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PLEASURE AND REASON:
MARCUSE'S IDEA OF FREEDOM

JAMES M. RHODES

I

Herbert Marcuse often has been accused of advocating the abolition of liberty and the establishment of totalitarianism in the United States. This is ironic, for Marcuse always has imagined himself a champion of freedom and a foe of tyranny. Conflicting ideas of freedom and contradictory assessments of its status in American society are at issue in this disagreement.¹

Most of Marcuse's antagonists are American democrats who define liberty in terms of "rights" which they have learned to cherish. They firmly believe that people are entitled to live under representative political institutions and impartial laws constituted by majority rule. They also feel that men ought to be permitted to form and express their own opinions without being persecuted or forced to assent to official orthodoxies. They think further that individuals should be allowed to make their material fortunes competitively and consume them as they please, or, if they are socialists, they think that economic decisions at least ought to reflect the popular will. The American democrats consider men free if they enjoy all these rights and they are satisfied that their country tries to assure the rights to everyone.

It is easy to see why people who accept this creed would charge that Marcuse preaches tyranny. The man openly encourages the New Left to defy duly constituted laws and policies of the United States and to forbid freedom of speech to persons who defend what is "radically evil." He also calls for the violent subversion of American institutions and a drastic revision of the nation's economic priorities "against the will and against

¹ A sympathetic interpreter professes not to know what Marcuse means by the "weasel word" freedom. Robert W. Marks, *The Meaning of Marcuse* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), pp. 55-56. Nevertheless, Marcuse has an explicit idea of freedom which is developed in the following works: *Reason and Revolution, Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (1941, 1960); *Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955, 1962); *One-Dimensional Man, Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964); "Repressive Tolerance," in Robert Paul Wolff *et al.*, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (1965, 1969); *An Essay on Liberation* (1969); and *Five Lectures, Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia* (1970). The latest paperback editions of these books are cited in this paper and, of these, all but the second are published by Beacon Press in Boston. The exception is a Vintage Book published in New York. The works are cited as RR, EC, ODM, RT, EL, and FL respectively.

the prevailing interests of the great majority of the people." Moreover, he urges the creation of an "educational dictatorship" managed by a revolutionary elite (albeit reluctantly).² There never has been a more emphatic refusal to respect majority rule, freedom of speech and thought, and popular economic sovereignty. There never has been a clearer invitation to dictators to control the psychic development of human beings, either. Marcuse seems bent on depriving people of their rights, not to speak of their souls, and thus his adversaries could not help but judge him a would-be totalitarian.³

For his part, Marcuse admits readily that he would abridge existing rights and empower despots to mold the human psyche. However, he rejects his critics' inference that this would put an end to liberty. He maintains in the first place that no one has any freedom to lose; the belief that the American rights are equivalent to freedom is a delusion. Granted, these rights do guarantee choice, but Marcuse contends that: "The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but *what* can be chosen and what *is* chosen by the individual."⁴ Americans do not will what freemen would will; they are incapable of doing so because they are the unwitting victims of an insidious and cruelly effective slavery.

This slavery consists of two impediments to truly free choice. The first is "repression," a nearly universal psychological disorder which gravely impairs man's capacity to desire his proper happiness.⁵ Repressed individuals are both aggressive and euphoric; they engage in destructive mass behavior which would grieve them if they were in their right minds and they do not seem to be bothered by the "alienation" of their labor, from which they would suffer intensely if they were sane. They think themselves happy in their sorry state. Their madness is reinforced by the second element of the slavery, "totalitarian" manipulation. Marcuse thinks that ruling elites in America who benefit from aggression deftly manage human minds to make certain that the masses remain repressed. Using modern creature comforts, the media, and pernicious academic doctrines as "instruments of domination," the rulers reach down to the "very instincts" of men to make

² RT, pp. 81, 88, 100, 109-110, 117; EL, pp. 17, 70; FL, pp. 86, 104; ODM, pp. 16, 39-41.

³ A typical democratic (though not American) attack on Marcuse is M. Cranston, "Herbert Marcuse," *Encounter*, XXXII (March, 1969), 38-50. An anthology of typically democratic essays directed against the New Left in general is William P. Gerberding and Duane E. Smith, eds., *The Radical Left, The Abuse of Discontent* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

⁴ ODM, p. 7.

⁵ Marcuse insists that happiness is an objective condition and not merely a matter of subjective feelings. EC, p. 94. The correct name for the psychological disorder actually is "surplus-repression" but this term is too awkward and hence is contracted to "repression" in this essay.

them content with false pleasures, to secure their labor and their aggressive co-operation in schemes of oppression, and to make them "one-dimensional," i.e. incapable of perceiving the evils of their condition. The masters also disguise their control of society to prevent rebellion; they maintain democratic rights and institutions as facades which help to generate one-dimensionality by creating an illusion of popular self-government.⁶

Marcuse hopes to substitute real self-determination for the illusion but he faces an enormous problem; people who dementedly love their slavery and call it freedom are likely to resist their own liberation. Since their slavery is an intolerable evil nevertheless, Marcuse concludes with Rousseau that contemporary men simply "must be 'forced to be free,' to 'see objects as they are, and sometimes as they ought to appear,' they must be shown the 'good road' they are in search of." He advocates subversion of the American democracy, the universities, the media, and the economy against the popular will in order to destroy the system of manipulation which nobody senses and he conceives educational dictatorship as a necessary therapy for minds which have been programmed to accept irrationality as happiness. When manipulative institutions have been done away with and when consciousness has been reformed true liberty will be at hand; then the will of the people can be respected once again and dictatorial measures discarded. Meanwhile, Marcuse suggests that his opponents should not complain if revolutionaries temporarily employ despotic methods to prepare society for true freedom; a benevolent despotism with this aim surely would be better than the present tyranny, which has made the Affluent Society an Auschwitz.⁷ The American democrats, of course, are scandalized and reject Marcuse's entire argument as a shabby rationalization of dark designs, generally without paying sufficient attention to the challenge which Marcuse poses to the grounds of their beliefs.

If anyone wished to examine the merits of the Marcusean and American democratic positions, he would have to consider two issues seriously. First, he would have to look into Marcuse's accusation that America is not the democracy that it pretends to be, that it is controlled by a minority which manipulates popular consciousness. Actually, this thesis has been the stock-in-trade of the New Left since C. Wright Mills and it has been contested strenuously by the sociological "pluralists" and others. The de-

⁶ EC, chaps. i-vii, especially pp. 42, 90-95; ODM, intro., chaps. i-vi, especially pp. 3, 6, 7, 9, 12, 16, 80; RT, pp. 84, 97; EL, pp. 7, 11, 63; FL, p. 16. It is not quite clear whether Marcuse envisages manipulation as a deliberate conspiracy of culpable evil-doers or as the result of an impersonal system which entraps both oppressor and oppressed. Compare EC, pp. 33-34; ODM, xvi, pp. 14, 168; FL, p. 54.

⁷ ODM, pp. 6, 7, 16, 39-41, 80; RT, pp. 88, 100; EL, pp. 17, 65, 70. Marcuse once rejected educational dictatorship, arguing that all men would know the truth automatically if only their minds were not "methodically arrested and diverted." EC, p. 206.

bate has been inconclusive and it cannot be settled in this paper. One comment would be pertinent, however. The question of who exercises power and how is essentially empirical and Marcuse himself does not supply any empirical proof that his claims are valid. He merely interprets selectively assembled data arbitrarily, without showing why these data could not be construed equally well some other way. He often seems strangely unaware that rigorous demonstrations are required to establish that the facts are as he says and at times he does not even indicate precisely which facts are supposed to support his generalizations. Thus, as many of his opponents have pointed out, it is a mystery that he expects anyone to believe his power elite thesis.

Marcuse's theory of repression presents the second issue which needs to be discussed; American democrats never would concede that people today are unfree due to some psychological incapacity to want real happiness. This dispute, unlike the first, does not admit of empirical resolution. Marcuse says explicitly that he takes his theory from Freudian "metapsychology" and that parts of it are more important for their "symbolic" than their literal truth. His primary concern is to establish that men are misguided and have neither true liberty nor true happiness; the rest of his argument is intended as an explanation of the causes of these evils in terms of certain "ontological" circumstances.⁸ Several philosophic questions, therefore, are at the heart of the repression issue: What are "true" freedom and happiness? Is the range of choice inherent in the American rights "real" liberty? Or is "true" freedom the attainment of some Marcusean end? Is the achievement of this end "happiness" and all else "misery," despite the individual's subjective feelings? Have man's "ontological" circumstances really led to a defective kind of human existence which lacks "happiness"? What are these circumstances and how can one know what they are? Would it be justifiable or even possible to save people from their "misery" by compelling them to choose the Marcusean good?

It is not immediately evident that Marcuse treats these problems any more rigorously than the empirical ones. Most scholars think that he proceeds cavalierly, that he merely asserts what he believes man's ontological situation, true freedom, and real happiness are, and a commentator says that: "He does not make it clear what criteria of truth he accepts or to what criteria of truth he is appealing when he invites us to accept his assertions."⁹ Difficulties also have been pointed out in the very questions

⁸ EC, pp. 6, 7, 11, 25, 54-56, 94, 96-99, 113-114.

⁹ The critic adds that: "Marcuse seldom, if ever, gives us any reason to believe that what he is writing is true. He offers incidental illustrations of his theses very often; he never offers evidence in a systematic way. Above all, there is entirely absent from his writing any attempt on his own part to suggest or consider the

which Marcuse raises. The questions are couched in idealistic language, implying that there actually may be Forms of true freedom and happiness, and it is intimated that Marcuse persists in his idealism ignorantly, without realizing that analytic philosophy has done much to discredit its assumptions.¹⁰ Furthermore, idealism often is nothing more than a manner of expressing opinions about good and evil and Marcuse goes so far as to admit that all his work is informed by "value-judgments."¹¹ But, it is asked, if this is the case, aren't the questions implied by Marcuse's arguments unanswerable? In fact, in planning to force his "values," mere "subjective preferences," on his neighbors, isn't Marcuse committing the one unforgivable intellectual sin of baseless arrogance and proving himself a tyrant who would make others bend, not to any truth, but to what necessarily could be only his imperious will?

Marcuse is confident that he is acting on the basis of something more than personal whims. He maintains against the analytic philosophers that true freedom and happiness are ideal realities and he rejects positivistic claims that knowledge of an objective good is impossible. He also thinks that he does appeal to explicit criteria of truth to demonstrate his assertions; he says that humanity's need for what he takes to be freedom "is not a truth imposed upon man by an arbitrary philosophical theory, but can be proved to be the inherent aim of man, his very reality."¹² Being certain that he can demonstrate the truth, Marcuse holds that it is no sin of arrogance to revolutionize the present order undemocratically. Although the scholars seem blind to his proofs, he also has done a remarkable job of convincing some sensitive young students of the justice of his cause. He even produces an extremely curious spiritual effect in one of his mature critics, who admits that when he reads Marcuse he has a problem: "An inner voice seems to say, 'You know more or less what he means. Why be so carping about details?' To which another voice replies, 'I haven't the faintest idea what he means, but I have a strong feeling that he may be right.'"¹³ Because of their revolutionary potential and their strange power to move sensitive minds without any evident reason, Marcuse's arguments should not be dismissed out of hand. Rather, it would seem necessary to learn what they are, to attempt to discover their grounds, and to try to determine why Marcuse's "values" would have more or less to recommend them than the American alternatives.

difficulties that arise for his positions, and hence also no attempt to meet them." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse, An Exposition and A Polemic* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 14, 44-45, 51, 59, 71, 84, 88.

¹⁰ Marks, *loc. cit.* Marks also attacks Marcuse for his loose and arbitrary use of words. See pp. 50, 79, 82.

¹¹ RR, viii-ix; ODM, x-xi.

¹² RR, pp. 98-99.

¹³ Marks, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

II

A summary of Marcuse's ideas of liberty and happiness logically begins with his theory of human nature, which is pieced together from Freudian and Hegelian thought with some ingenuity. Marcuse believes with Freud that the human organism is something which arises out of inorganic matter "under the pressure of external disturbing forces" and which continues to be excited after birth by stimuli which are experienced as needs and desires. Because it originally comes from the "quiescence" of inorganic matter, the organism does not like to be disturbed and it strives for "relief" from its "internal tension due to stimuli." It can find relief in either of two ways, by satisfying its desires or by returning to the inorganic state. The organism attempts to do both and, thus, for Marcuse, man is a dialectical unity of opposites. He is an organic whole with two basic, diametrically opposed "instincts": Eros, which tries to ease tension through pleasure, thereby sustaining and reproducing life, and Thanatos, the death instinct, which seeks refuge from want in the ultimate peace of the tomb and which manifests itself as aggressive destructiveness.¹⁴

Freedom and happiness are not categories which pertain to dead matter. Whoever wants these prizes must suppress Thanatos and submit himself to that discomforting bombardment of stimuli which is life; he must give himself over to Eros and participate in a being which is "essentially the striving for pleasure." Liberty and happiness then become identical with the goal for which being strives; Marcuse defines both concepts as "absence of want," "the full satisfaction of needs," and "integral gratification," in short, as pleasure. This is not to say that Marcuse commits man to a vulgar, hedonistic search for new and ever more attractive forms of titillation, a quest which inevitably must lead to boredom and nihilism. On the contrary, to spend one's life in the pursuit of new excitements would be to exacerbate the condition from which the organism seeks relief. Marcuse stresses time and again that what the instincts "really want is not unending and eternally unsatisfying change, not a striving for what is endlessly higher and unattained, but rather a balance, a stabilization and reproduction of conditions within which all needs can be gratified and new wants only appear if their pleasurable gratification is also possible." In other words, the instincts want to propel the organism into a radically transfigured existence, into an eternal, "permanent *order*" which offers "peace," "attained and sustained fulfillment," "rest in fulfillment," "calm through fulfillment," and a "true mode of freedom" which is "not the incessant activity of conquest, but its coming to rest in the transparent knowledge and gratification of being."¹⁵ Of course, it might be inquired whether such a miracu-

¹⁴ EC, pp. 21-27, 114. It should be kept in mind that Freud is presented in this essay as interpreted by Marcuse.

¹⁵ EC, pp. 17, 104, 105, 113, 203, 204; FL, pp. 11, 41. Paul Eidelberg says that

lous transformation of organic being is possible; Marcuse tries to answer this question, as will be seen below. It also might be asked whether man really is Eros and Thanatos and how this could be proved, whether the striving for pleasure truly is all that is significant in human existence, and whether it is appropriate to define freedom and happiness as a miraculously permanent satisfaction of Eros, especially since many people think that not all erotic desires should be satisfied. Marcuse does not appear to deal with these problems rigorously.¹⁶

Marcuse's reference to true freedom as "the transparent knowledge" of being represents a further definition of the concept; liberty is not only pleasure, but also "a form of reason." Falling back on a Left Hegelian view of human nature, Marcuse argues that if man were to seek "mere instinctual gratification" he would not be distinct from the animal and his pleasure really would not be enjoyment. To be a truly enjoyable, human freedom, gratification must be "mediated," or permeated with reason.¹⁷ Three typically Hegelian requirements have to be met: pleasure must be based on and consistent with rational human control of the world; the individual, through reason, must determine his needs and satisfactions autonomously, and man must attain to a fully developed consciousness of his freedom.

Marcuse sets the first requirement, "conscious and rational mastery of the world" by man, because he thinks that this is one of the "conditions that render freedom possible." People could not achieve "rest in fulfillment" if they pursued pleasure mindlessly and permitted themselves to be subject to the vicissitudes of nature, an unregulated economy, and capricious social relationships; famines, depressions, civil strife, and the like would keep such improvident men in constant turmoil. Eros must act with foresight to escape these results of improvidence; it must allow reason to establish "a new rationality of gratification" which anticipates and guards against threats to tranquillity. Order will be necessary; reason will create "its own division of labor, its own priorities," and a "multitude of coordinated arrangements" which will have to "carry recognized and recognizable authority." Eros will have to obey this authority but the result will

Marcuse teaches "activistic hedonism," making it look as if Marcuse's ideal were the life of the jet-set. See "The Temptation of Herbert Marcuse," *The Review of Politics*, XXXI (October, 1969), 451. This interpretation misses the point; it fails to give proper emphasis to the radical overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of Freudian existence that the Marcusean man craves.

¹⁶ Regarding the hypothesis about Thanatos, MacIntyre (*op. cit.*, p. 51) points out that "almost all those acquainted with the relevant empirical facts agree with Reich in rejecting it." Although the criticism seems cogent, it may be inadequate. For Marcuse the question is "ontological" and, hence, "the relevant empirical facts" may not be a sufficient basis for rejection of the hypothesis.

¹⁷ RR, pp. 9, 99; FL, p. 35.

not be a loss of pleasure, or unfreedom, because the authority will be "rational." It will be an authority of experts aimed at protecting men from unwanted consequences of disorganization and ignorance and, as such, it will "sustain the order of gratification." Eros also will have to accept the constraints of some form of morality; Marcuse observes that even though the instincts by nature are amoral, "no free civilization" could dispense with a distinction between good and evil. An amoral Eros with free rein could wreck liberty by causing conflicts among individuals. At times, therefore, the "genuine gratification" of Eros would call for moral barriers to immediate satisfaction set by reason (if not by Eros itself).¹⁸

Marcuse's insistence on the second requirement, that people must determine their own needs and gratifications to be free, flows directly from Hegel's definition of liberty as the "self-contained existence" of Spirit. Hegel was unwilling to permit his *Weltgeist* to be dependent for its existence on any being in any way; this would amount to a lack of perfect autonomy and, without this, there could be no liberty. Hegel asserted: "I am free, on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself."¹⁹ Following Hegel, the young Karl Marx applied this maxim to man without shrinking from its glaring paradox. Denying that man was created by a God and arguing that nature should be considered a chaos out of which man could create his own body through work, he concluded that: "Since

¹⁸ RR, p. 99; EC, pp. 205-208; FL, p. 81. It would seem to be a significant distortion of Marcuse's thought to say that "morality and other forms of authority will have been dispensed with" in his utopia. Eidelberg arrives at this conclusion by attributing to Marcuse an absolutely anarchistic sentiment which the latter merely attributes to Schiller and which he accepts himself only insofar as this does not mean sacrificing rationality. Eidelberg also makes the erroneous claim that Marcuse is a "nihilist" who rejects any form of self-restraint. He apparently attempts to support this claim in part by citing Marcuse's description of the instincts as "beyond good and evil," while neglecting to mention that Marcuse thinks this instinctual amorality antithetical to freedom. Eidelberg does not distort Marcuse dishonestly in this; rather, he is confusing two issues. What he actually wants to argue is not that Marcuse has no morality, but that he has a pseudo-morality. He is disturbed by Marcuse's identification of the grounds of morality and legitimate authority with "rationality"; he does not like Marcuse's willingness to satisfy *any and all* erotic desires whenever this would be consistent with the canons of "rationality." He thinks that there are erotic desires which are intrinsically unworthy of gratification and that there must be some standard of morality which transcends Marcuse's version of reason. Finding that Marcuse does not concede this, Eidelberg carelessly jumps to the conclusion that his protagonist recognizes no limits on the instincts at all. This leads to the distortions noted and forces Eidelberg to treat Marcuse's demands for authority and morality as stupid aberrations. See Eidelberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 448-454.

¹⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 17.

for socialist man . . . the entire so-called world history is only the creation of man through human labor . . . he has evident and incontrovertible proof of his self-creation, his own formation process."²⁰ Marcuse applies the maxim to man too and thus he is unwilling to call any being free unless it can escape from "alien necessity" and "reason its own potentialities into being." He seems to accept Marx's view of nature as a chaos out of which man can form himself physically and he goes beyond Marx by adding a psychic dimension to the chaos; he says that the instincts, Eros and Thanatos, are "mutable." They are a "plastic," "malleable," substratum of being which can be shaped almost any way reason desires and man can create a new, "second nature" for himself simply by determining his instincts. All each person has to do to create himself is to decide rationally which desires and pleasures he wants to cultivate in his life, or which ones will constitute his peace and fulfillment, and secure a commitment from others not to interfere with his choices. Since autonomy is desirable, no one would be permitted to interfere with his rational choices in the new order; Marcuse argues vehemently that "no tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide which needs should be developed and satisfied."²¹

The establishment of each man as the autonomous creator of his own fulfillment does not imply that the realm of freedom will be a liberal order based on "a compromise between competitors, or between freedom and law, between general and individual interest, common and private welfare." Marcuse agrees with Marx that a society which is "shot through with a conflict at every hand among individual interests" and which employs political institutions to ensure the common good is thoroughly enslaved. Self-interest, competition, and compromise are irrational; they place unnecessary limits on man which could be eliminated by co-operation. Laws which ensure the common interest are slavish because they usurp the function of willing what men really want, thereby setting up society "as an abstraction opposed to the individual." In this, they differ fundamentally from rational authority, which only saves people from unintended blunders. Liberal individualism, interest group politics, and law as an expression of the common good therefore must be transcended before human beings can be autonomous. Liberty will be found only in a political anarchy in which men spontaneously act for the common welfare because "the interest of the whole" is "woven into the individual existence of each." Marcuse's autonomous person will not be a selfish god unto himself but a man "capable of being free with the others." If it be inquired how a collective élan can be instilled in a being who seeks pleasure for himself,

²⁰ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), pp. 293-295, 312-314.

²¹ RR, p. 9; EC, pp. 7, 12; ODM, pp. 5, 6, 18; EEL, pp. 5, 10, 11; FL, p. 7n.

Marcuse answers that it does not need to be instilled; it is already there. Eros is love; it aims to "combine organic substances into ever larger unities," to make "one out of many," to "unite men in an increasingly intimately bound mass." As genital sexuality it leads to the formation of pairs of individuals "libidinally satisfied in each other" and, as a more generalized libido, it disposes people well towards those who participate with them in the activity of gratifying the major needs of life. Collective and "highly civilized human relations" therefore are guaranteed if Eros is free to do its work.²²

If men collectively succeed in becoming the satisfied, rational, and autonomous masters of their world, they will have achieved what Marcuse calls the highest form of reason, namely, "attained and sustained fulfillment, the transparent unity of subject and object . . ." To meet the third and final condition of rational freedom, then, they will need only to reflect on what they have done and appreciate its meaning. When this is done, man will realize that "the conditions and relations of his world possess no essential objectivity independent of" himself, that the entire world is his "own doing." Being will appear to be nothing but an extension of man; it will be a "transparent unity of subject and object" in the sense that man will be able to see himself all through it. It will be a reflecting pool and, like Narcissus, whom Marcuse invokes as a symbol of happiness, man will look into that pool, see himself, and love the being that he sees. Unlike Narcissus, however, he will recognize himself in the pool and, knowing himself as the source and substance of his happiness, he will be content with his pleasure and loving self-consciousness until death releases him from tension forever.²³

As with Marcuse's definition of liberty and happiness as pleasure, some critical questions arise about these assertions to the effect that they are "reason." To subject nature, economies, and the relationships between men to rational foresight as Marcuse proposes would require a Herculean effort of social co-operation and technology. Is mankind capable of this effort? Moreover, economic and social breakdowns seem to have causes other than disorganization and ignorance; sometimes they are products of sheer human perversity. Man's perversity could not be overcome merely by preaching a new rational morality, not even under an educational dictatorship; preaching has been tried for centuries, without much success. This being so, wouldn't mankind's occasional penchant for evil make Marcuse's vision of rationality hopelessly utopian? Wouldn't it be impossible to dispense with law as a guardian of the common good, leaving only "rational authority" as a sort of law among angels? And isn't it simply a facile trick

²² RR, pp. 283-284; RT, pp. 86-87; ODM, p. 42; FL, pp. 18-20; EC, pp. 38-39, 187.

²³ RR, ix, pp. 95, 110, 113; EC, pp. 105-106, chap. vii. Marcuse hopes that death eventually will be overcome by a technological breakthrough.

to say that Eros is love and that liberated erotic men would construct a moral, collective society spontaneously? Further, what is the meaning of Marcuse's Hegelian demands for "autonomy" and a "transparent knowledge" of being as a "unity of subject and object"? Man undoubtedly can reason his "own potentialities into being" and make being an extension of his will in a metaphorical sense; he can make decisions affecting his own destiny, impose a better order on his economic and social life, and arrange and rearrange the things which he finds in existence. But he cannot escape from "alien necessity," create himself by working or by choosing his pleasures, or make the entire world his "own doing" literally. Anybody can see that man is endowed with a nature for which he is not responsible and which he does not change in any essential way merely by cultivating selected desires which first arise from the nature itself. Likewise, anybody can see that being has another source than man (even if that source is not a God), that existing things have their own structures and laws from that source, that man cannot use existing things profitably irrespective of their structures and laws, and therefore that he cannot master absolutely all the conditions which affect him.²⁴ What, then, is Marcuse's meaning, the metaphorical or the literal? If the former, what is gained by speaking as if man could remake himself and the world in his own image? What is the use of dressing commonplaces up as riddles? If the latter, couldn't one suspect Marcuse of megalomania? Finally, what assurance is there that rational control of the world, autonomy, and the unity of subject and object would make man happy? Could man be a contented Narcissus? Even if he could, should he?

Marcuse does not appear to see the difficulties inherent in his hopes for autonomy and the unity of subject and object; neither does he present proof that rational freedom would be conducive to happiness or otherwise desirable. However, he is sensitive to charges that he is utopian in his dreams of moral, communistic men rationally controlling the world and achieving "rest in fulfillment." He responds to the charges by channeling discussion in two directions. First, he says that the vision of perpetual pleasure is made to seem utopian by the painful reality of work and the "common sense" knowledge that man will have to toil all his days to make a living. He does not look into other arguments which could be based on the nature of the appetites themselves, arguments epitomized by Plato's comparison of the intemperate life to an effort to keep a leaky jar filled.²⁵ He probably would answer such objections by saying that the

²⁴ Kirilov had to commit suicide because he saw clearly that man's life is not of his own choosing. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, trans. David Magarshack (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 612-615.

²⁵ Plato, "Gorgias," 493d-494a, trans. W. D. Woodhead, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Bollingen Foundation and Pantheon Books, 1961).

jar could be kept filled by adjusting the rate of influx to the rate of draining and that the only significant question then would be how much work would be necessary to keep the two rates equal. Secondly, Marcuse sees no reason at all to doubt that people could subject the world to foresight if they wished but he does admit that human wickedness is a barrier to rationality and communism. As a Freudian, he conceives of this problem as that of man's "aggressiveness" and he knows that Freud considered aggressiveness an "indestructible feature of human nature." This led Freud to attack the ideal of a moral, collective existence in which "ill-will and hostility would disappear among men" as an "untenable illusion."²⁶ Marcuse, naturally, does not agree. He maintains that neither aggressiveness nor the necessity of work are insurmountable obstacles to freedom. He thinks that both problems have been solved in principle and that they only appear insoluble today because "common sense" has not awakened yet to the genuine possibility of a new reality.²⁷

In earlier periods of history, the problem of work originated in the fact of scarcity. The world was too poor to support an order of universal gratification and people had to work hard merely to stay alive. Dramatic improvements made in the means of production during the past few centuries have changed all this; it is not necessary for man to suffer from scarcity anymore or to permit it to dictate how he will spend his time. Labor remains a problem, however. Far from freeing man from toil, the industrial revolution chained him to the machine, robbed his work of creativity, regimented life, and forced him to work all the harder for subsistence in the system of mass production which keeps the specter of scarcity at bay. Labor is "alienated" by being coupled with these evils and it is this alienated form of work to which the modern, common-sense thinker believes man is doomed for all time. Marcuse sees another alternative. He argues that recent advances in technology have made possible a "reversal of the relation between free time and working time." Man always will have to work but automation has created a "possibility of working time becoming marginal, and free time becoming full time." It also is conceivable that the marginal work which still will be necessary no longer will be "stupefying" and "enervating." "It might be turned into "play" and a "process of creation" guided by imagination and reason. Thus, man can both escape from labor as from a painful realm of necessity and transform working time itself into a realm of freedom within the realm of necessity. Moreover, Marcuse thinks that this can be done now. He agrees with Marx that the historical realization of freedom depends on progress in technology but he does not accept the Marxist proposition that absolute material superabundance is liberty's *sine qua non*. The technological base

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, college edition, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), pp. 59-61.

²⁷ EC, pp. 3-5, 32-33, 74, 125-126, 140, 206; EL, pp. 3-4, 21; FL, pp. 62-63.

of freedom is already present and, at the expense of a decrease in productivity and the standard of living, people could abolish alienated labor and seize their liberty today, if only they would.²⁸

The problem of aggressiveness also is a historical one which Marcuse connects with the development of "repression" in human life. In the early days of scarcity, it was not possible for Eros to be gratified immediately, whenever it wished. Any person who strove for nothing but instant satisfaction rapidly found himself destroyed by a world which had not been mastered sufficiently to support universal pleasure. For the sake of continued existence, man had to learn to give up dangerous, immediate satisfactions and to accept in their stead a mixture of pain (work) and "delayed, restrained, but 'assured' pleasure." In Freudian terminology, Eros had to be "repressed," or compelled to stop living by the "Pleasure Principle" and to bow to the "Reality Principle." To this end, the ego (reason) developed out of the id as an organic function capable of probing reality to discover the useful and the harmful, society created sexual taboos, divisions of labor, and authoritative institutions to translate the useful into practice and to ban the harmful, and the superego (conscience) developed out of the ego to introject social utility into the psyche as morality. Working together, ego, superego, and society succeeded in repressing Eros and in diverting its energy into the transformation of reality through labor. Then, as reality changed, reality principles and conceptions of social utility (morality) changed. In our time, Eros is made to bow to the "Performance Principle," under which erotic energy is diverted into alienated labor and society is "stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members." The result is increasing productivity and, for this reason, people dementedly think repression, alienation, and political structures good, just as all previous peoples thought their schemes of slavery good because they made for economic progress. However, repression, work, and political authority really were good only insofar as they were rational reactions to necessity. They actually have been a heavy price to pay for progress. Man has had to sacrifice his freedom since history began and, furthermore, progress has been aggression's doorway into his affairs. It has been "the fatal dialectic of civilization" that "the very progress of civilization leads to the release of increasingly destructive forces."²⁹

This "fatal dialectic" can be understood readily if it be recalled that

²⁸ EC, vii-viii, pp. 32-33, 41-43, 78, 95, 137-143, 203-204; EL, pp. 19-21; FL, p. 4.

²⁹ EC, chaps. i-iv, especially pp. 11-16, 27-29, 32-34, 41-42, 49, 57, 81-82. In this argument, Marcuse could be mistaken for a relativist because he is a "historicist" who has morality and rationality varying between historical periods. The test of a true relativist, however, is whether he rejects the possibility of a *summum bonum* which can be discovered by man. This Marcuse does not do; his highest good is freedom. He calls earlier historical periods moral and rational only when he measures them against their capabilities and he condemns them when he compares

man is a unity of opposites, Eros and Thanatos. These instincts are not friendly to one another. They are in conflict, and the "fate of human freedom and happiness is fought out and decided in the struggle of the instincts – literally a struggle of life and death." Eros gains the upper hand in the struggle and for a time it even harnesses Thanatos to the service of progress; the superego and society rely on man's fear of Thanatos to assure his obedience to socially useful norms and Thanatos also provides the destructive energy man uses in "attacking, splitting, changing, [and] pulverizing things and animals (and, periodically, also men)" for the sake of economic advancement. However, Eros is being repressed all the while it controls Thanatos in this manner and "the perpetual restrictions on Eros ultimately weaken the life instincts and release the very forces against which they were 'called up' – those of destruction." The newly invigorated Thanatos then oversteps the bounds set for it by Eros and goes on a destructive rampage which threatens civilization. It also "strives to gain ascendancy over the life instincts" and accomplishes this to the extent that, in the era of the Performance Principle, the "second nature" of man itself is stabilized in an aggressive form. Freud's pessimism about the possibility of freedom thus seems to be justified, for the moment. Because they must repress Eros in favor of the Performance Principle, people today appear to be hopelessly aggressive, whereas liberty requires the full flowering of Eros as love. Freedom can be saved, however, because there is no reason why the Performance Principle should be any more permanent a fixture in life than work. Marcuse asserts that "technical progress has reached a stage in which reality no longer need be defined by the debilitating competition for social survival and advancement" and that the tenure of the Performance Principle in the superego therefore could be ended immediately. This would bring about a change "in the infrastructure of man," a rebellion "in the very nature, the 'biology' of the individual," for Eros would be liberated from repression and it could subjugate Thanatos again. Man then would be "no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life." He would be ready for freedom.³⁰

them with the idea of freedom. — It is true that Marcuse is a "historicist." Like Marx's doctrine of historical materialism, his argument contains a theory of how "consciousness is conditioned by social existence" throughout history. However, he believes that the social determination of consciousness is slavery and that man somehow will free himself of this bane in the new order. "Historicism" does not lead inevitably to relativism. On the contrary, most "historicists" have used their doctrines to discredit previous versions of the one truth in order to clear the stage for their own. This is what Marcuse himself does, as will be seen below. See RR, pp. 312-322, and compare MacIntyre (*op. cit.*, p. 15) and Eidelberg (*op. cit.*, p. 448).

³⁰ EC, pp. 3, 40-41, 47-49, 76, 79, 140; ODM, p. 18; EL, pp. 5, 21; FL, pp. 4, 6-8, 45, 56.

It should not escape notice that Marcuse's treatment of the problems of work and aggression envisages a rebellion in the nature of man. In fact, even more is involved; Marcuse is announcing a fundamental revolution of being. His argument, in effect, is that up until now there have been three "ontological" realities, i.e., a principle of goodness which draws man towards freedom and happiness (Eros), a principle of evil which leads him towards misery and the void (Thanatos), and a niggardly universe which has made labor necessary. Labor has obstructed the good principle and helped the bad throughout history, thus inflicting evil on man and lending credence to the accusation that visions of happiness are utopian. Now, however, work has ceased to be an ontological necessity and being finally can be set aright. Mankind's problems truly have been solved at the most profound level possible.

To be sure, this raises a question. Men still are unfree. Even though all ontological difficulties have been surmounted, human life lags behind its potentialities. Why? Since ontological necessity no longer is involved, the only explanation which Marcuse finds conceivable is that some arbitrary social practice is to blame; the perpetuation of slavery must be the product of "a specific historical organization of human existence." The culprit is "domination," social control "exercised by a particular group or individual in order to enhance itself in a privileged position." With an eye on Freud's myth of the "primal horde" and Marxist sociology, Marcuse speculates that domination probably always has gone hand-in-hand with social organization under the Reality Principle. Whether it has or not is of no consequence, however, for the question is whether it does today and Marcuse is certain that those who benefit from the Performance Principle in our age continue to enforce it. Using the subtle instruments of manipulation mentioned earlier, today's rulers freeze the Performance Principle in the superego of the masses. Then they exploit the prodigious labors which result and reward their subjects with the false pleasures offered by tons of wasteful gadgets and the "entertainment" purveyed by television. They also unleash the aggressiveness of their slaves on racial minorities at home and whole populations abroad. Thus, they deny true happiness to all mankind for their own profit. This is the most heinous crime against humanity in a history which is nothing but a record of crime against humanity, for surely it is more evil to make people unhappy when felicity is within their grasp than when it is not. The crime threatens to grow in magnitude, too; as long as Eros remains repressed, Thanatos goes about like a devil released from Hell after the Millennium, making the nuclear incineration of mankind a distinct, terrifying possibility. The enormity of these evils and the urgency of the situation are what justify the drastic revolutionary measures which Marcuse recommends.³¹

³¹ EC, pp. 4, 33-34, 54-55, 81-85, 91-92, 215-216; ODM, ix-x, xvii, pp. 3, 5, 9, 11, 23-24, 40, 49; FL, pp. 44ff.

By singling out "domination" as the only remaining cause of human misery, Marcuse returns to one of the weakest links in his argument; it was stated previously that he does not even attempt to prove empirically that domination exists. It is clear now why he does not feel obliged to be empirically rigorous; his belief that the order of being no longer makes unhappiness necessary drives him inexorably to the conclusion that something must be wrong with society. Rather than requiring proof, the proposition that people are manipulated would seem self-evident to anyone of Marcuse's persuasion and in need of only a few illustrations at most. However, those who are sceptical of Marcuse's ideas about being would not feel the same logical compulsions as he and would prefer an independent demonstration of his power elite thesis. Indeed, if no such demonstration were possible, the ontological arguments themselves could be called into question. One legitimately could wonder whether Marcuse had described the order of being and its historical changes accurately if no system of manipulation could be found and existing evils still did not disappear.

There are additional grounds for doubting Marcuse's ontology, of course. What real evidence is there that the necessity of work ever could be so reduced as to make possible a transition from the Performance Principle to the Pleasure Principle? Marcuse attempts to prove that this and other wonderful things could happen by appealing vaguely to "trends," "tendencies," and historical "possibilities" which he sees and, in doing so, he succeeds in proving nothing. He never says how "trends" are to be identified and he never tells why they can or necessarily must be carried through to their logical conclusions.³² In holding that work can be eliminated by automation, he also may be displaying a naive faith in the power of machines to do all the jobs which society ever would want or need to have done. On the whole, his predictions about the abolition of labor may amount to no more than wishful thinking. They also are vulnerable to the objection that they do not demonstrate that an ontological revolution would occur even if labor could be abolished. Work may have nothing significant to do with the ontological situation of man, whether that situation is defined by Eros and Thanatos or by other factors, and no one is obliged to accept Marcuse's unsupported assurances in the matter. Further, it still has not been proved that Eros and Thanatos are the fundamental elements of human existence and much less has any evidence been adduced to show that they play the roles which Marcuse attributes to them. Thus far, the story of the two instincts seems as arbitrary and mythical as a Manichean demonology. It also performs the same ideological functions as a Manichean myth inasmuch as it interprets being as a struggle between principles of good and evil and history as a salvific process in which the miraculous outcome of the ontological struggle assures the ultimate redemption of

³² EC, pp. 5, 99, 126, 220; ODM, xi, p. 17, 219-221; EL, pp. 3-4.

man. This brings up a crucial final question. Marcuse apparently finds American democracy totally evil and abhorrent *primarily* because it does not lend itself to the erotic, rational redemption envisaged by his myth, much as if a fanatical Christian were to despise a political order because it was not the Beatific Vision. It follows that he would not be justified in judging the American order evil unless there were an adequate basis for saying that his myth identifies evil and possible goods correctly. How does Marcuse know that he understands good and evil? What are the criteria of truth to which he alludes and which have been so long in forthcoming?

To this and all the other questions and doubts which have been accumulating in the analysis Marcuse makes but one answer. He says that: "Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree; that is to say, man and nature exist in conditions of alienation, exist as 'other than they are.' Any mode of thought which excludes this contradiction from its logic is a faulty logic."³³ At first sight, this statement appears to substantiate the charges of arrogance which are brought against Marcuse; he seems to be proclaiming arbitrarily that anybody who disagrees with him is wrong. After the first anger fades, it still is difficult to see that he has made any epistemological advance; he seems to be demanding that others accept his "value-judgments" simply on faith. Closer examination, however, reveals that Marcuse has made a genuine epistemological proposition. He is saying that the evil of the existing world is known to man through *experience*. Universal alienation is not something which can be demonstrated with empirical evidence or deduced from incontestable first premises; rather, it is itself an incontestable first premise which is grasped directly through participation in being. Merely to exist under present conditions is to feel unfree. Once recognized for what it is, this experiential knowledge leads to an act of will, to a "Great Refusal to accept the rules of a game in which the dice are loaded." It also becomes the basis for all further thought. Thought becomes "negative" and deliberately is "used as a tool for analyzing the world of facts in terms of its internal inadequacy." It condemns the world rather than merely describing it and it expresses the will's yearning to escape from what it condemns. If any philosophy, psychology, or social science fails to do this, Marcuse dismisses it contemptuously as a "logic of domination."³⁴

The primary experience of alienation also points the way infallibly to humanity's final cause, for it is plain to Marcuse that happiness would be to get away from the slavery which man now experiences and to attain to some good which is "absent." This much being granted, the specific form of the absent good, erotic, rational freedom then is revealed by two activities of the mind, Phantasy and Reason. The former, Marcuse says,

³³ RR, ix.

³⁴ RR, vii-x, xiii, pp. 27, 98, 112-113, 123, 131, 321; EC, pp. 5, 101-102, 114; ODM, pp. 63, 70, 127, 137-140.

is the one mental activity of man which "remains free from the rule of the reality principle." Throughout a person's life, it "stays committed to the pleasure principle." Truth is found in this commitment to the Pleasure Principle; Marcuse states that: "As a fundamental, independent mental process, phantasy has a truth value of its own, which corresponds to an experience of its own – namely, the surmounting of the antagonistic human reality. Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into utopia by the established reality principle, phantasy insists that it must and can become real, that behind the illusion lies *knowledge*." In other words, happiness is the pleasurable, rational life about which man daydreams and man knows that he would be happy if he could experience this life in reality because he *does* experience it vicariously in his daydreams and in these dreams he *is* happy.³⁵

Reason takes a different tack; it discovers the Reasonable, or that which ought to be and which therefore is most truly Real, simply by pondering existing irrationality. In every stupid, wrong situation (or philosophy) there is a potential for rationality and justice. Reason can grasp this potential by testing experiences and ideas to see what there is in them that produces intensely alienated feelings and to see what changes would allay the feelings. For example, if Reason observes that ignorance, disorganization, amorality, competition, political institutions, work, aggressiveness, alien necessity, a world created in some image other than man's, and ideas which defend such things typically cause a sense of alienation to mount, simple means-ends analysis leads to the obvious conclusion that the opposites of these things are Real. The more blatantly "untrue," or enslaving, a mode of existence or thought is, the louder it shouts to Reason what Truth and Freedom would be. The irrational makes the Real self-evident, or as Karl Marx once said in a fit of Hegelian abstruseness: "[The fact] that the reasonable is real is demonstrated precisely in the *contradiction* of *unreasonable reality*, which in all corners is the opposite of that which it expresses and the opposite of which expresses what it is."³⁶

It is not an inconsistency in this theory that very few people ever have perceived what is supposed to be so obvious. Reason, for Marcuse, is historically conditioned; its recognition of the necessity of previous forms of historical existence has prevented it from condemning them and rising to the Real. Since history is dynamic, however, Reason is dynamic. History has altered the character of necessity and Reason no longer is fettered. It now can see the good easily and it would if the minds of the masses were not caught in the snares of modern domination. It is domination which

³⁵ RR, ix-x; EC, pp. 14, 18, 130, 135.

³⁶ RR, viii-x, pp. 11, 153; ODM, pp. 123, 127, 133, 135, 137, 138; Marx, "Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts," *Frühe Schriften*, I, ed. Hans-Joachim Lieber and Peter Furth (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag, 1962), p. 339.

explains why only a few "critical spirits" here and there actually understand what Reason should understand today. On the other hand, Reason's present potential also explains why Marcuse is so intrigued with the idea of a temporary educational dictatorship; if the Performance Principle only could be uprooted from the mass psyche, people rapidly would see the self-evident good. They could not avoid knowing the Real as they gazed upon existing unrealities. Action to realize the Real probably would not be long in following; Marx pointed out that theory becomes a force when it grips the masses. Marcuse may be relying more on this expectation than anything else in thinking that his utopian dreams can come true. He feels that the strength of will of people who understood their slavery and craved freedom would be a powerful guarantee of revolution.³⁷

Marcuse's interpreters can be forgiven for having overlooked his epistemology of ontological experience; it is not exactly an orthodox epistemology and the eye often misses what it is not expecting to see. Now that Marcuse's criteria of truth are clear, it might be surmised that his critics still would not be prepared to give up the fight. There are at least four difficulties in his epistemology. First, if it be conceded that man learns of alienation and freedom through experience, it is not evident that the myth of Eros and Thanatos could follow from the experience. Indeed, a person might feel the two instincts stirring and struggling within his soul. Beyond this, however, the history and evolution of the instincts would not be matters of direct experience. These things could be found out only by reason, if at all, and Marcuse has yet to demonstrate the validity of his reasoning. Secondly, if people knew freedom and slavery experientially and if they wanted very much to obtain freedom, there still would be no certainty that they could, especially if their dreams were intrinsically impossible of realization. To establish possibility, it is not enough to say: "Where there's a will, there's a way." Marcuse's hopes for rational communism and the abolition of labor still appear unfounded. The same is true of his paradoxical wishes for autonomy, the unity of subject and object, and an ontological revolution. Third, although it is plausible that the experience of alienation could lead to knowledge of freedom, Marcuse does not show that this is what happens necessarily. An equally possible alternative is that the mind would react to alienation by seeking refuge in self-deceiving defense mechanisms and that man really would not be happy even after possessing the objects of his dreams or instituting "rationality." Dreams, after all, are only illusions and Marcuse's Reason is only speculation on what *might* result if certain steps were taken. Conceivably, illusory pleasures could turn out to be unsatisfying realities and Reason could founder on reefs in the new order which it does not see now. Finally, it prob-

³⁷ RR, vii-ix, pp. 6-7, 25, 27, 99, 121, 125, 231, 316-319; EC, pp. 101, 129, 144, 206; ODM, chaps. v-vii: Marx: "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, Introduction," *Writings of the Young Marx*, p. 257.

ably is not possible for man to experience unfreedom. It must be admitted that experience is one thing and the description which is attached to it another. A person experiences whatever it is that he comes across but he does not experience the description of that experience; the description comes later as the man attempts to grasp what has happened to him. It follows that Marcuse does not experience alienation, but something which he chooses to call alienation. He experiences something in his own existence and this makes him call his existence unfree. But does he have an adequate reason for doing this? What reasons could there be?

One possibility which springs to mind is that Marcuse feels alienated simply because life does not offer "integral gratification." He may think existence unfree because it does not provide full satisfaction every time he desires something. If this is the case, it would appear that Marcuse's epistemology of ontological experience is not an affair of the intellect at all but, rather, one of the will. He would be attempting to validate his condemnation of the existing order not on the basis of any objective standard of good and evil which the mind could discover but on the sole ground that existence frustrates him. He would be trying to make his own will the measure of all being.

If this is what Marcuse is doing, all his intellectual constructs collapse in a heap. As far as the truth is concerned, they would not seem to be worth a moment's notice. It would be understandable that Marcuse's reasoning never appears rigorous and that one of his sympathizers could admit: "I haven't the faintest idea what he means," for the primary referents of his arguments would be found only in his will. But there is one nagging doubt which forbids that Marcuse be cast aside. How could his sympathizer add: ". . .but I have a strong feeling that he may be right"? What is there in Marcuse that produces the ambiguous feeling that he may have his finger on the truth? How could he convince anybody of anything if his work had no intellectual substance? Is he right, despite the apparent deficiencies of his epistemology? Is his epistemology really so faulty or has some mistake been made in evaluating it?

III

Actually, it would be impossible to understand Marcuse and his appeal to sensitive minds with the analytic techniques used so far. An unwarranted demand was made in the analysis, namely, that Marcuse was expected to demonstrate his "values" in terms of realities extrinsic to his soul and his fundamental experience of being. Although Marcuse's own pretensions are responsible for the error, it also was demanded wrongly that his ontological myths pertain to realities other than his experience and that their truth be measured against other standards. This has been to misconceive the nature of his thought and, perhaps, to lack insight into the phenomenon of irrationalism on the New Left, for Marcuse's "values" and his basic

doctrines are not drawn rationally from "objective" reality at all. Rather, they are groping efforts to describe his primary experience itself and wild, desperate speculations about man's past and future relationships to it. Marcuse attempts to make the content of the experience clear with analogies and symbols and whatever else is useful in communicating "non-objective" truths and then he simply guesses at the meaning which the experience has for man's place in "objective" reality. His arguments are persuasive, or at least cause feelings of uneasiness, because what they convey strikes a familiar chord in every human soul. This can be seen by retracing the path of the Marcusean spirit.

To repeat what was said earlier, what Marcuse experiences is something in his own being. In the first instance, personal existence presents itself to him as it does to all men, as a seat of consciousness within an animate body and as various on-going activities of consciousness. The conscious activity which most attracts his attention is that of the appetites, which indeed always are striving to possess their objects, except during brief periods of gratification, and which keep body and soul in a constant, discomforting tension when they are not satisfied. Marcuse describes this universally known experience of the appetites much as anybody would. However, he notices something about it which others do not seem to see. In defining human existence as the striving for pleasure, Marcuse is saying that he experiences the erotic appetites as the strongest element of consciousness. He feels the appetites to be so powerful as to dominate the soul absolutely. They are so much at the center of consciousness that they and they alone appear to make consciousness what it essentially is and, therefore, human life essentially what it is.

It could be objected here that this is to elevate the appetites to too high a rank, to a position which reason actually holds. The objection presents no obstacle to Marcuse, however, for now he can turn the tables on his interrogators and demand that they produce their evidence. What does introspection really show? Reason does seem to be directing all human activity but isn't it doing so at the behest of the appetites? The fact appears to be that even when reason represses Eros it is acting in the enlightened self-interest of the appetites. Marcuse is sure of this and, looking ahead to the new order, he says that then: "Eros redefines reason in its own terms. Reasonable is what sustains the order of gratification." When repression becomes unnecessary, reason will be nothing but the servant of Eros, which will be the undisputed sovereign of the soul. Having established the fact, Marcuse takes another step; he says that Eros rightfully is sovereign. What positive good does reason offer in defense of its claims to rule? What does reason know how to do other than to help Eros or obstruct it? What would the rule of reason mean other than permanent repression and what good is there in repression? Is it argued that reason is higher and nobler than Eros, that it orients the soul towards something which "transcends" the "base" pleasures? Then *why* is reason higher, *why* is pleasure base, and *what* is there in the soul or beyond it which is

better than erotic satisfaction? The very idea of transcendence perplexes Marcuse. It makes no sense to him, for he simply cannot see that there is anything beyond pleasure to talk about. As far as he can tell, philosophies which make "transcendence" the final cause of man give man an empty end which is "free of happiness." He can conclude only that such philosophies are crude fabrications of the superego which were designed to aid in the repression of Eros back in the days when repression was necessary.³⁸

Presumably, every human soul begins to cast about for answers to Marcuse's questions when challenged like this. It is then that the sensitive person begins to feel that Marcuse is right, for the soul suddenly discovers that Marcuse's arguments seem to ring true to its own experience. In something of a panic, the soul sees that it cannot be sure that Eros isn't truly in command. Moreover, it finds itself unsure that it knows any real transcendent good to which reason could claim to be the guide and which would justify reason's sovereignty. Religion and philosophy really may be abstractions of the superego and, meanwhile, reason does seem to spend its time figuring out ways of gratifying the appetites. It is hard to see why it shouldn't; pleasure does not seem to be such a terrible thing to want. Thus, Marcuse wins. The man who accepts the challenge to inspect his own soul and who finds that he cannot say honestly that Marcuse is wrong about spiritual experience concedes Marcuse's case. The capitulation is painful but the convert, by an effort of will, succeeds in interpreting his pain as a "bourgeois hang-up" supported by an as yet unregenerate superego. By degrees, he suppresses his "guilt-feelings" and gives himself over to the enthusiastic service of Eros.

This prepares the ground for Marcuse's next advance. It is a matter of experience that Eros is frustrated more often than not in our age. The appetites do frequently writhe in the pain of dissatisfaction. The soul which has enthroned the appetites suffers a broken heart to see this. It begins to think that man's essence (the striving for pleasure) is an enormous self-mockery; existence absurdly denies the human essence its natural rewards. To feel the soul's heart breaking and to know the pain of being mocked in one's own existence is what it is to experience alienation. The experience then leads immediately to a demand for justice. The soul insists that being be restructured to stop the crime against the human essence. Indeed, this is to make the human will the measure of all being but being *is* will, will which has been the victim of an atrocity. Why shouldn't will demand to be the measure of being if it is itself the raped and suffering essence of being? It is not fair that man should be the victim of an ontological conspiracy. Thus, the Marcusean soul resolves to revolutionize existence. It decides that there must be a new creation in which the human essence and its external supports are governed by man's will. Only by becoming his

³⁸ EC, pp. 99-102, 113-114, 192, 205; FL, pp. 30-32.

own God and remaking being according to his own idea can man become happy; this is the message in Marcuse's calls for autonomy and the unity of subject and object. But ontological revolution is still a paradoxical enterprise; how can man carry it off?

At this point, Marcuse falls victim to his own defense mechanisms and his intellectual honesty crumbles. He wants to *know* that there *can* be an end of his pain and frustration, that he *can* succeed in an apparently impossible enterprise. He does not demand to be certain of victory but he wishes to be certain that he at least has a *chance* to rebel successfully. He proceeds to create that certainty artificially. Operating speculatively, he fabricates his salvation myth with its already finished transformation of being and its one last powerful but not invincible Anti-Christ, domination, the defeat of which would usher in freedom on earth. The stories of Eros and Thanatos, work and aggression, anarchy and communism, and Phantasy and Reason all are sublimations by means of which Marcuse's unhappy consciousness arrives at the result which it desires, "proof" that there is a genuine possibility of an order of freedom. The only thing genuine about the result, however, is the wish that it be so. By accepting speculation and sublimated wishes as psychological props, Marcuse becomes just another figure in the long history of "gnosis," the spiritual disease in which pretences to knowledge become the opium of unheroic souls.³⁹

This being as it may, Marcuse still is not undone. If an ontological revolution is uncertain of accomplishment, less than ontological revolutions remain possible. If being cannot be altered, society can. It still might be possible to effect a social change which brings man closer to erotic freedom than he is now. At the present time, society does not seem to be as rationally contrived to sustain the order of gratification as it could be. People do suffer from the consequences of improvidence, competition, the Performance Principle, and aggression. They also chafe in the yoke of political authority. Why not make a revolution which institutes rational planning, shorter work weeks, co-operation, and an approximation of the Marxist principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"? Why not make a revolution which teaches man to be less aggressive by habituating him to a peaceful life and which thereby might lessen the need for political authority gradually? As Marcuse admits, the revolution would have to abrogate the so-called American freedoms and, if it took a long time to get the order of gratification established on its own feet, the American rights would have to remain suspended a long time. But why would these rights be worth having anyway in a world which lacked as much erotic freedom as possible?

³⁹ Cf. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion, The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), chaps. iv-vi; and Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery, 1968).

There could be only one reason for denying Marcuse his revolution. If the American rights were means to some good which transcends erotic freedom, then there would be no justification for destroying them in the name of Eros. The question, then, is whether there is any good higher than pleasure which the American rights do help man to obtain. Of course, if anyone said that he knew such a good, his claims would have to be subjected to as close an epistemological scrutiny as Marcuse's were. If the champion of the American freedoms hoped to dissuade Marcuseans from their revolutionism, his test would be even more severe, for he would have to appeal to the rebels as Marcuse himself does. The youth of the "now generation" seem to distrust religious and philosophic abstractions which are not subject to immediate, experiential verification. Marcuse appeals directly to experience rather than to Scripture or tired old ethical maxims and, hence, his opponents would be at a disadvantage if they could not do the same.

The situation was equally difficult in the Athens of Marcuse's arch-enemy, Plato. Plato's Socrates had to spend most of *The Republic* teaching young Athenians why they should not attempt to live like Gyges, a mythical character who, like the Marcusean free man, acquired a magic power to act out all his fantasies. Justice cannot be done to Plato's arguments in the short space remaining. However, an outline of an answer to Marcuse can be ventured.

Socrates taught his students in *The Republic* that there is something in spiritual experience which tells reason that the appetites by themselves are not the essence of consciousness and that pleasure is not the highest good. This is the experience of what Plato calls the Agathon (The Good). The experience is like that of the appetites in that the soul feels itself striving for something. However, in this case it is not the appetites which are striving, but "reason," and the soul knows that what it wants is not pleasure. Beyond this, a problem arises. The precise nature of the object which the soul does want is unclear. Socrates says: "The soul divines that it is something but is at a loss about it and unable to get a sufficient grasp of just what it is, or to have a stable trust such as it has about the rest." Socrates thus finds himself forced to speak of the Agathon indirectly by discussing its "offspring," i.e., its effects in his soul, and he remains uncertain that the object of his yearning can be possessed. Man cannot escape this uncertainty and this may be why the soul panics when Marcuse suddenly challenges it to refute pleasure as the highest good. Fortunately, the panic is unnecessary; the soul does not have to overcome its uncertainty to answer Marcuse, for the "offspring" of the experience illuminate the right way of life. The soul knows just by virtue of the "offspring" that it ought to pass its existence attempting to approach the Agathon and to possess it.

This right way of life is not inconsistent with the satisfaction of man's necessary appetites for food, clothing, shelter, and reproduction and so it is not inconsistent with pleasure. Plato concedes this by putting the crafts-

men in his polis. However, it is impossible for the Platonic soul to allow itself to be ruled by Eros (and so the craftsmen who symbolize the necessary appetites do not govern the polis). As compared with the Agathon, the objects of the appetites acquire the character of unrealities for the Platonic man. They seem to be mere shadows, illusions, and substanceless wisps which are not worth the while of the man who yearns for The Good. A man could gorge himself on them and never be happy, for they never would satisfy the longing of reason to know the Agathon and thus would not fill up the abiding emptiness in his soul. To permit the soul to be ruled by Eros, therefore, would be to commit it to unfulfilling unrealities (*doxa*). It would be to offer the soul gall when it was thirsty and narcotics when it was hungry; it would be to condemn the soul to the self-mockery which Marcuse himself despises. There is a good reason why the Marcusean convert to Eros initially is pained by his choice; far from being afflicted with "bourgeois hang-ups," his soul is recoiling from what it somehow knows to be its own assassination by suffocation in nauseating, inconsequential *doxa*. It follows that erotic, rational freedom would not be true happiness and that reason ought to be sovereign, the better to permit man to seek the Agathon. It follows too that true freedom would not be the rule of Eros but the rule of reason.

It is necessary to turn to Aristotle for enlightenment on what all this means for the American freedoms. Aristotle argues that the life of reason recommended by Plato requires choice. Since man is uncertain as to how he should approach the Agathon (or the nous, the ground of being) in his actions, he must deliberate about the matter from case to case and then do what reason tells him is best. Although the American rights do not guarantee that citizens will be so reasonable, they at least provide a context in which men *can* deliberate and act in this manner. This is why the rights are so sacred and why it would be folly to abolish them with the intention of instituting rational, erotic freedom.⁴⁰

It will not be denied here that the American order may be in need of reform or that its Performance Principle and other principles of organization may inflict unnecessary suffering on men. Neither will it be denied

⁴⁰ The materials drawn upon for this skeletal argument are as follows: Plato, *The Republic*, 477a-480a, 505e, 506d-618d, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1138b-1145a, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Library of Liberal Arts, 1962); Voegelin, *Order and History*, III, *Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), chap. iii; and Voegelin, "Was ist Politische Realität," *Anamnesis, Zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik* (München: Piper, 1966), pp. 283-315. To some it may be surprising that Plato and Aristotle are used to defend the American liberties. It is recognized here that there are opposing interpretations of the views of these thinkers on the question of "liberty." Suffice it to say here that, if the two were dyed-in-the-wool aristocrats, no one is obliged to accept them on every point because he accepts them on one.

that the American order occasionally perpetrates terrible injustices against various groups; it would be surprising if this were not the case. From time to time, the prudential soul could be persuaded to suspend the American freedoms as a means to the eradication of such injustices. However, the prudent individual would know that it would be preferable, if at all possible, to carry out reform without ever denying Americans the good which their rights safeguard. He would not decide to suspend the rights lightly to achieve a good which was not worth the evil inherent in dictatorship. And he never would accept Marcuse's arguments for dictatorship. Marcuse's critics are right. In proposing to force men to be erotically and rationally free, he actually is proposing to establish a tyranny in which every human soul would be destroyed with unnourishing spiritual food.⁴¹

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