal interpretation: not necessary. The avowedly (and, I take it, sincerely) unpolitical intent of "nazi surfer" does not cancel the inner unconscious affinity with the most destructive regime of the century which is here expressed as a matter of linguistic identification.

Let me return to my theoretical discussion. The primary drive toward destructiveness resides in individuals themselves, as does the other primary drive, Eros. The balance between these two drives also is found within individuals. I refer to the balance between their will and wish to live, and their will and wish to destroy life, the balance between the life instinct and the death instinct. Both drives, according to Freud, are constantly fused within the individual. If one drive is increased, this comes at the expense of the other drive. In other words, any increase in destructive energy in the organism leads, mechanically and necessarily, to a weakening of Eros, to a weakening of the life instinct. This is an extremely important notion.

The fact that these primary drives are individual drives may seem to commit and restrict any theory of social change to the matter of individual psychology. How can we make the connection between individual psychology and social psychology? How can we make the transition from individual psychology to the instinctual base of a whole society, nay, of a whole civilization? I suggest that the contrast and opposition between individual psychology and social psychology is misleading. There is no separation between the two. To varying degrees, all individuals are socialized human beings. Society's prevailing reality principle governs the manifestation even of individual primary drives, as well as those of the ego and of the subconscious. Individuals introject the values and goals which are incorporated in social institutions, in the social division of labor, in the established power structure, and so on. And conversely, social

institutions and policies reflect (both in affirmation and negation) the socialized needs of individuals, which in this way become their own needs.

This is one of the most important processes in contemporary society. In effect, needs which actually are offered to individuals by institutions, and in many cases are imposed upon individuals, end up becoming the individuals' own needs and wants. This acceptance of superimposed needs makes for an affirmative character structure. It makes for affirmation of and conformity to the established system of needs, whether that affirmation and conformity are voluntary or enforced. In fact, even if approbation gives way to negation, even if it gives way to non-conformist social behavior, this behavior is largely determined by what the non-conformist denies and opposes. To accept and affirm externally superimposed and introjected needs — this negative introjection makes for radical character structure.

Radical character structure. I want to give you now, in psychoanalytic terms, a definition of radical character structure — which will lead us immediately into our problem today.

A radical character structure is defined, on a Freudian basis, as a preponderance in the individual of life instincts over the death instinct, a preponderance of erotic energy over destructive drives.

In the development of Western civilization, the mechanisms of introjection have been refined and enlarged to such an extent that the socially required affirmative character structure normally does not have to be brutally enforced, as is the case under authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. In democratic societies, introjection (along with the forces of law and order, ever-ready and legitimate) suffice to keep the system going. Moreover, in the advanced industrial countries, affirmative introjection and a conformist consciousness are facilitated by the fact that they proceed on rational grounds and have a material foundation. I refer to the existence of a high standard of living for the majority of the privileged population, and to a considerably relaxed social and sexual morality. These facts, to a considerable extent, compensate for the intensified alienation in work and leisure which characterizes this society. In other words, conformist consciousness provides not only an imaginary compensation but also a real one. This militates against the rise of a radical character structure.

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In the so-called consumer society, however, contemporary satisfaction appears as vicarious and repressive when it is contrasted with the real possibility of liberation here and now. It appears repressive when contrasted with what Ernst Bloch once called the concrete utopia. Bloch's notion of concrete utopia refers to a society where human beings no longer have to live their lives as means for earning a living in alienated performances. Concrete utopia: "utopia" because such a society is a real historical possibility.

Now, in a democratic state, the effectiveness and extent of affirmative introjection can be measured. It can be measured by the level of support for the existing society. This support is expressed, for example, in election results, in the absence of organized radical opposition, in public opinion polls, in the acceptance of aggression and corruption as normal procedures in business and administration. Once introjection, under the weight of compensatory satisfaction, has taken root in the individual, people can be granted a considerable freedom of co-determination. People will, for good reasons, support or at least suffer their leaders, even to the point at which self-destruction is threatened. Under the conditions of advanced industrial society, satisfaction is always tied to destruction. The domination of nature is tied to the violation of nature. The search for new sources of energy is tied to the poisoning of the life environment. Security is tied to servitude, national interest to global expansion. Technical progress is tied to progressive manipulation and control of human beings.

And yet, the potential forces of social change are there. Those forces present the potential for emergence of a character structure in which emancipatory drives gain ascendancy over compensatory ones. This tendency appears today as a primary rebellion of mind and body, of consciousness and of the unconscious. It appears as a rebellion against the destructive productivity of established society and against the intensified repression and frustration bound up with this productivity. These phenomena may well foreshadow a subversion of the instinctual bases of modern civilization.

Before briefly sketching the historically new features of this rebellion, I shall explicate the concept of destructiveness as applied to our society. The concept of destruction is obscured and anaesthetized by the fact that destruction itself is internally joined to production and productivity. The latter, even as it consumes and destroys human and natural resources, also increases the material and cultural satisfactions

available to the majority of the people. Destructiveness today rarely appears in its pure form without proper rationalization and compensation. Violence finds a well provided, manageable outlet in popular culture, in the use and abuse of machine power, and in the cancerous growth of the defense industry. The last of these is made palatable by the invocation of "national interest," which has long since become flexible enough to be applied the world over.

No wonder, then, that under these circumstances it is difficult to develop a non-conformist consciousness, a radical character structure. No wonder that organized opposition is difficult to sustain. No wonder such opposition is constantly impeded by despair, illusion, escapism, and so on. For all these reasons, today's rebellion becomes visible only in small groups which cut across social classes — for example, the student movement, women's liberation, citizen initiatives, ecology, collectives, communes, and so on. Moreover, especially in Europe, this rebellion assumes a consciously emphasized personal character, methodically practiced. It features a preoccupation with one's own psyche, one's own drives, with self-analysis, the celebration of one's own problems, that famous voyage into man's own private internal world. This return into oneself is loosely connected with the political world. Personal difficulties and problems and doubts are (without negation) related and explained in terms of social conditions, and vice versa. Politics is personalized. We see "politics in the first person."

The social and political function of this primary, personal radicalization of consciousness is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it indicates depoliticization, retreat, and escape. But on the other hand, this return to the self opens or recaptures a new dimension of social change. This dimension is that of the subjectivity and the consciousness of individuals. It is individuals, after all, who (en masse or as individuals) remain the agents of historical change. Thus, contemporary small-group rebellion is characterized by an often desperate effort to counteract the neglect of the individual found in traditional radical practice. Moreover, this "politics in the first person" also counteracts a society of effective integration. In modern society, the process of affirmative introjection equalizes individuals on the surface. Their introjected needs and aspirations are universalized; they become general, common throughout the society. Change, however, presupposes a disintegration of this universality.

Change presupposes a gradual subversion of existing needs so that, in individuals themselves, their interest in compensatory satisfaction comes to be superseded by emancipatory needs. These emancipatory needs are not new needs. They are not simply a matter of speculation or prediction. These needs are present, here and now. They permeate the lives of individuals. These needs accompany individual behavior and question it, but they are present only in a form which is more or less effectively repressed and distorted. Such emancipatory needs include at least the following. First, the need for drastically reducing socially necessary alienated labor and replacing it with creative work. Second, the need for autonomous free time instead of directed leisure. Third, the need for an end to role playing. Fourth, the need for receptivity, tranquility and abounding joy, instead of the constant noise of production.

Evidently, the satisfaction of these emancipatory needs is incompatible with the established state capitalist and state socialist societies. It is incompatible with social systems reproduced through full-time alienated labor and self-propelling performances, both productive and unproductive. The specter which haunts advanced industrial society today is the obsolescence of full-time alienation. Awareness of this specter is diffused among the entire population to a greater or lesser degree. Popular awareness of this obsolescence shows forth in the weakening of those operational values which today govern the behavior society requires. The Puritan work ethic is weakening, for example, as is patriarchal morality. Legitimate business converges with the Mafia; the demands of the unions shift from wage increases to reduction in working time; and so on.

That an alternative quality of life is possible has been proven. Bloch's concrete utopia can be achieved. Nonetheless, a large majority of the population continues to reject the very idea of radical change. Part of the reason for this is the overwhelming power and compensatory force of established society. Another part of the reason is the introjection of this society's obvious advantages. But a further reason is found in the basic instinctual structure of individuals themselves. Thus we come, finally, to a brief discussion of the roots of this repulsion from historically possible change in individuals themselves.

As I mentioned at the outset, Freud argues that the human organism exhibits a primary drive for a state of existence without

painful tension, for a state of freedom from pain. Freud located this state of fulfillment and freedom at the very beginning of life, at life in the womb. Consequently, he viewed the drive for a state of painlessness as a wish to return to a previous stage of life, prior to conscious organic life. He attributed this wish to return to previous stages of life to a death and destruction instinct. This death and destruction instinct strives to attain a negation of life through externalization. That means that this drive is directed away from the individual, away from himself or herself. It is directed to life outside the individual. This drive is externalized; if it were not, we simply would have a suicidal situation. It is directed towards the destruction of other living things, of other living beings, and of nature. Freud called this drive "a long detour to death."

Can we now speculate, against Freud, that the striving for a state of freedom from pain pertains to Eros, to the life instincts, rather than to the death instinct? If so, this wish for fulfillment would attain its goal not in the beginning of life, but in the flowering and maturity of life. It would serve, not as a wish to return, but as a wish to progress. It would serve to protect and enhance life itself. The drive for painlessness, for the pacification of existence, would then seek fulfillment in protective care for living things. It would find fulfillment in the recapture and restoration of our life environment, and in the restoration of nature, both external and within human beings. This is just the way in which I view today's environmental movement, today's ecology movement.

The ecology movement reveals itself in the last analysis as a political and psychological movement of liberation. It is political because it confronts the concerted power of big capital, whose vital interests the movement threatens. It is psychological because (and this is a most important point) the pacification of external nature, the protection of the life-environment, will also pacify nature within men and women. A successful environmentalism will, within individuals, subordinate destructive energy to erotic energy.

Today, the strength of this transcending force of Eros towards fulfillment is dangerously reduced by the social organization of destructive energy. Consequently, the life instincts become all but powerless to spur a revolt against the ruling reality principle. What the force of Eros is powerful enough to do is the following. It serves to move a non-conformist group, together with other groups of non-silent citizens, to a protest very different from traditional forms of radical

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protest The appearance in this protest of new language, new behavior, new goals, testifies to the psychosomatic roots thereof. What we have is a politicization of erotic energy. This, I suggest, is the distinguishing mark of most radical movements today. These movements do not represent class struggle in the traditional sense. They do not constitute a struggle to replace one power structure with another. Rather, these radical movements are existential revolts against an obsolete reality principle. They are a revolt carried by the mind and body of individuals themselves. A result which is intellectual as well as instinctual. A revolt in which the whole organism, the very soul of the human being, becomes political. A revolt of the life instincts against organized and socialized destruction.

Once again I must point out the ambivalence of this otherwise hopeful rebellion. The individualization and somatization of radical protest, its concentration on the sensibility and feelings of individuals, conflicts with the organization and self-discipline which is required by an effective political praxis. The struggle to change those objective, economic and political conditions which are the basis for the psychosomatic, subjective transformation seems to be weakening. The body and soul of individuals have always been expendable, ready to be sacrificed (or to sacrifice themselves) for a reified, hypostatized whole — be that the State, the Church, or the Revolution. Sensibility and imagination are no match for the realists who determine our life. In other words, a certain powerlessness seems to be an inherent characteristic of any radical opposition which remains outside the mass organizations of political parties, trade unions, and so on.

Modern radical protest may seem condemned to marginal significance when compared with the effectiveness of mass organizations. However, such powerlessness has always been the initial quality of groups and individuals which upheld human rights and human goals over and above the so-called realistic goals. The weakness of these movements is perhaps a token of their authenticity. Their isolation is perhaps a token of the desperate efforts needed to break out of the all-embracing system of domination, to break the continuum of realistic, profitable destruction.

The return which modern radical movements have made, their return into the psychosomatic domain of life-instincts, their return to the image of the concrete utopia, may help to redefine the human goal of radical change. And I will venture to define that goal in one short

sentence. The goal of radical change today is the emergence of human beings who are physically and mentally incapable of inventing another Auschwitz.

The objection to this lofty goal which is sometimes made, namely the objection that this goal is incompatible with the nature of man, testifies only to one thing. It testifies to the degree to which this objection has succumbed to a conformist ideology. This latter ideology presents the historical continuum of repression and regression as a law of nature. Against that ideology, I insist that there is no such thing as an immutable human nature. Over and above the animal level, human beings are malleable, body and mind, down to their very instinctual structure. Men and women can be computerized into robots, yes — but they can also refuse. Thank you.

Commentaries

I.

From this last speech of Marcuse's one can get a good idea what he was all about. The specifics of doctrine are less important than the tone and thrust.

Marcuse was an old man when he gave this speech. Most of us knew him only as an old man. He spoke slowly, forcefully, with both seriousness and irony, from out of the depths of history to us who still had no history. Those depths were visible on his face, in his strongly accented voice. An auditorium full of young students listening to this powerful, self-assured indictment of the system must have felt the force of a judgement made from out of those depths, and taken hope.

Marcuse did not express mere personal opinions as we might have; he had the authority of an intellectual and political tradition. On that basis he unhesitatingly confronted the contemporary world, however shocking or bizaare his claims might seem to the conformist consensus of both the establishment and the left. And often he was right, on the War in Vietnam, nuclear energy, the bankruptcy of

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socialism in the Soviet Union, the greatness and the limitations of the New Left, the decline of the proletarian threat to capitalism, the coming importance of feminism and ecology.

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The central question of Marcuse's thought appears clearly in this short speech: from what standpoint can society be judged now that it has succeeded in feeding its members? Recognizing the arbitrariness of mere moral outrage, Marx measured capitalism by reference to an immanent criterion, the unsatisfied needs of the population. But that approach collapses as soon as capitalism proves itself capable of delivering the goods. Then the (fulfilled) needs of the individuals legitimate the established system. Radicalism means opposition, not just to the failures and deficiencies of that system, but to its very successes.

It takes astonishing nerve to persist in this challenge. But as Marcuse once wrote, "obstinacy [is] a genuine quality of philosophical thought."¹ To be obstinate means to reject the easy reconciliation with society, to keep a *sense of reality* based on longer time spans, deeper tensions, higher goals, than those recognized today by a fashionable "post-modernism."

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Marcuse maintained a critical stance by reference to several parallel registers of phenomenon. First, there are some hard facts that don't go away: the persistence of war, hunger, periodic ecological catastrophes. Second, there is the aesthetic failure of contemporary society, the undeniable contradiction between its daily ugliness and criteria of beauty elaborated in millenia of artistic endeavor, both in folk and high art. Third, there is the equally undeniable fact of massive manipulation of consciousness through the media and consumerist ideology. Fourth, there are the self-evident demands for fulfilling work and security of life that remain unmet for the vast majority. Finally, there is the proliferation of signs and symptoms of deep psychic disturbances and dissatisfactions beneath the surface glow of success. These signs and symptoms take both personal and political forms; indeed the distinction between these two forms is often difficult to make.

¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p.143.

What converts this list of discontents into an indictment of the system is the contention that the benefits of our society are won at this price, that unlike isolated "problems" that could be solved piecemeal, these issues reveal the inherent limitations of contemporary capitalism.

This society, Marcuse argues, has the material potential to "pacify" existence but artificially maintains competition and violence as the basis for domination and inequality. As he put it in his last speech: "The specter which haunts advanced industrial society today is the obsolescence of full-time alienation." And further: radical political struggle today consists in "existential revolts against an obsolete reality principle."

Marcuse's concept of "*obsolescence*" situates his critique historically. The revolutionary judgement has always been made in the future anterior tense, as when Saint-Just imagined what "cold posterity" will have said concerning the absurdity of monarchy. Thus Marcuse is not merely complaining about a system he doesn't like. He is imagining how it will appear to a backward glance rooted in the wider context of values evolved over past centuries and destined to achieve realization in future ones. The obsolescence of that system will be obvious in this hypothetical future, justifying the obstinacy of those who persisted in critique through these difficult times.

With the collapse of Soviet communism, the last alibi of historicist opposition to capitalism has died. We can no longer rest our case for change, if we ever did, on the realized achievements of "socialism." We are one step closer to a world in which only Marcuse's type of principled opposition is available. His thought has never been more relevant. — Andrew Feenberg

II.

It is good to see these words of Herbert Marcuse find the light of day, where they may fertilize the radical ecology movement. Marcuse has been in eclipse for some years, but his time may be returning. He fell from grace on the left when the countercultural movements fizzled and became co-opted, and when a politics of scarcity/survival replaced his politics predicated on abundance. However, the current necessity to

rethink the socialist project from its roots up brings the vision of Marcuse into a new focus. Marcuse has never been irrelevant; but the radical subjects upon which his discourse touched — students and Third World revolutionaries — proved unable to bear the torch of emancipation. Yet the defeat of certain forces does not invalidate the cause for which they fought. The emancipation of humanity is a project as old as history itself, and it does not stop because one contingent or another may have been turned back. It finds, rather, new subjects out of new historical conjunctures to pick up the thread of struggle.

Herbert Marcuse was above all a philosopher of emancipation, who heightened our consciousness as to the ontological conditions through which people could free themselves. He also remained faithful to the spirit of Marx, however much Marxists of his day may have anathematized him for his heterodoxy. Within his frame of reference Marcuse was able to thematize the philosophical foundation of ecological politics: the relations between humanity and nature. As radical ecology becomes the emerging revolutionary subject for our time — and, given the nature of the environmental crisis, for the foreseeable future — Marcuse once again comes into focus. I would even say that we need Marcuse's emphasis upon emancipation more than ever, given the fact that radical ecology has all too often shown a proclivity to move rightwards, even to degenerate into fascism.

Marcuse's lecture continues along the lines of his reading of Freud in *Eros and Civilization*. This adds an essential dimension to ecological discourse. Freud gave us a way of speaking of the body as a site of lived experience — that body which is the actual point of co-existence between the human and natural worlds and which, therefore, must be reclaimed in any emancipated relation to nature. We can be certain Marcuse's reading is one which Freud himself would have rejected and of which the psychoanalytic establishment is utterly incapable. Like Freud, Marcuse grounds the human subject in nature through the postulation of "instincts." But Marcuse's notion of instincts is unlike anything devised by conventional psychoanalysis. Where Freudian thought sees humanity limited from below by its animal nature, Marcuse sees instinct as the potentiality of a fully humanized nature. Instinct is not the pre-human, but the not-yet-human. Marcuse derives this from Freud's metatheoretical speculations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as to Eros and Thanatos,

the instincts of life and death. However, so radical is the departure from Freud that the maneuver may be seen as mainly heuristic, Marcuse's way of finding a theoretical wedge with which to cleave an impasse within Marxist discourse.

Marcuse's intervention is peculiarly strategic, in that radical ecology needs to comprehend the boundary between humanity and nature if it is to undo the domination of nature. A discourse of instinct, however, even one so spectacularly radical as that of Marcuse, falls short. Ultimately, his Eros becomes a non-specific "life force," beyond the human being, which pulls the human being towards itself, i.e., a kind of god. There is even a kind of crypto-mechanism implied by this instinct which somehow gives energy to the human subject. Where is the Other in Marcuse, or intersubjectivity? Where is the foundation of sociality in this body, which supposedly strives to protect nature?

We need to see rather how the body is already humanized nature, which is to say, fully dialectical. Human beings must live by positing some distinction between themselves and nature: language itself is formed in this space as the precondition for sociality, and encodes the world with human meaning. Both the body, i.e., nature claimed by the self, and the external nature which is not claimed by the self, are drawn into this zone of difference. But we have a choice, whether to *split* ourselves from nature and make it radically Other — the classical Cartesian attitude out of which capitalism has grown; or whether to *differentiate* ourselves from nature, that is, to recognize it in ourselves, as body, and to recognize ourselves in it, as those who care for the earth. Splitting characterizes both the Freudian view of instinct as the animal *id* to the human *ego*, as well as a view which denies all instinct-like terms and sees humans as entirely socially constructed. Differentiation, on the other hand, comprehends Marcuse's view of instinct, in which nature and humanity mutually transform each other, but adds to it a specifically human dimension. Thus splitting negates its opposite, while differentiation engages its opposite in a dialectic, preserving difference but radically transforming both self and other. This is a very radical path, as it requires the systematic undoing of all forms of domination to complete. At the other end will be a fully humanized being, capable of emancipation as well as caring for the earth. — Joel Kovel

III.

Herbert Marcuse's late 1970s talk articulates his vision of liberation and sense of the importance of ecology for the radical project. The lecture argues that genuine ecology requires a transformation of human nature, as well as the preservation and protection of external nature from capitalist and state communist pollution and destruction. Rooting his vision of human liberation in the Frankfurt School notion of the embeddedness of human beings in nature, Marcuse believed that until aggression and violence within human beings were diminished, there necessarily would be continued destruction of nature, as well as violence against other human beings. Consequently, Marcuse stressed the importance of radical psychology and transforming inner nature, both to preserve external nature and to diminish violence in society.

Marcuse's ecological vision is rooted in his reflections on the early Marx. The author of one of the first reviews of Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marcuse rooted his philosophy in the early Marx's philosophical naturalism and humanism.¹ In Marx's anthropology, taken up and developed by Marcuse, the human being was a natural being, part and parcel of nature. Capitalism, on this view, produced an alienation of human beings by alienating individuals from many-sided activity by forcing upon them a specialized and one-sided capitalist division of labor. Under capitalism, life is organized around labor, around the production of commodities for private profit, and individuals are forced to engage in external, coercive, and one-sided activity. For Marx, by contrast, humans are many-sided human beings with a wealth of needs and potentialities which are suppressed under capitalism. The human being is both an individual and social being for Marx and capitalism neither allows for the full development of individuality, nor for the possibility of diverse, social and cooperative relationships. Instead, it promotes greed, competition, and asocial behavior.

¹ See Herbert Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," in *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), originally published in 1932. I discuss this essay and other elements of Marcuse's theory in *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London and Berkeley: Macmillan Press and University of California Press, 1984).

Marcuse followed this early Marxian critique of capitalism throughout his life, focusing analysis on how contemporary capitalism produced false needs and repressed both individuality and sociality. He also followed the early Marx's concept of human beings as desiring beings, conceptualizing desire as part of nature, exemplified both in erotic desire for other human beings and instinctive needs for freedom and happiness. During the late 1940s and 1950s, Marcuse radicalized his anthropology, incorporating the Freudian instinct theory into his Marxist view of human nature, producing a version of Freudo-Marxism that he stuck with until the end, as is evident in "Ecology and the Critique of the Modern Society," which uses the Freudian instinct theory to criticize contemporary forms of destruction of the environment.

Marcuse sympathized, though not uncritically, with the environmental movements since the early 1970s. In a symposium on "Ecology and Revolution" in Paris in 1972, some of which was translated in the September, 1972 issue of *Liberation*, Marcuse argued that the most militant groups of the period were fighting "against the war crimes being committed against the Vietnamese people." Yet he saw ecology as an important component of that struggle, arguing that "the violation of the earth is a vital aspect of the counterrevolution." For Marcuse, the U.S. intervention in Vietnam was waging "ecocide" against the environment, as well as genocide against the people: "It is no longer enough to do away with people living now; life must also be denied to those who aren't even born yet by burning and poisoning the earth, defoliating the forests, blowing up the dikes. This bloody insanity will not alter the ultimate course of the war but it is a very clear expression of where contemporary capitalism is at: the cruel waste of productive resources in the imperialist homeland goes hand in hand with the cruel waste of destructive forces and consumption of commodities of death manufactured by the war industry."

In his major writings, Marcuse consistently followed the Frankfurt School's emphasis on reconciliation with nature as an important component of human liberation, and also stressed the importance of peace and harmony among human beings as the goal of an emancipated society.² Marcuse consistently called for a new

² On the Frankfurt School, see my book, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (London and Baltimore: Polity and Johns Hopkins Press, 1989).

concept of socialism that made peace, joy, happiness, freedom, and oneness with nature a primary component of an alternative society. Producing new institutions, social relations, and culture would make possible, in his liberatory vision, the sort of non-alienated labor, erotic relations, and harmonious community envisaged by Fourier and the utopian socialists. A radical ecology, then, which relentlessly criticized environmental destruction, as well as the destruction of human beings, and that struggled for a society without violence, destruction, and pollution was part of Marcuse's vision of liberation.

The lecture on ecology published here was presented in California to a wilderness class. Marcuse sarcastically opens by stating that there may no longer be a problem of preserving the wilderness, as President Carter had turned over some thirty-six million acres of wilderness land to commercial development. This trend accelerated tremendously during the Reagan era, in which his Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, wanted to turn over all government lands and wilderness preserves to commercial development. Had Marcuse lived through the Reagan era, we would no doubt have benefitted from some radical Marcusean critiques of this monstrous epoch.

There was, for Marcuse, a contradiction between capitalist productivity and nature, for in its quest for higher profits and the domination of nature, capitalism inevitably destroyed nature. Capitalist production manifested an unleashing of aggressive and destructive energies which destroyed life and polluted nature. In this process, human beings are transformed into tools of labor and become instruments of destruction. Introjecting capitalism's aggressive, competitive, and destructive impulses, individuals themselves engage in ever more virulent destruction of the natural environment and anything (individuals, communities, and nations) which stands in the way of its productive exploitation of resources, people, and markets.

The relevance of Marcuse's argument should be apparent in the aftermath of the ecocide and genocide of the Persian Gulf war. While ecologists warned from the beginning of the disastrous environmental effects of a Gulf war, establishment scientists claimed that potential oil spills and fires did not threaten more than regional destruction. Evidently, Bush and his War Lords allowed no environmental restraints on their high-tech Iraqi massacre and destruction of the fragile Gulf region environment. In late January, 1991, Bush signed an order freeing the military from the burden of producing environmental

impact reports, which was required after the environmental effects of the Vietnam war became known. Henceforth, free of all restrictions, the Bush/Schwarzkopf war machine merrily bombed Iraqi nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons facilities, and attempted to destroy Iraq's oil industry, causing severe fires throughout Iraq; the environmental damage caused by the U.S.-led coalition bombing was so severe that the Bush administration directed all Federal agencies not to reveal to the public any information concerning environmental damage. The U.S. would release no satellite photos of the region and refused to disclose the effects of U.S.-led coalition bombing on the region.³

Thus both the Iraqi and U.S. forces were responsible for environmental terrorism and both sides committed horrific acts of human and environmental destruction. Indeed, war itself in the high-tech age is environmental terrorism and ecocide as advanced technology destroys the earth and annihilates human beings. From this perspective, the high-tech massacre in the Gulf region reveals the insanity of the Western project of the domination of nature, in which a military machine sees the economic and military infrastructure and people of Iraq as objects to dominate and even destroy. The human and ecological holocaust discloses the importance of Marcuse's argument that individuals must change their very sensibilities and instinctual structure so that they can no longer commit or tolerate such atrocities against nature and other human beings. The euphoria in destruction and wide-spread support of U.S. Gulf war crimes in the general population shows the extent of societal regression during the conservative hegemony of the last years and the need for re-education and humanization of the population. "Postmodern" cynicism and nihilism will not help us deal with such problems; thus we must return to the classical thinkers of the emancipatory tradition to guide us in the struggles ahead and out of the long night of darkness in the era of Reagan and Bush. — Douglas Kellner

³ Eventually, the Saudis admitted that the coalition bombing produced at least 30 percent of the oil spills and over fifty of the fires. See my forthcoming book, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992) for exposés of the propaganda and disinformation campaigns whereby the Bush administration mobilized consent to its high-tech massacre and covered over its crimes through propaganda and lies.

IV.

I have not read much Marcuse in recent years, and after reading this lecture I shall read more. Not because I believe that most of what he says is correct, or even because I believe that his fundamental thesis, that human nature can be transformed and recreated in radically new ways, is correct. Rather because the simplicity and power of his thought is more impressive and more important today than ever before. Today we live in an intellectual world, at least within the academy, in which cleverness of expression seems to have become the highest value. Texts are equated with life under the doctrine of intertextuality (texts refer only to other texts, never the world), and the cynical mimicry of the one-dimensionality of advanced industrial society (for example, Baudrillard's "hyperreality") substitutes for criticism. Most unfortunately, these approaches have become identified with a type of intellectual radicalism, as though radicalism had nothing to do with a radical analysis of real existing society. Marcuse's "Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society" is a breath of fresh air.

More than this, I find myself attracted to what is actually Marcuse's most problematic concept: an instinctual basis for socialism in the demands of Eros. Marcuse turns to Eros as an alternative to history, a history that failed to see the proletariat fulfill its revolutionary role. In a word, Eros takes the place of the proletariat as subject of the revolution. It is this that helps to explain why Marcuse would at once seek to render Eros historical ("there is no such thing as an immutable human nature"), and remove it from history — a contradictory undertaking, to say the least. What Marcuse wants to say is that society reaches so deeply into the human being that it can manipulate and exploit humanity's deepest instinctual needs. Society has always done this, of course, but never with the effectiveness of advanced industrial society, which has yet to meet an emancipatory need it could not exploit. Yet, if Eros is merely a creature of history, then it loses its great revolutionary virtue: its utter demandingness (for Eros, too much satisfaction is never enough), as well as its desire for real and genuine fulfillment now and forever. It is these virtues that render Eros immune to the intrusions of history, and the false promises of capitalist society, and that make Eros such a potent and a permanent revolutionary force, even in exile, so to speak, deep within the alienated body and one-dimensional mind.

I do not think that Marcuse ever solved this dilemma: to make Eros historical, so that it might be liberated by changes in technology, labor, and society, is to risk its emancipatory potential, which rests in its immunity to social influences. "Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society" gives me no reason to alter this judgment. Yet, if Marcuse did not solve this dilemma, he continued up until the very end to work within the space created by it: an account of human nature which appreciates that this nature is always potentially more than it historically appears to be. This turns out, I believe, to be a tremendously fruitful space, one defined and bounded by the play of Eros and history. It is this aspect of Eros, its role as signpost to the body in history, that is most valuable, not the question of whether Eros might become the organizing principle of society. On the contrary, to focus exclusively on the utopian promise inherent in Eros risks ignoring its value in the here-and-now: as a reminder of the fundamental reality of the human desire for peace, joy, and happiness. Nothing is more important and valuable than this, which does not mean that these things can only be valued in an all or nothing fashion.

Marcuse's understandable rage that most have experienced so little peace, joy, and happiness in their lives is, one suspects, what leads him to formulate the issue as all or nothing, as though billions of humans have little to lose. About this conclusion we must be careful, however, if only because, *ceteris paribus*, more peace, joy, and happiness is better than less. Furthermore, while attributes such as truth, justice, and reason sometimes seem to have a reality independent of their embodiment in individual humans, peace, joy, and happiness do not. It is only the peace, joy, and happiness of individuals that make sense, which is not to say that the pursuit of these values is not a collective one, for it is. Marcuse makes a similar claim in "On Hedonism."¹ Unlike universal values, happiness is an attribute of individuals. If social theory can remember this, it will be less likely to sacrifice individuals to history or ideas. In the end, this is the great value of Eros in Marcuse's project: to make this sacrifice less likely. —
C. Fred Alford

¹ "On Hedonism" in Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).