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## Hidden Trends: Reason, Renunciation and Liberation in Marcuse's Appropriation of Hegel and Freud

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**Abstract** *In Herbert Marcuse's work on Hegel and Freud one sees some interesting parallels. Although writing in different eras and on different subjects, according to Marcuse both come to an impasse between gratification and pleasure on one hand, and societal progress on the other. This article will offer a brief examination of how Marcuse uses these two authors in his own writings on subject formation and what he has to say about the possibility of overcoming this historical impasse.*

### Introduction

According to Herbert Marcuse much of modern thought has posited a conflict between pleasure and reason in which, in the interest of progress, pleasure is relegated to a supporting role, continuously left unrealized, forever deferred. This trend is apparent in both the psycho-social development of the individual as well as in the historical emergence of the species. Thus reason, moderation, renunciation and sacrifice become the dominant motifs in subject formation while pleasure and gratification are pushed to the historical sidelines—beneficial, perhaps, to the general well-being of the individual, but certainly not necessary for social, economic or political progress.

Marcuse explores these themes in the works of Sigmund Freud and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the subjects of two of his most influential books, *Eros and Civilization* and *Reason and Revolution* respectively. Although the concerns of Hegel and Freud diverge greatly—Hegel's being the movement of an abstract subject in history while Freud's focus was on the development of the individual psyche—in each we see an emphasis on renunciation and deferral; on individual sacrifice and on social demands haunted by a sense of pessimism about the prospect of happiness or gratification. In Freud's theory of instincts, for example, this is the process in which the subject has to continuously curb its natural inclinations in the name of progress and work; in other words, in order to build a society. In Hegel, the subject—initially an abstract entity—in the name of reason continuously

strives to master its object, all externality. In both of these cases the renunciation of pleasure is paramount.

In both Freud and Hegel Marcuse sees a subject utilizing reason in the interest of mastery. A component of this movement of reason is its engagement in a principle of 'identity' in which all objects are submitted, categorized and classified under general concepts so that all can be fit into one unitary schematic with the subject at the apex; the object is the intellectual activity of the subject (Marcuse, 1974, pp.21-54; Marcuse, 1999, p.93; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, pp.1-34; Adorno, 2003, pp.3-57).<sup>1</sup> This classificatory or 'identity' thinking, in the interest of emancipation, aims to make all identical to itself, to bring cognition in line with the mind's own internal logic and the maintenance of the system is what protects the power of the individual over a disorganized nature. Anything which escapes identification is perceived as a risk of pulling us back into the pre-conceptual chaos of the natural world. 'Pleasure' and 'gratification' are digressions for they necessitate either submission to an externality over which the subject is powerless or immersion into an immediacy that is potentially destructive, both cases as dangerous as the Sirens' song. Marcuse traces this back to Plato who, long before Kant's wish for a "self-directed" agent, free from the sway of external forces, argued for the supremacy of reason over the "lower appetites" as the sole pursuit of appetite satisfaction leaves us as slaves to nature. Even in ancient Athens, reason was tied to repression. And

<sup>1</sup> This is also central to the work of Marcuse's former colleagues, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno

while Plato pointed to the sky and Aristotle peered at the ground, he too tied reason to domination, for in Aristotle, the work of reason is understood as ordering and classifying (Marcuse, 1974, pp.110-111).

Rather than seeing this divide as a permanent fixture, inspired by Marx, Marcuse reads it as actually an aspect of class society and as such there exists a potential for its undoing. Although the works of Hegel and Freud are grim with regards to the individual in both of their works Marcuse traces a possibility for a different historical phase in which the antinomies between reason and pleasure would not be so vast. Although this paper pays only minimum attention to the class character of subject formation, what is important to keep in mind is that if this is the case then there at least exists a historical possibility for the reorientation of these antinomies, one neither Hegel nor Freud would have anticipated. This is not a simple synthesis of but an opened call return to sensuousness, play, corporeality and creativity. Marcuse does not draw a blueprint for this changed orientation of the subject, he merely demonstrates its potential, using the works of Hegel and Freud as a point of new departure. Thus Marcuse's relationship to each of these thinkers is threefold; he begins by demonstrating their influence over his thought, then turns to a criticism of their work and thirdly winds up surpassing them—not in rejection but in a manner which directly unfolds from the liberating tendencies which Marcuse sees in their work.

Finally, the reader should bear in mind that this paper is not a comprehensive or critical engagement with the works of Hegel or Freud directly, not with the traditions—German Idealism and Psychoanalysis—of which they stand at the pinnacle. Rather, its intentions are vastly more modest; its hope, merely to offer an introduction to the thought of Herbert Marcuse focussing particularly on his relationship to Hegel and Freud—the manner in which he appropriates their work, his criticism of it and finally, his discovery of hidden trends in each which could point to liberating tendencies in the works of Hegel and Freud, beyond which either envisioned.

## Hegel, Reason and Freedom

Hegel believed that philosophy was shaped by contradictions of human history; mind and matter, soul and body, etc. Picking up from Kant, the first concept Hegel re-examined dialectically was 'reason'. Similar to Kant he made a distinction between 'understanding'—which for Hegel meant common sense, immediate, undialectical reflection—and 'reason', which is speculative thought, dialectical knowledge. In other words 'understanding' is the everyday sort of thinking which an individual employs to make sense of and navigate the world. It is a 'common sense' understanding of the world which appears immediately logical. The world of understanding is governed by the law of identity in which all objects can be sorted and categorized (Horkheimer

and Adorno, 2002, pp.1-34). Marcuse writes that "Common sense mistakes the accidental appearance of things for their essence, and persists in believing that there is an immediate identity of essence and existence" (Marcuse, 1999, p.45). Understanding is mired in immediacy, never able to penetrate the surface of phenomena and ask, for example, why a particular phenomenon arose historically. 'Reason', in Marcuse's reading of Hegel, aims to overcome this barrier. The reconciliation of essence and existence can come about only through the conscious deployment of reason, the primary condition of which is the abandonment of immediate, everyday 'common sense'. This is a form of thinking which strives to compare the surface appearance of things with their 'essence' or truer form, often understood as possibility or potentiality—the manner in which objects would appear under an ideal condition. Marcuse describes this speculative thinking as a thinking which "conceives 'the intellectual and material world' not as a totality of fixed and stable relations, but 'as a becoming, and its being as a product and a producing'" (Marcuse, 1999, p.46); as Marcuse writes, "the struggle against common sense is the beginning of speculative thinking, and the loss of everyday security is the origin of philosophy" (Marcuse, 1999, p.48).

In a sense, the first moment of reason is always the distrust of the given state of things. Ever since Plato the 'Idea' has been a critical concept, again denoting the real as (as yet) untrue. But for Hegel there is no realm of truth beyond the given in a mystical sense, so the idea is the "actual and man's task is to live in its actuality"—the Idea as a transformative imperative (Marcuse, 1999, p.162). Therefore in Hegel the adequate form of the idea is the unity of cognition and practice. According to Marcuse Hegel was never able to faithfully uphold this and in the end becomes ensconced in a realm of pure theory, but this kernel is crucial to Marcuse's thought.

For Hegel the goal of reason is freedom, but a freedom residing on a mastery of all externality. Freedom presupposes the subject's ability to unify subject and object, to develop the full potentialities of both. Hegel claims that the empirical principle retained in Kant still accepted objects in their given state. Thus, in Kant reason is limited to the subjective realm alone, powerless over the external world—hence, 'unfree'. For Hegel the human subject alone is able to transform objectives and external conditions which stand opposed to the subject, into elements which are a medium for the subject's own development; the subject "brings the truth into the world, and with it is able to organize the world in conformity with reason" (Marcuse, 1999, p.39). Hegel's subject, according to Marcuse, is not the individual consciousness observing the world, but an abstract subject transforming it. It is the subject which brings the object to its potentiality in history. Thus 'Reason' is that which brings together subject and object in the Absolute. The self-conscious subject is a thinking subject and thinking consists of the subject recognizing the objective world as actually a subjective one. 'Thinking' is an attribute of the independent subject, one who is in existence with others, but has

mastered all externality. In short, a subject who is self-sufficient is one who is thinking and free (Marcuse, 1999, p.118).

All conflicts for Hegel, all forms of alienation including the alienation from nature took the general form of subject vs. object.<sup>2</sup> Nature is always other, always finite; nature does not possess self-consciousness and thus cannot reach its potentialities through its own power. Again, the driving force of history is the human mind, actively and consciously transforming nature, making it into its truer form, which according to Marcuse, means taking nature out of the realm of pure objectivity and bringing it into that of the subject (Marcuse, 1999, p.140, p227). Nature is freed from its "blind necessity" by the subject. Marcuse writes:

History, in turn, is the long road of mankind to conceptual and practical domination of nature and society, which comes to pass when man has been brought to reason and to a possession of the world as reason (Marcuse, 1999, p.168).

This means that nature only achieves its truth (the realization of its latent potentialities) once it enters history, once it has been worked on and brought into a cognitive identity with the subject.

This should not imply that there exists a prior separation between the human subject and the natural world for the subject is a part of nature and nature comes to be an object which can be identified as such only through the mediation of the subject. Neither 'subject' nor 'nature' are to be assumed or taken as ontologically stable categories. The subject consistently constitutes itself as over and opposed to nature, which in turn is progressively reduced to the mere stuff of domination. Therefore, my framing of the human/nature dialectic as an historical fixture is not meant to imply that it is a unidirectional movement which acts as some sort of philosophical foundation. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno point out in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* the subject only constitutes its unity through the continuous posing of the multiplicity of nature as its antithesis (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.38). Thus this relationship has been paradoxical as on one hand the subject strives for unity in thought, and yet in doing posits a duality between itself and nature which intensifies. Pursuing a similar theme in *Reason and Revolution* Marcuse writes:

The process of life, however, consists in continuously drawing these external conditions into the enduring unity of the subject. The living being maintains itself as a self by mastering and annexing the manifold of determinate conditions it finds, and by bringing all that is opposed to itself into har-

mony with itself. The unity of life, therefore, is not an immediate and 'natural' one, but the result of a constant active overcoming of everything that stands against it. It is a unity that prevails only as the result of a process of 'mediation' between the living subject as it is and its objective conditions. The mediation is the proper function of the living self as an actual subject, and at the same time it *makes* the living self and actual subject (Marcuse, 1999, p.38).

In this whole, all alienation is both justified and cancelled; the absolute idea represents both the culmination of desire and the redemption of suffering and misery. In Marcuse's words, "[Hegel's] *Phenomenology of Spirit* unfolds the structure of reason as the structure of domination—and as the overcoming of domination". In this movement, consciousness is constituted through both interaction with nature and by encountering other consciousnesses. In the end, these antagonisms are reconciled, but during the process, freedom is constituted through fear for one's own ego (Marcuse, 1974, pp.113-118).

Ever more repressive and alienating forms of domination come about to protect us from slipping back under the influence of nature—for as a species we collectively remember its uncertainty, its terror and wish to keep ourselves firmly ensconced as masters—just as the bourgeois mentality encourages us to come out from under the influence of others, to be 'free'. Yet, just as was the case with the independent bourgeois entrepreneur, this freedom is illusory, for we are still prostrating ourselves, not to another, but to the totality of the logical whole. In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse writes:

The science of nature develops under the technological a priori which projects nature as potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organization. And the apprehension of nature as (hypothetical) instrumentality precedes the development of all particular technical organization (Herbert Marcuse, 1991, p.163).

And later, "The scientific method which led to the ever-more-effective domination of nature thus came to provide the pure concepts as well as the instrumentalities for the ever-more-effective domination of man by man through the domination of nature" (Marcuse, 1991, p.158).

'Nature' is a cipher for chaos, suffering and uncertainty. Ever more repressive and alienating forms of domination come about to protect us from slipping back under the influence of nature—for as a species we collectively remember its uncertainty, its terror and wish to keep ourselves firmly ensconced as masters. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, close friends and colleagues of Marcuse, wrote, "It is the identity of mind and its correlative, the unity of nature, which subdues the abundance of qualities. Nature, stripped of qualities becomes the chaotic stuff of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes a mere having, an abstract

<sup>2</sup> This in fact is the general schematic of all European philosophy from Descartes on, that, "Man's knowledge and will had been pushed into a 'subjective' world, whose self-certainty and freedom confronted an objective world of uncertainty and physical necessity" (Marcuse, 1999, p.36). For Hegel, only the most universal and abstract concepts could make sense of this divide. This is because the subject can overcome its particularity through its mediation of the objective world which at first appears external to it.

identity” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.6). Human beings purchase their power at the cost of estrangement from this nature, and here lies the singular distinction of Enlightenment, the logical unity or *logos* of nature on one side, and the realm of human individuals on the other. The more congealed nature becomes as a concept, the farther removed from it we find ourselves.

Part and parcel of this logic, reason must be consistently steered away from temptation. In “On Hedonism” Marcuse argues that in the history of philosophy pleasure has always been relegated to an inferior role. ‘Happiness’ and ‘progress’ are posed as mutually exclusive. Reason becomes antagonistic toward those faculties, such as pleasure, which are purely receptive.<sup>3</sup> In Hegel’s dialectic, fulfillment is in absolute knowledge, in the final reconciliation of subject and object. Hegel emphatically denied that the satisfaction of individual happiness would be a component of reason. He expected it to be quite the opposite in fact as the tragedy of late modernity is that knowledge of the whole—of its past and its repression; its bodily suffering, its unfulfilled desires, its potential and its inadequacies—is not conducive to happiness. This knowledge often has more akin to misery (Marcuse, 1974, pp.99-104). Progress is such that, as Hegel once wrote, “The History of the World is not the theatre of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages in it” (Hegel, 2001, p.41).<sup>4</sup> Hegel saw human history as burdened with this misfortune and argued that individuals must be sacrificed for the sake of the universal, for “the progress of reason realizes itself against the happiness of individuals” (Marcuse, 1988b, p.160). Hegel rejected eudæmonism, the centering of ethical life around the happiness of the individual as this principle is antithetical to historical progress. In happiness, the individual acquiesces to the present conditions—the realm of mere ‘appearance’, ruled by immediacy and ‘common sense’—reveling in the moment, thereby halting movement. In pleasure, the subject is not master over the object but bound to it, under its spell.

The attainment of pleasure tends to be understood as available to us solely through objects, products and conditions which are available today, and always through the marketplace. Pleasure no longer points to or suggests that other, transcendent possibilities. Other social or political arrangements might perhaps be even more conducive to a truly pleasurable life. The current conception of pleasure freezes us in our immediacy. Our subjective pursuit of pleasure employs our faculty of reason only to aid us in determining the most efficient means to maximize the fulfillment of our desires and virtually ignores any question pertaining to the

3 This is not unique to Hegel. Kant rejects pleasure as something contingent and contrary to “the autonomy of the individual”; Fichte called pleasure “involuntary” and merely a result of the conjunction of the instincts and the external world, in either case, in pursuit of pleasure, individuals are not being true to themselves (Marcuse, 1988b, p.181).

4 Compare this with Freud: ““One feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be ‘happy’ is not included in the plan of ‘Creation’” (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*).

objects of pleasure themselves. Hedonism errs in accentuating the subjective side of happiness; it offers no critical evaluation of the objects of happiness, nor of the labour processes which produce such objects, not to mention the social structure which encourages the desire for said objects. In other words, hedonism champions happiness but does not challenge its content.

Hedonism, Marcuse reminds us, arose in slave societies when there was a recognized division between slaves and free people, making plainly obvious the distinction between labour and happiness as each concept was embodied by a different social class. For that incredibly small strata of the population for whom happiness was attainable, their conception of happiness was quite a beautiful thing; ‘eudemonism’, aiming to ground ethical life in a version of happiness which goes far beyond the limited moments of personal enjoyment we term ‘happiness’ today and was understood as a much larger philosophic principle (Marcuse, 1988b, pp.172-173). It articulated an allowance for a speculative way of life relatively autonomous of the dictates of production or the labour process, free from society’s narrow focus on progress or survival.

The middle class of modernity is simultaneously slave and patrician, producer and consumer, straddles this divide, obscuring the boundary between toil and happiness. In industrial society the objects of happiness have been rendered into those which can be achieved through the labour process. This loss of the distinction between labour and happiness restricted it to consumption. Alongside this reason has become instrumental, a subjective faculty which can be wielded in simply “choosing among given possibilities” (Marcuse, 1988b, pp.172-173). Today we are all free, but our ‘freedom’ is narrowed into channels which service the established whole (Marcuse, 1988b, pp.169-172).

Although Marcuse is critical of Hegel in that he warns that any notion of progress which subsumes individuals entirely into the tides of history has its own imbedded authoritarian impulse, he does not want to go entirely to the opposing pole. Hedonism, in other words, is not false because it encourages individuals to seek happiness, for if that truly were the case individuals would be in constant rebellion against the labour process. In industrial society sensuality, not reason, is the source of happiness. Hedonism grasps this; this is its truth. However, the falsity of hedonism is that it does nothing to negate the root causes of suffering in antagonistic society, as reason—in a Hegelian sense—does. Thus, it accepts antagonism (Marcuse, 1974, pp.161-172).

So the real question, for Marcuse is to choose neither happiness nor reason as this very dichotomy itself is a product of antagonistic social relations. In other words, if the hedonistic impulse could be rechanneled against societal antagonisms, rather than being contrary to reason it could be reason’s ally. Thus the happiness of all individuals, suggests Marcuse, could be seen as the most ‘reasonable’ of requests and hedonism the most radical of

political critiques.

## Freud, Pleasure and Renunciation

In Marcuse's appropriation of Freud's theory of instincts a similar process is at work in that the subject has to continuously and repetitiously curb its supposed 'natural' inclinations in the name of progress. In Freud, the instinctual drives which blindly grope for immediate gratification come into conflict with the material necessities and conditions of the natural world; the unfettered fulfillment of the basic human instincts is incommensurate with the requirements of civilization. In "On Hedonism", an earlier piece, Marcuse writes that pleasure is a moral problem in that it pertains to a 'rightly' ordered life. In maturity the interests of the general and the particular are meant to be coterminous. When this is not the case morality is the expression of this gap (see Horkheimer, (1995), pp.15–47), for society forbids the gratification of needs which threaten to shatter the whole. Early in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse writes:

According to Freud, the history of man is the history of his repression. Culture constrains not only his societal but also his biological existence, not only parts of the human being but his instinctual structure itself. However, such constraint is the very precondition of progress. Left free to pursue their natural objectives, the basic instincts of man would be incompatible with all lasting association and preservation: they would destroy even where they unite (Marcuse, 1974, p.11).

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In Freud, the two primary instincts are that of Eros, rechanneled into the impulse to create ever more complex social systems, and the death drive<sup>5</sup>, the compulsion to return to a simpler state. Eros is the creator, the unifier.<sup>6</sup> There is some overlap between the two as both aim at reducing external stimuli—or at the very least keeping it constant. Thus the instincts are fundamentally conservative, struggling to maintain the inertial unity of the individual—a sort of equilibrium that we have been forced to abandon through our

5 Sometimes called 'Thanatos' by others.

6 In his "Philosophical Interlude" midway through *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse writes that, "The sex instincts are life instincts: the impulse to preserve and enrich life by mastering nature in accordance with the developing vital needs is originally and erotic impulse" (Marcuse, 1974, pp.26-27). Also see Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

encounters with the external world. In the "Philosophical Interlude", Marcuse adds to this, stressing again that civilization began with the suppression of instincts; first, the sex instinct, whose inhibition enables the expansion of social groups, and secondly, the death instincts, whose inhibitions refocuses energy on the mastery of nature (Marcuse, 1974, p.106). Growth is paradoxically coupled with a persistent drive to return to the serenity of the womb. In attempting to achieve the Nirvana principle, the psyche moves even farther from it. In short, a repression of the instincts underlies all historical forms of the reality principle; civilization progresses through organized domination.

In Freudian terms the pleasure principle—the unsublimated gratification of instinctual drives—is transformed into the reality principle, the principle that governs the normal, progressive functioning of society. The reality principle, although it may appear as opposed to the pleasure principle, emerges out of it as the instinctually constituted individual learns to renounce immediate gratification in exchange for delayed, but perhaps further secured, gratification (Marcuse, 1974, p.13); both principles interpenetrate and modify each other and this complex, instinctual tapestry is the fount of human culture (Marcuse, 1974, p.13). Marcuse writes:

The scope of man's desires and the instrumentalities for their gratification are thus immeasurably increased, and his ability to alter reality consciously in accordance with "what is useful" seems to promise a gradual removal of extraneous barriers to his gratification. However, neither his desires nor his alteration of reality are henceforth his own: they are now "organized" by his society. And this "organization" represses and transubstantiates his original instinctual needs. If absence from repression is the archetype of freedom, then civilization is the struggle against this freedom (Marcuse, 1974, p.14).

This whole process leads to the development of memory, judgment, and attention—in short, the development of the subject. All mental apparatus, with the exception of *phantasy*<sup>7</sup> which remains dedicated to pleasure, become geared toward reality principle; it is the guarantor of the subject's continued existence, the cost of which is a partial sacrifice of the self.

This mechanics of this move from the pleasure principle to the reality principle occurs due to the blind and unconscious bundle of drives, Freud's 'id', organizes an ego, whose job—like a toe testing the bath water—is to explore reality and ensure the continued existence of the subject. The id is the oldest portion of the psyche and is the seat of the primary instincts; it knows no morality<sup>8</sup> and has no interest in self-preservation. The id strives only for

7 More on this below

8 It should be noted that morality is tied to the third component of the psyche, the 'superego' which is partially the internalization of social norms and values. As the present discussion is only concerned with the tension at the heart of

gratification in its most immediate sense, no matter how destructive the consequences. In encountering the external world—the world of pain; of misery and starvation—the compulsion to seek out immediate gratification can prove harmful. The ego protects the id from annihilation by re-orienting the instincts toward different objects, objects in which the conflict between the id and the external world can be minimized. Thus pleasure is not eliminated, merely modified into socially progressive forms.

In Freud early human society was ruled by the father who had a monopoly on Eros—meaning, the women of the clan as they were considered the objects of pleasure.<sup>9</sup> The father, thus, also mediated the death instinct by blocking the return to the tranquility of the womb. Marcuse writes that, “On the basis of renunciation, Eros begins its cultural work of combining life into ever larger units”; aim-inhibited love, affection, exogamy (Marcuse, 1974, pp.62-63, 79). This society was characterized by an unequal distribution of pleasure and pain, rational in the sense that the father ensured the propagation of the life of the clan. The father set the precedent of curbing the instincts to guarantee the continued existence of the whole. According to Marcuse, he does the work of Eros, not only by suppressing the death instinct but by curbing both into socially constructive endeavours.

In the first act of historical liberation the father is challenged by the sons who both hate and wish emulate him and this band of brothers establishes a new order after his assassination. For a brief time after this regicidal/patricidal act the instincts flow more freely. However, the sons feel guilt because of their crime and repression comes about to safeguard society against slipping back into the chaos of prehistory. The father’s monopolization of pleasure becomes the basis for all later taboos. With or without him, the work of the father is done, in the prohibitions on Eros and aggression, in guilt and progress (Marcuse, 1974, pp.62-63, 79). A new order is established to once again protect the survival of the whole and the rule of the dead father is deified; his omnipotence returns as monotheism. Marcuse writes:

The overthrow of the king-father is a crime, but so is his restoration—and both are necessary for the progress of civilization. The crime against the reality principle is redeemed by the crime against the pleasure principle: redemption thus cancels itself. The sense of guilt is sustained in spite of repeated and intensified redemption: anxiety persists because the crime against the pleasure principle is not redeemed. There is guilt over a deed that has not been accomplished: liberation (Marcuse, 1974, p.68).

In re-establishing the order of the father and in his deification the

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subject formation I will not venture into a detailed discussion of the structure of Freud’s tripartite psyche.

9 For a more detailed discussion of this in Freud see his *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*.

domination-liberation-domination dialectic is set in motion. In a dual sense, for the sons the pleasure principle becomes a source of both anxiety and terror and every successive stage of domination takes an ever more insulating attitude toward pleasure, until finally, in our era, a shift in the instinctual relations themselves comes about (Marcuse, 1974, pp.63-67). The more progress, the more guilt—as can be seen in both Freud’s theory of instincts and Hegel’s conception of subject formation—as there is guilt attached to both the revolutionary act, the murder of the father as well as the reinstatement of his power; a betrayal of their revolutionary ideals (Marcuse, 1974, pp.77-80).<sup>10</sup>

Due to the enormous amount of progress that is enjoyed in the late industrial era the various means in which the instincts are curbed appear rational, so much so that today the life and death instincts no longer seem at odds. Marcuse writes:

...the instinctual energy thus withdrawn does not accrue to the (unsublimated) aggressive instincts because its social utilization (in labour) sustains and even enriches the life of the individual. The restrictions imposed upon the libido appear as the more rational, the more universal they become, the more they permeate the whole society. They operate on the individual as external objective laws and as internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the ‘conscience’ and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality and fulfillment (Marcuse, 1974, p.45).

This move is so totalizing that it in fact no longer registers as repression but as the objectively determined, ‘normal’, or ‘common sense’—in so far as nuclear armament, mass poverty and environmental degradation, to name but a few, are ‘normal’ or ‘common sense’—order of the social world; its rationalization can be shown empirically, in the material comforts we experience every day, and its unitary schematic expressed in the language of scientific rationality appears theoretically sound. In modernity the overabundance of means and objects give repressive society the power to regulate enjoyment as never before; an entire coercive apparatus exists to ensure that enjoyment occurs only in avenues which are not ultimately disruptive of the labour process. This labour process is itself continuously creating new objects of enjoyment, further fusing individuals to its alienating nature in the pursuit of the limited pleasures it guarantees. Hence, according to Marcuse, ‘culture’ for Freud, is the curbing and rechanneling of instinctual drives into their socially useful forms which promise greater pleasures, although a pleasure which is never fully realized. In other words, the very fact that the instincts strive for gratification is also the root of its continual deferral. In concrete terms, this means that immediate satisfaction becomes delayed satisfaction; pleasure becomes restraint, receptiveness becomes

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10 For another interesting parallel see Marcuse’s discussion of Hegel’s take on the French Revolution in his *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*.

productiveness and nonrepression becomes security.

But this is where Marcuse breaks with Freud. Although he agrees with him that immediate gratification is incommensurate with the reality principle as material existence necessitates work, he argues that specific historical formations ensconce forms of repression over and above what is required to meet material demands. In other words, Marcuse accepts the general schematic of Freud's theory of instincts but criticizes him for ignoring the class character of instinctual gratification, as well as the shifting historical dynamics which alter specific configurations of the reality principle, adding that perhaps social conditions could be altered, and societal progress and instinctual gratification are perhaps not, as Freud assumes, forever doomed to incommensurability.

In Freud there is a lack of distinction between what is historical and what is biological. Marcuse argues that without an appreciation for history, Freud reifies historical repression as biological thereby concluding that it is inevitable. In introducing the distinction between what is required biologically and historically, Marcuse introduces two new terms: 'surplus-repression', the restrictions dictated by the social form, over and above the basic repression required for the individual to perpetuate existence, and the 'performance principle', the prevailing historical form of the reality principle (Marcuse, 1974, pp.2-35). Marcuse writes:

Throughout the recorded history of civilization, the instinctual constraint enforced by scarcity has been intensified by constraints enforced by the hierarchical distribution of scarcity and labour; the interest of domination added surplus-repression to the organization of the instincts under the reality principle. The pleasure principle was dethroned not only because it militated against progress in civilization, but also because it militated against a civilization whose progress perpetuates domination and toil (Marcuse, 1974, p.18).

In other words, the hostility of nature and the scarcity of resources require a certain level of repression but specific manifestations of the reality principle, the performance principle, arise to serve the interests of a particular group. This would suggest that if the root causes of suffering are at least partially historical then perhaps there exists a chance to alter them. Marcuse writes:

Does the interrelation between freedom and repression, productivity and destruction, domination and progress, really constitute the principle of civilization? Or does this interrelation result only from a specific historical organization of human existence? In Freudian terms, is the conflict between pleasure principle and reality principle irreconcilable to such a degree that it necessitates the repressive transformation of man's instinctual structure? Or does it allow the concept of a non-repressive civilization, based on a fundamentally different experience of being, a fundamentally different relation between man and nature, and fundamentally different

existential relations? (Marcuse, 1974, pp.3-4)

In introducing this notion of surplus-repression Marcuse is fusing Freud with Marx. In Marx, historically classes arise who have antagonistic material interests, and culture is the expression of both the dominant economic interests—the specific mode of domination—and also as the expression of the desire of the underclass to transform the world into a shape that will allow the intellectual and material interests to be better managed. Marcuse writes:

...various modes of domination (of man and nature) result in various historical forms of the reality principle... These differences affect the very content of the reality principle, for every form of the reality principle must be embodied in a system of societal institutions and relations, laws and values which transmit and enforce the required 'modifications' of the instincts (Marcuse, 1974, p.37).

Surplus-repression refocuses the discussion onto the institutions which make up the social body as it is this which appears differently in different versions of the reality principle. To once again invoke Marx, Marcuse writes that "alienated labour is the negation of the pleasure principle" (Marcuse, 1974, pp.44-45). Under the performance principle, pleasure is only released under very specific time constraints and is only allowed to unfold in ways that support the perpetuation of the labour process (Marcuse, 1974, p.47). This is not to say that work is contrary to Eros, for all societies require work, but it is the version of work embodied in the performance principle to which Eros is the antithesis. Thus alienated labour, in the Marxian understanding of the concept, *is* the performance principle (Marx, 1978). A full portrait of what society would look like without alienated labour is not provided by Marx or Marcuse but we can surmise that it would attempt to reconstruct work in a manner which allows a freer exposition of human creativity. It would also be an organization of work aimed solely at satisfying the needs for societal progress—basic repression—and not aimed at the perpetuation of the dominance of one class over another.

In previous epochs when toil was still necessitated by scarcity, happiness, sexuality, art and entertainment all enjoyed a place as escapes from the drudgery of work. Today, when the need for toil is greatly diminished (at least theoretically diminished due to automation) surplus repression turns these escapes into their opposite and they enter into its service. In a sense, the individual is never left alone for, in Marcuse's words:

...left to itself, and supported by a free intelligence aware of the potentialities of liberation from the reality of repression, the libidinal energy generated by the id would thrust against its ever more extraneous limitations and strive to engulf an ever larger field of existential relations, thereby exploding the reality ego and its repressive performance (Marcuse, 1974, p.48).

Only in “the perversions”, those aspects of sexuality which are not aimed at genital reproduction and which share an affinity with phantasy, does the psyche clash with the reality principle. They threaten to establish libidinal relationships which are hostile to work and are “...a symbol of the destructive identity between freedom and happiness” (Marcuse, 1974, pp.49-50).

Yet, the very fact that these alienated modes of thinking exist suggest that the trauma of the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle occurs again and again, indicating that its victory over the pleasure principle is never complete. Marcuse argues that the pleasure principle in fact survives as the “tabooed and subterranean history of civilization”, thus necessitating ever increasing repression (Marcuse, 1974, p.15). In Marcuse surplus-repression arises as a function of the reality principle’s incomplete victory over the pleasure principle and its latest guise has become increasingly rationalized and directed at a singular purpose more so than ever before the stratification of society according to competitive economic interests, and the universal expansion of the marketplace.

In both Hegel and Freud the ego develops as the agent of “reflexive foresight” and has an interest in its own productivity and economic autonomy. Reason is a “purely formal entity”; it is neutral with respect to ends, its essence is calculation. Consequently, the individual’s understating unfolds on the ground of individual self-preservation and mastery over the object; self-interest underpins epistemology and the bourgeois mentality is framed as logical and natural, powerful over the objects of nature, powerless to alter this arrangement of domination. The mind/body dualism of modernity plays into this as the material world is one of contradiction, repression, irrationality. In “Concept of Essence” Marcuse writes:

As long as philosophy does not adopt the idea of a real transformation, the critique of reason stops at the status quo and becomes a critique of pure thought. The uncertainty and unfreedom of the external world is countered by the certainty and freedom of thought as the individual’s only remaining power base (Marcuse, 1988a, p.50).

From Descartes on the mind alone is the realm of freedom and certainty while everything external to it is transitory and uncertain. We react to this precariousness by seeking a unity or harmony in thought when such harmony is not available to us in our material existence. As Marcuse points out in “On Hedonism”, knowledge of the ‘whole’, the ensemble of social relations, is antithetical to happiness, more akin to misery and individuals of the bourgeois era feel unable to change it and resign themselves to the limited gratifications which are attainable. As a correlate to this, Marx was always clear that industrial society is both progressive and liberal compared to what came before, but its tolerance can only extend to those pursuits which are in line with the functioning of the market. For example, Western society has greatly expanded

in its tolerance for relatively liberated sexualities as long as it is expressed in channels which do not aim to shatter the whole, or at the very least forms of sexuality which are as yet deemed radical, stay hidden. Psychoanalytically we afforded higher degrees of a release of instinctual energy, but only in increasingly sublimated forms.

## Conclusion: Reconciliation, Reason and Happiness

And yet, ‘Reason; and ‘Happiness’ share an affinity as they both look to the unrealized potentiality within present historical conditions; reason speaks of the development of productive forces allowing for the free, rational shaping of the conditions of life and happiness seeks the fulfillment of individual wants and needs and emancipation from an inhuman labour process (Marcuse, 1988b, pp.162-167). Marcuse is hopeful in suggesting that this growth of happiness has happened in conjunction with shifts in this labour process, freeing more and more people from toil, potentially leading to a boiling point where the continued demand for happiness can no longer be met by the market, forging a demand for something beyond our present conditions. Thus the demand for happiness is actually among the most radical. Marcuse writes that in the Marxian dialectic happiness is manifested as the positive content of materialism. He continues:

Historical materialism appeared at first as a denunciation of the materialism prevalent in bourgeois society, and the materialist principle was in this respect a critical instrument of expose directed against a society that enslaved men to the blind mechanisms of material production. The idea of the free and universal realization of individual happiness, per contra, denoted an *affirmative* materialism, that is to say, an affirmation of the material satisfaction of man (Marcuse, 1999, p.295).

All Marxian concepts unfold on two levels, both the critique of actually existing conditions and their eventual dissolution into something new. This two-fold approach determines Marx’s analysis of the labour process (Marcuse, 1999, pp.295-296). Since alienated labour appears as such only in light of its dissolution, then an analysis of the labour process is also an analysis of its abolition. Marx is thus always examining contemporary society with a view to its destruction. Referring to Marx’s categories of analysis, Marcuse writes:

His categories are negative and at the same time positive: they present a negative state of affairs in the light of its positive solution, revealing the true situation in existing society as the prelude to its passing into a new form (Marcuse, 1999, p.295).

As outlined above, the reality principle’s victory over the pleasure



principle is never complete and the pleasure principle lives on as the “subterranean history”, fantasy, dreams, memory (Marcuse, 1974, p.15). In each successive stage of repression, its promise is unfulfilled and true progress—by ‘true’, meaning progress that would have a more non-repressive flavour—is forever deferred. The “subterranean” history is the remainder of the incomplete identification of the individual and the whole. The unconscious is the drive for “integral gratification”; it is the immediate identity of necessity and freedom. In Freud, this identification is tabooed by the conscious, but upheld in the unconscious. Marcuse writes that “its truth... continues to haunt the mind”; it preserves the memory of past stages when gratification was more readily or immediately available, and it generates a wish for a time when this paradise will be resurrected (Marcuse, 1974, p.18). “The memory of gratification”, as Marcuse describes it, “is at the origin of all thinking, and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought” (Marcuse, 1974, p.31). The past is never entirely forgotten; memory explodes the rationality of the reality principle. “The *recherche du temps perdu*’ becomes the vehicle of future liberation”, this, according to Marcuse, is the hidden trend in psychoanalysis (Marcuse, 1974, p.19).

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