

SHE RAN INTO HIM ON HER WAY HOME, AND
CONFERENCE IN LONDON.

WITH A FOREWORD BY ANGELA Y. DAVIS

WE SUBMIT
TO THE PEACEFUL
PRODUCTION OF THE
MEANS OF DESTRUCTION,
TO THE PERFECTION
OF WASTE.

HERBERT MARCUSE

PHILOSOPHER OF UTOPIA

A GRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY

A BETTER
WORLD IS
POSSIBLE

TODAY WE
HAVE THE CAPACITY
TO TURN THE WORLD
INTO HELL, & WE ARE
WELL ON OUR WAY
TO DOING
SO.

WE
ALSO HAVE
THE CAPACITY
TO TURN IT INTO
THE OPPOSITE
OF HELL.

NICK THORKELSON

EDITED BY PAUL BUHLE AND ANDREW T. LAMAS

HERBERT MARCUSE

PHILOSOPHER OF UTOPIA

a graphic biography

NICK THORKELSON

PAUL BUHLE AND ANDREW T. LAMAS, EDITORS



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—Nick Thorkelson

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FOREWORD

Angela Y. Davis

As I write this preface in May 2018, in the city of Paris, French students and workers are conducting demonstrations, sit-ins, and occupations with the aim of challenging the Macron government's harsh attacks on labor and its announced efforts to restrict access to higher education. These protests reflect a growing consciousness of deepening structural inequalities in the Global North—especially for people of color, immigrants from the South, and more generally, poor and working class communities suffering the effects of global capitalism.

As if to accentuate the significance of the publication this year of the graphic biography, *Herbert Marcuse, Philosopher of Utopia*, these demonstrations in Paris coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the 1968 student/worker uprisings, with which his utopian ideas have been historically associated. But serendipitously, Marcuse was in fact in Paris during the 1968 protests, attending, along with Lucien Goldmann and others, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conference on Marx. Students who had occupied the École des Beaux Arts recognized him as he walked back to his hotel from the conference and invited him to speak to the assembly. When he addressed them, he brought greetings from the developing movement in the United States and, according to Andrew Feenberg, who accompanied him, praised the students for their critiques of capitalist consumerism.¹

In 1968, I was one of Herbert Marcuse's graduate students at UC San Diego, and we all benefited both from his deep knowledge of European philosophical traditions and from the fearless way he manifested his solidarity with movements challenging military aggression, academic repression, and pervasive racism. Marcuse counseled us always to acknowledge the important differences between the realms of philosophy and political activism, as well as the complex relation between theory and radical social transformation. At the same time, he never failed to remind us that the most meaningful dimension of philosophy was its utopian element. "When truth cannot be realized within the established social order, it always appears to the latter as mere utopia."² As new generations of scholars and activists ponder the role of intellectuals in shaping radical movements of this era, I believe that Marcuse's ideas can be as valuable today as they were fifty years ago.

1. Andrew Feenberg, "Remembering Marcuse," in Herbert Marcuse, *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation*, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, vol. 5, ed. Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce. (London: Routledge, 2011), 235-236.

2. Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 143.

Shortly before the death of his longtime Frankfurt School colleague Theodor W. Adorno, Marcuse urgently debated with him the significance of the student movement. The focal point of their sometime intense exchange was Adorno's justification of the fact that the police were called in response to a student occupation of the Institute for Social Research. In criticizing this reliance on the police, Marcuse insisted that "if the alternative is the police or left-wing students, then I am with the students. . . . I still believe that our cause . . . is better taken up by the rebellious students than by the police."³ Marcuse pointed out that even as he rejected the "unmediated translation of theory into praxis," he recognized that theory can be advanced by praxis and that although student activism of that period was neither unfolding within a revolutionary situation, nor even, he insisted, in a "pre-revolutionary one," it demanded recognition of new possibilities of emancipation.⁴ It brought in, he said, some much needed fresh air when the world was suffocating in so many ways. "It is the air that we . . . also want to breathe some day, and it is certainly not the air of the establishment."⁵

While Marcuse did not always agree with particular tactics of radical movements of that era, he was very clear about the extent to which calls for black liberation, peace, gender justice, and for the restructuring of education represented important emancipatory tendencies of the era and, indeed, helped to push theory in progressive directions. *An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt*, as well as his 1974 Stanford University lecture on "Marxism and Feminism," offers us evidence of his own efforts to engage directly with ideas associated with movements of that period.⁶ His reference to "feminist socialism" in the latter essay predicted the important influence of anti-capitalist and anti-racist feminism on many contemporary movements, including prison abolition, campaigns against police violence, and justice for people with disabilities. The explicitly utopian dimension of Marcuse's thought attracted young intellectuals and activists during the historical conjuncture we associate with the uprisings of 1968. Fifty years later, as we confront the persisting globalities of slavery and colonialism, along with evolving structures of racial capitalism, Herbert Marcuse's ideas continue to reveal important lessons. The insistence on imagining emancipatory futures, even under the most desperate of circumstances, remains—Marcuse teaches us—a decisive element of both theory and practice.

3. Herbert Marcuse, in Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," trans. Esther Leslie, *New Left Review* 1/233 (January-February 1999), 125.

4. Ibid. Marcuse also wrote to Adorno: "You know me well enough to know that I reject the unmediated translation of theory into praxis just as emphatically as you do. But I do believe that there are situations, moments, in which theory is pushed on further by praxis—situations and moments in which theory that is kept separate from praxis becomes untrue to itself." Marcuse, "Correspondence," 125.

5. Ibid.

6. See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); and, Herbert Marcuse, "Marxism and Feminism," *Women's Studies* 2.3 (1974), 279-288.

SPRING 1965,
OAKLAND,
CALIFORNIA:

IT'S BEAUTIFUL!
THE UNIFICATION
OF THE POLITICAL
PRINCIPLE WITH
THE PLEASURE
PRINCIPLE!

THE PHILOSOPHER
HERBERT MARCUSE
& HIS FRIENDS
JOIN A
DEMONSTRATION
MARCHING ON
THE OAKLAND
ARMY TERMINAL.

WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO DESPAIR
THERE COULD BE GOOD THINGS OUT THERE
AS MUCH AS WE'RE WILLING TO BEAR,
FREEDOM! * TO BEAR!

WHEN THEIR
WAY IS
BLOCKED BY
A PHALANX
OF RIOT POLICE,
THE YOUNG
DEMONSTRATORS
SIT DOWN IN
THE STREET
& BURST
INTO SONG.

* THESE ARE NOT THE ACTUAL LYRICS
THEY WOULD HAVE SUNG - I WROTE
THEM MYSELF JUST A COUPLE OF YEARS
AGO, INSPIRED BY ALL I WAS LEARNING
ABOUT HERBERT
MARCUSE
WHILE
I WAS
WRITING
THIS
COMIC.

CARTONIST

PLEASURE

FREEDOM

EROS

RESISTANCE

IN 1965, MARCUSE COULD HAVE PASSED THROUGH THIS CROWD VIRTUALLY UNNOTICED.



BUT BY 1967, THE YOUNG REBELS IN THE PEACE & JUSTICE MOVEMENTS WERE TREATING HIM AS A ROCK STAR.



WHEN FRENCH WORKERS & STUDENTS WENT TO THE BARRICADES IN MAY 1968, THEIR SLOGANS REFLECTED MARCUSE'S IDEAS.



CHAPTER 1

ASSIMILATION AND CATASTROPHE



A PHILOSOPHER ONCE FROM BERLIN—



THOUGHT ENJOYING LIFE WAS NO SIN.



HIS BODY HAS PASSED—
GONE TO ASHES, ALAS—
BUT HIS MEMORIES STAY
WITH HIS KIN.



IN JULY 2003, A MEMORIAL FOR HERBERT
MARLUSE WAS HELD IN BERLIN, GERMANY.

HIS SON, PETER MARLUSE, OFFERED SOME
LIMERICKS
TO MARK
THE EVENT.

OK, I GOT A
FEW MORE.

WE'VE NOT
COME HERE TO
BURY MY FATHER.
JUST HIS ASHES—SO
WHY ALL THE BOTHER?
THE ANSWER IS
SIMPLE:
HIS LIFE IS A SYMBOL.
THE OCCASION
WILL HELP MAKE
IT MATTER.

DO WE
REALLY WANT
TO SAY KADDISH?
FOR SOME OF US
IT'S A MISH
MASH OF CULTURE,
RELIGION,
AND A RATHER
MOVING TRADITION.
SO WHY NOT?
AFTER ALL, HE
WAS JEWISH.

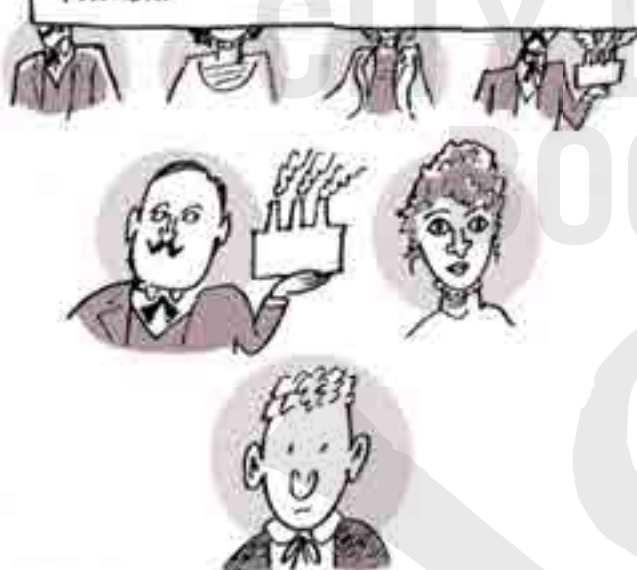
GROAN



HA



HERBERT MARCUSE WAS BORN ON JULY 19, 1898, TO CARL + GERTRUD MARCUSE. CARL OWNED A FACTORY, AS DID GERTRUD'S FATHER.



THEY LIVED IN A NEIGHBORHOOD OF HIGHLY ASSIMILATED JEWISH FAMILIES.

HOW ASSIMILATED?



IN LATER YEARS MARCUSE REMEMBERED HEARING THIS CRY ON HIS STREET.

FOR MARCUSE, THE FERMENT OF IDEAS WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE FERMENT OF NATIONALISM, CLASS STRUGGLE, + WAR.



A VERSION OF THIS PHRASE IS OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO JOSEF GOEBBELS BUT IT IS ACTUALLY FROM A NAZI PLAY.



HE READS ALL THE TIME. SHOULDN'T HE BE LEARNING THE BUSINESS?

LEAVE HIM BE. I NEVER HAD TIME TO READ WHEN I WAS A KID.

I'M NOT SURE I EVER EVEN WAS A KID.

WHEN WORLD WAR I BROKE OUT, MARCUSE WAS DRAFTED. CONFINED TO THE REAR ECHELON DUE TO POOR EYESIGHT, HE WOUND UP "WIPING HORSES' ASSES" FOR THE INFANTRY.



THE WAR WAS SUPPOSED TO LAST A FEW WEEKS, BUT DRAGGED ON FOR YEARS.



SO YOU'RE UPSET ABOUT WAR PROFITEERING, THE ARROGANCE OF THE OFFICERS, & THE WHOLE IMPERIAL PROJECT THAT GOT US INTO THIS MESS.

YOU SHOULD JOIN OUR SOCIALIST MOVEMENT.

BUT DIDN'T THE SOCIALISTS VOTE FOR THE WAR?

WELL, YES, BUT EVERYBODY WANTED A WAR BACK THEN.



THE WAR WAS ALSO SUPPOSED TO NEUTRALIZE THE BURGEONING SOCIALIST SENTIMENT OF THE PRE-WAR YEARS.

INSTEAD-

FOR MILLIONS OF WORKING CLASS SOLDIERS ON ALL SIDES, IT REPLACED THE SLOW DEATH OF THE IMPOVERISHED WAGE EARNER WITH CERTAIN SLAUGHTER.

FORWARD MARCH!

WHY ARE YOU ALL BLEATING LIKE SHEEP?



THE "SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC" IDEAL OF GRADUAL CHANGE BEGAN TO GIVE WAY TO REVOLUTIONISM.

WE KNOW WE WON'T RETURN.

CHAPTER 2

THE SORROWS OF YOUNG MARCUSE



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1918

REVOLUTION REPLACED THE GERMAN EMPIRE WITH A REPUBLIC LED BY THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SPD). THE PARTY MARCUSE HAD JOINED DURING THE WAR. BUT AS SOON AS THEY TASTED POWER, THE SPD LEADERS TURNED THEIR ATTENTION TO COMFORTING THE COMFORTABLE AND AFFLICTING THE AFFLICTED.



1919

WHEN THE BERLIN WORKERS SAW THE SPD TURNING AGAINST THEM, THEY ROSE UP.



ROSA LUXEMBURG, AND OTHER PRINCIPLED SOCIALIST LEADERS WHO HAD BROKEN FROM THE SPD TO FORM THE SPARTACIST LEAGUE, JOINED THE REVOLT.

I SUPPOSE WE KNEW IT WAS HOPELESS.

BUT IN A TIME OF REVOLUTION, THE REVOLUTIONIST HAS NO CHOICE.

YOU CAN'T BE SELECTIVE IN THE COLLECTIVE.

FRÄULEIN LUXEMBURG!

YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!





1920

IT WAS BAD ENOUGH WHEN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS CUT A DEAL WITH THE OFFICER CORPS - THAT'S WHEN I QUIT THE PARTY -

- BUT THAT THEY HIRED THE FREIKORPS MILITIA - SWORN ENEMIES OF THE REPUBLIC - TO MURDER LUXEMBURG - UNSPEAKABLE!

I WOULD JOIN THE SPARTACISTS - NOW THEY CALL THEMSELVES COMMUNISTS - BUT ALL THEY SEEM TO CARE ABOUT IS DEFENDING THE SOVIET UNION.

THERE'S NO PLACE FOR ME IN THE POLITICS OF THIS VICIOUS "REPUBLIC"

I SUPPOSE I SHOULD COLLECT MY BOOKS AND HEAD ON BACK TO SCHOOL.



MARCUSE ENROLLED IN A DUAL COURSE OF LITERATURE & POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AT HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY IN BERLIN. BETWEEN CLASSES HE PARTICIPATED IN A LITERATURE STUDY GROUP.



THE LONGING TO ENGAGE WITH WHAT WAS "OUTSIDE" - A THWARTED & UNMOORED SOCIETY EMERGING IN THE WAKE OF MILITARY DEFEAT & STILLBORN REVOLUTION - ANIMATED YOUNG ARTISTS AS WELL AS BUDDING INTELLECTUALS.





"THE LAST LAUGH," WITH ITS SLUM-DWELLING HOTEL DOORMAN PUFFED UP BY THE ILLUSION OF STATUS THAT HIS UNIFORM CONFERRED, COULD BE TAKEN AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF AN OFT-QUOTED REMARK OF MARCUSE'S:



SO IT WAS A DISAPPOINTED MARCUSE WHO BEGAN HIS INTELLECTUAL ADVENTURES EXPLORING THE ARTIST'S PROBLEM AS IF IT WERE THE PROBLEM OF REVOLUTION.



(BY THIS TIME MARCUSE HAD TRANSFERRED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF FREIBURG.)

IN HIS 1922 DISSERTATION, "THE GERMAN ARTIST-NOVEL," MARCUSE SAW

THE CLEFT BETWEEN WHAT IS & WHAT COULD BE



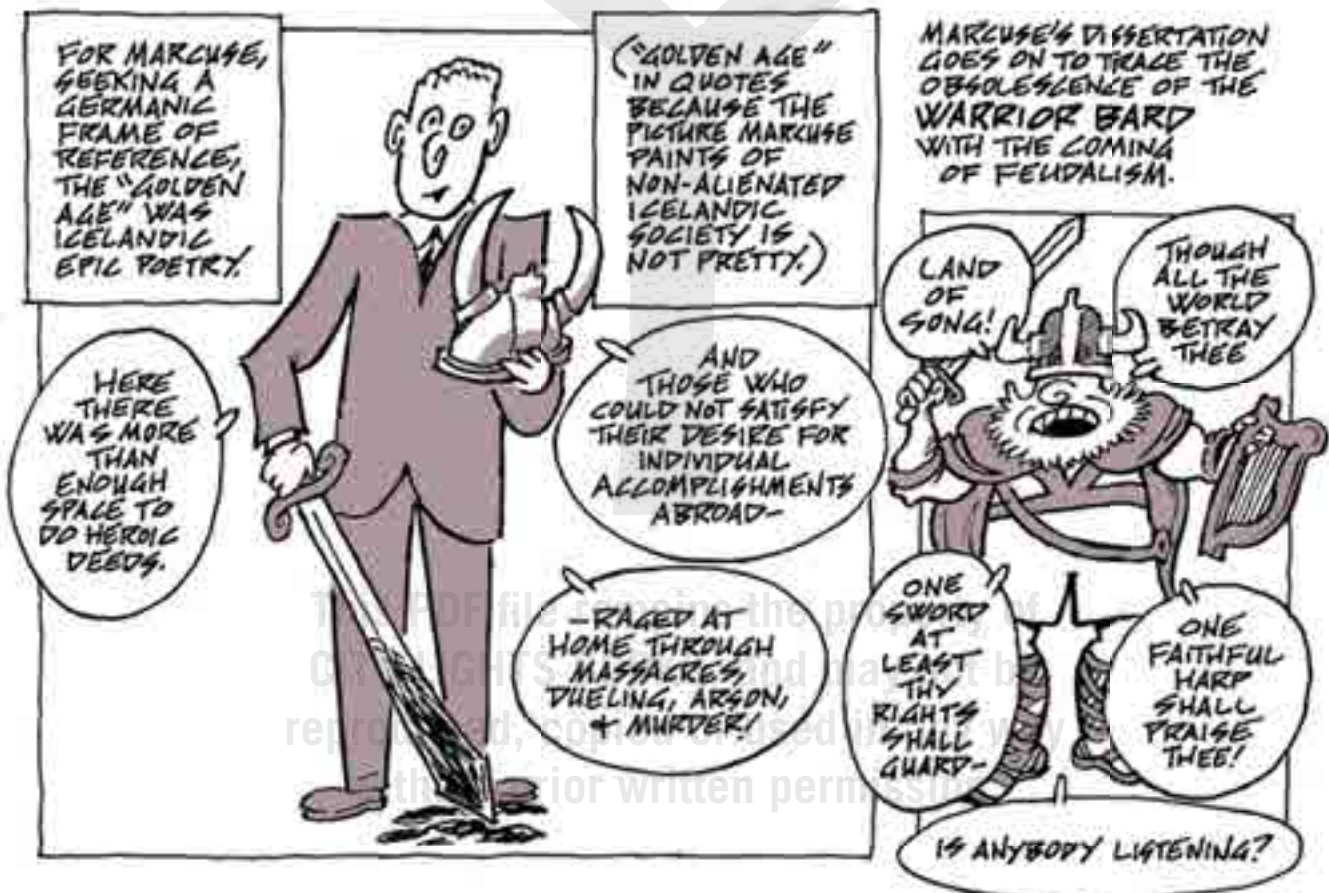
AS THE SOURCE AND THE SHAPE OF THE MODERN ARTIST'S DILEMMA:

THE VERY BEING OF AN ARTIST MEANS HAVING A PECULIAR TYPE OF LIFE, NOT CONGRUENT WITH THAT OF PEOPLE IN GENERAL.



WHICH MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR THE ARTIST TO PRESENT A "FULL HISTORICAL PICTURE."

FOLLOWING LUKÁCS, MARCUSE CONTRASTED THE ISOLATION OF THE MODERN ARTIST WITH THE "EMBEDDEDNESS" OF ARTISTS IN EARLIER TIMES.



FEDERALISM REPLACED THE BARD WITH A FAMILIAR ARTIST TROPE, THE VAGABOND.

AS SOON AS EARTHLY LIFE WAS STRIPPED OF THE GODS--

-THE SPIRIT HAD TO PRESENT ITSELF PURELY AS UNTETHERED TO REALITY-AND IN OPPOSITION TO IT.

TRAVELING BANDS OF MUSICIANS AND MIMES AND, ESPECIALLY, YOUNG CLERICS AND STUDENTS, BROKE FREE AND CHARGED OUT INTO A LIFE OF LAUGHTER.

TOO PROUD, TOO WILD TO EVER SEEK COMPROMISE OR STABILITY--

-THEIR LIVES EVAPORATED INTO AUSTERE BEGGING AND CONTINUAL WANDERING.



WHICH BRINGS US TO MODERNITY, AND THE GERMAN ARTIST-NOVEL, A LITERARY FORM WHICH MARCUSE'S DISSERTATION TRACES FROM THE 17TH CENTURY TO THE 20TH.



"I TREAT MY HEART LIKE A SICK CHILD AND GRATIFY ITS EVERY FANCY."

"THE HUMAN RACE IS A MONOTONOUS AFFAIR."

MARCUSE SEES THE RENUNCIATION OF PROSAIC SOCIETY IN GOETHE'S 1774 NOVEL AS ESCAPIST & NARROW.



INBORN IN NEARLY EVERY ARTIST'S NATURE IS A VOLUPTUOUS, TREACHEROUS TENDENCY TO ACCEPT INJUSTICE IF IT CREATES BEAUTY

HE PREFERS THE MORE WORLDLY AND "EPIC" CONCERNS OF GOETHE'S LATER WORK, AND OF THOMAS MANN'S CELEBRATED 1912 NOVELLA.

THE DISSERTATION HAS A SURPRISE ENDING: JUST WHEN MARCUSE SEEMS CONTENT TO SHOW THE ARTIST FINDING BEAUTY IN A BROKEN WORLD—

THE EPICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE HARMONY AND BEAUTY OF THE WORLD, OF THE NECESSITY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF EVERYTHING—

—IS GIVEN AS A POSSIBILITY TO ALL.

—HE REVERSES COURSE, AND DEMANDS UTOPIA.

BUT THE ARTISTIC WORKING OUT OF THAT EXPERIENCE DEMANDS THE EXISTENCE OF AN ORGANIC AND MEANINGFUL WHOLE—

A "COMMUNITY" IN THE DEEPEST SENSE.



HIS NEED FOR ORGANIC & MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY LED MARCUSE TO A DEEPER ENGAGEMENT WITH PHILOSOPHY.

1923:

TWO WORKS OF MARXIST THEORY INSPIRED HIM:

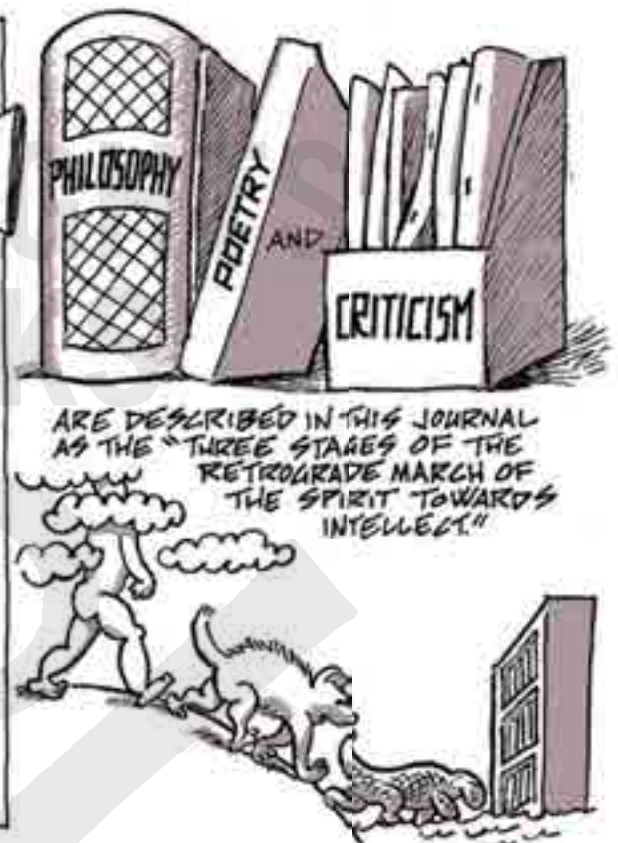
GEORGE LUKÁCS' HISTORY & CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS DESCRIBED HOW "REIFICATION" RATIONALIZES OPPRESSION.

KARL KORSCH'S MARXISM AND PHILOSOPHY USED "DIALECTICS" TO ESTABLISH THE CENTRALITY OF REVOLUTION IN MODERN THOUGHT.

A RELATION BETWEEN PEOPLE TAKES ON THE CHARACTER OF A THING, & THIS ACQUIRES A PHANTOM OBJECTIVITY.

THE BOURGEOIS WRITING OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY HAS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC REASONS ABANDONED HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY.





MARCUSE'S OWN MARCH OF THE SPIRIT TOWARDS INTELLECT-RETROGRADE OR NOT-TOOK HIM THROUGH THE RICHES OF WEIMAR REPUBLIC CULTURE.

1924:



THEY SET UP HOUSEKEEPING ON A LOWER FLOOR OF HIS FATHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING IN BERLIN.



THEIR APARTMENT BECAME A KIND OF SALON WHERE ARTISTS, SCHOLARS, & ACTIVISTS DISCUSSED MARXISM, PSYCHOLOGY, THEATER, & PAINTING. A FREQUENT VISITOR WAS HERBERT'S YOUNGER BROTHER ERICH (THE MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE MARCUSE AT THIS TIME).

