

Book Reviews

FIVE LECTURES: PSYCHOANALYSIS, POLITICS, AND UTOPIA. By Herbert Marcuse. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970. Pp. 109. \$7.50 (cloth); \$1.95 (paper).

HERBERT MARCUSE: AN EXPOSITION AND A POLEMIC. By Alasdair MacIntyre. New York: Viking Press, 1970. Pp. 114. \$1.65.

THE MEANING OF MARCUSE. By Robert W. Marks. New York: Ballantine Books, 1970. Pp. 147. \$1.25.

Two years ago the *New York Times Magazine* suggested that Herbert Marcuse might well be the world's most important living philosopher "in terms of day-to-day effect." If one can measure day-to-day importance by visibility in the mass media, the claim may well be true. In his on-again off-again role as ideological guru to the New Left, which has seen him enshrined in the radical hagiography alongside Marx and Mao on marching banners of European radical students and then shouted down a few weeks later by those same enthusiasts, Marcuse has retained enough popularity among extremists of the Left to become anathema to those of the Right, and an object of some interest to everyone else. He has, consequently, become one of the most interviewed, written and talked about (and possibly even read) philosophers of recent memory.

This popularity-cum-notoriety would seem to provide the best explanation for the publication (at a fat price) of this slender volume of lectures delivered between 1956 and 1967. Readers familiar with *Eros and Civilization*, *One-Dimensional Man*, and the recent *Essay on Liberation* will find little in it with which they are unacquainted. The agrarian maxim, "Make hay while the sun shines," continues to have application beyond the farm.

The first two lectures, "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts" and "Progress and Freud's Theory of Instincts," as the translator's title suggests, are sufficiently similar rehearsals of the central argument of *Eros and Civilization* to trigger an experience of *déjà vu* in the reader. The argument is that modern technological society continues to bind men in coils of unnecessary repression

("surplus repression" in *Eros and Civilization*) which weaken Eros, the life instinct, thereby undermining its power of controlling the instinct of destruction and death and rendering human life ever more dangerous. The solution is to throw off social restrictions on the erotic impulses and recapture, in our technological maturity, the infantile happiness of unfettered gratification. Little is done with the concepts of freedom and progress. They function essentially as different departure points for the same speculative journey.

The fourth lecture, "The End of Utopia," and the fifth, "The Problem of Violence and the Radical Opposition," are brief talks given at the Free University of West Berlin in 1967. Here they are fleshed out with edited transcriptions of the question periods which followed. Both anticipate matters treated more fully in *An Essay on Liberation*. By the end of Utopia Marcuse means the end of the applicability of "Utopia" to projects for societies free from poverty, misery, alienated labor, and all but physically and biologically necessary repressions. Our technological and intellectual resources are, in his view, sufficient for a qualitative leap into the erotic-aesthetic world he envisions as the natural goal of man. As Marcuse puts it here, the idea of a "leap into qualitative difference, is not a mere invention, but inheres in the development of productive forces themselves."

The qualitative revision of society, and indeed of man himself, that Marcuse desires can come about only through overcoming the social inertia of present societies by revolutionary forces. The objective state of such forces, consisting of radical students, disaffected intellectuals, racial ghetto minorities, and Third World peoples is assessed in the final essay along with the necessity of violence.

As Marcuse sees it, violence against the system is necessary if any real progress toward the erotic society is to be made, although he humanely hopes it will be held to a minimum. In what he regularly terms "totalitarian democracies," protests within the bounds of legality are doomed to ineffectiveness, for it is part of the strategy of domination in such states to allow limited dissent as a safety valve against the development of revolutionary pressures. Peaceful, nonviolent dissent serves only to reinforce the "pluralistic absorption of all effective opposition." Peaceful protests, on this view, amount to ritual celebrations of the protesters' own oppression. Violence itself comes in two forms: the institutionalized violence of the established system which is suppressive and aggressive, and the violence of resistance, by its nature illegal, which he calls the "violence of liberation" or "violence for the defence of life."

This rhetoric-laden good-guy, bad-guy analysis of violence typifies Marcuse's methodical renunciation of objective language in favor of linguistic warfare. The "Establishment," he argued in *An Essay on Liberation*, has succeeded in defining all words in such a way that they are incapable of carrying any critical weight. Hence scholarly dedication to objective language constitutes political surrender, as it is but one more device of domination. In the spirit of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, he recommends that the political and sociological vocabulary be stripped of its "false neutrality" and be "provocatively

moralized" for the attack on the "Establishment." Marcuse practices what he preaches. Acts of linguistic aggression are the staple of his style.

The third lecture, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," adds, if it can be put this way, another dimension to Marcuse's theory of the one-dimensionality of modern man, and, by spelling out what is merely implicit elsewhere, contains the only new material to be found in this collection. In *One-Dimensional Man* it was claimed that all facets of contemporary society, from material comfort and relaxed sexual mores to operationalist interpretations of science and analytic philosophies of language, have conspired to turn modern man into a social zombie, a political cipher who desires only what he is told to desire and is incapable of imagining any other life-style than the one he presently inhabits. In this lecture we learn that man's psychic topography has been leveled as well. In earlier, less technologically developed times, the ego and super-ego were formed in the more or less individualized environment of the father-dominated family. Now, with the decline of the family and of private endeavor, society directly manages and shapes the nascent ego "through the mass media, school and sport teams, gangs, etc." Where the father had acted as the medium transmitting the values of society to the son, now the ego-ideal is "brought to bear directly" from outside "before the ego is actually formed." Thus the "omnipresent technical, cultural and political administration" shrinks the ego, which never has the opportunity to shape itself into a psychic force distinct from the id and super-ego. The results are a reduction of the (always relative) autonomy of the individual, the creation of the psyche as an image of society, and the formation of the masses.

If, however, the rise of "total administration" signals the waning applicability of Freud's theory of individual development, it also marks the ascendancy of Freud's group psychology. In his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud, leaning heavily on the work of Gustav Le Bon, isolated four regressive characteristics of the group mind. These were the dwindling of the conscious individual personality, the focusing of emotions and thoughts in a common direction, the dominance of the emotions and unconscious mental life, and a disposition to carry out intentions immediately as they occur. Freud explained these characteristics, as they occur in stable social groupings such as churches and armies, as resulting from the individual's own ego-ideal having been replaced by a common ego-ideal embodied in the leader of the group. According to Marcuse, men in modern industrial society exhibit all the regressive psychological traits of the group mind. As evidence for this sweeping claim, Marcuse offers the following: "The shrinking of the ego, its reduced resistance to others, appears in the ways in which the ego holds itself constantly open to messages imposed from outside. The antenna on every house, the transistor on every beach, the jukebox in every bar or restaurant are as many cries of desperation—not to be left alone, by himself, not to be separated from the Big Ones, not to be condemned to the emptiness or hatred or dreams of oneself."

This may be taken as a typical instance of Marcuse's technique of argument

by extreme example. Nowhere in his works is there to be found any attempt to assess the total range of evidence relevant to a particular claim. Instead an extreme, and often striking, example is cited, followed by a quick retreat to abstractions. In the case before us not a single example is given in support of the suggestion that the other three regressive traits mentioned by Freud, and cited by Marcuse, are typical of modern man. The one example is supposed to carry weight for all four. The example might provide some small support for the second, the focusing of thoughts in a common direction, but it cannot do even that for the final two characteristics, the dominance of emotions and the unconscious mental life, and the tendency toward immediately carrying out intentions. It may be significant that no further mention is made of these by Marcuse after their listing. In contemporary society they are most evident not among ordinary supporters of the system but among those student radicals who, according to Marcuse, have miraculously escaped its coils.

The degree to which any escape must be miraculous can be seen if we ask just who the "Big Ones," the leaders, are. It turns out that there are none. Even the administrators and manipulators of the system have been waffled into conformity by the system they operate. But this poses yet another problem. In Freud's theory, stable social groups must be bound together by a common object of libidinal cathexis. Without such an object one has a mere transitory and fragile crowd. Marcuse finds this common object, not in a revered leader, but in a hated enemy, "a very concrete and *personified* object," communism. We are bound together in our mutual subjugation to the system by our hatred of communism, which we can personify as "the reds, the commies, the comrades, Castro, Stalin, the Chinese," or, when we're more inventive, "pinks, intellectuals, beards, foreigners, Jews," and so on. As it is hate which holds the system together, the danger is high that pressures from below may force the government into aggressive anti-Communist policies which lead to war. Marcuse's advice is that we do whatever we can to combat such tendencies.

This collection will be of interest to those who want a brief first-hand acquaintance with Marcuse. On the whole the lecture format has resulted in less opacity than is the rule in Marcuse's writing, perhaps because there was not enough time for his dialectic to generate sufficient steam for many magical transformations. Those who read only these pieces, however, will lose the full flavor of Marcuse's style, which has a certain perverse charm. Particularly in his recent efforts, the reader is alternately treated to bright slashing attacks on mass culture and plunged into the Cimmerian darkness of nineteenth-century metaphysics. Whenever he is about to suffocate among abstractions, he encounters another refreshing assault on the system. The method has rhetorical power and may be favorably compared with the Puritan technique of instilling orthodoxy by dunking.

Both MacIntyre and Marks agree that Marcuse raises *obiter dictum* and *ipse dixit* into canons of philosophic proof. As MacIntyre says, "Marcuse's assertions remain free floating, suggestive rather than fully intelligible." And Marks, who is generally sympathetic to Marcuse's stance, nonetheless compares

him with the Bellman in *The Hunting of the Snark*, who "repeats his assumptions in the belief that 'what I tell you three times is true.'" In MacIntyre's terms, the manner is incantatory, the effect "magical rather than philosophical." Despite the difficulties inherent in such a manner both authors do their best to construct coherent accounts of Marcuse's work.

Beginning with an examination of the essays Marcuse wrote in the thirties for the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (translated in *Negations*), MacIntyre develops the hypothesis that Marcuse can be best understood, not as a neo-Marxist, but as a pre-Marxist thinker whose closest theoretical affinities lie with the Young or Left Hegelians. This is most clearly evident in Marcuse's belief that philosophy can transcend the limitations of time and place and provide a historically unconditioned critical standpoint, a position which contrasts sharply with the view of Marx and Engels and coheres with the Left Hegelians' practice of "criticism" which Marx and Engels denounce. This affinity manifests itself as well in Marcuse's willingness to lean on abstractions, to write of "man" instead of "men," a tendency for which Marx explicitly attacked Feuerbach, Bauer, and Stirner. Attempts to substantiate this thesis run as a connective thread throughout MacIntyre's exposition, though by no means dominating it. The major evidence is educed in the third chapter, where it is argued that Marcuse's interpretations of Hegel and Marx in *Reason and Revolution* are distorted in a Left-Hegelian direction.

Two short chapters expounding the doctrines of *Eros and Civilization* and *Soviet Marxism* are followed by two chapters devoted to the critiques of modern society and philosophy of *One-Dimensional Man*. It is here that the major critical efforts of the book appear. MacIntyre argues that Marcuse is correct in pointing to the feelings of impotence on the part of modern man, for he is indeed impotent. But he is wrong in attributing this impotence to the oppressive functioning of a self-propelling, monolithic system of social controls. Rather than control, it is lack of control at the core of modern society that is the source of man's political impotence. In a passage reminiscent of Jacques Ellul's thesis of the symbolic functioning of heads of bureaucracies, MacIntyre writes, "The most impressive political fact of our time is the accidental character of most of the policies which government is forced to embrace, an accidental character whose peculiar quality springs from the combination of the uncontrolled nature of the events with the insistence of those who govern, dominated as they are by the ideology of planning, that events are in fact directed by their deliberate and willed purposes." He mentions America's involvement in the Vietnam War as a paradigm case of a political event stumbled into and then defended by ad hoc policies.

One might be tempted to claim that MacIntyre, by substituting "lack of control" for "control" in explaining modern man's predicament, has only shown us the other side of the coin, leaving us with the same old coin. We still are bound by a system, just as Marcuse claims, that renders everyone, including the leaders, impotent. But MacIntyre's claim is the quite different one that there is *no* system, no set of reticulated and mutually reinforcing powers that

drive us in a single direction. And the practical imperatives which flow from the two positions are diametrically opposite. To free oneself from systematic domination requires a destruction of the dominating system. To free oneself from the random batterings of uncontrolled political forces, one must, as men have done in the case of the physical forces, develop means of systematically controlling them so that they will follow our deliberations and promote our chosen ends. That this is a desperate need in the modern world, a need which, despite the vaunted advances in the social sciences, we do not have the knowledge to satisfy, can hardly be denied by anyone not devoted to overly simple mechanistic or conspiratorial theories of history.

Marcuse's heavy-handed assaults on modern philosophy have been thoroughly criticized before, but never as trenchantly as by MacIntyre. He points out, as have others, Marcuse's apparent ignorance of the movements he so confidently assails, and, in response to Marcuse's "high-handed scorn" for those he attacks, undertakes to demonstrate how totally ignorant Marcuse seems to be of the most elementary principles of logic. At least, MacIntyre concludes, if Marcuse isn't ignorant of these elementary matters, he has gone to considerable lengths to conceal his knowledge.

The closing chapter takes up the doctrine of the now notorious essay "Repressive Tolerance" and its elitist-cum-dictatorial recommendations. Marcuse's thesis is the familiar one that tolerance in liberal (he would say totalitarian) democracies is a sham, one more device for maintaining repression by promoting illusions of freedom. His program then is to recognize that the *telos* of tolerance resides in truth and, since only the revolutionary minority and its intellectual spokesmen know the truth, true tolerance could be achieved by suppressing all other opinions. MacIntyre finds this doctrine mistaken as well as dangerous. The *telos* of tolerance, he argues, is not truth, but rationality, though indeed we value rationality because rational methods enable us to discover truths. The crux of the matter is that while a rational man may hold false beliefs and an irrational man true ones, it is only through dedication to rational discussion that the first may be assured the opportunity of correcting his errors and the second prevented from falling into them. Foreclosing on tolerance, cutting off inquiry and criticism, and thereby refusing to admit one's own fallibility, is also to foreclose the possibility of rational and peaceful progress.

(There are two serious printing errors in this volume. On page 5 "now" appears as "not" in the last full sentence, changing its meaning, and on page 89 a full line or more is missing.)

The Meaning of Marcuse is aimed at a more general audience than is MacIntyre's book; indeed when Marks goes out of his way to reexplain at some length previously explained philosophic distinctions of an elementary kind, one suspects that the intended audience is not only general but dull. Marks covers much the same ground as MacIntyre, omitting however any consideration of the early essays or of *Soviet Marxism*, and develops many of the same critical points though in a generally less precise manner.

Unlike MacIntyre, who finds nothing of value in Marcuse's work, Marks, while frequently pointing up the nonsense in Marcuse's writing in a more biting manner than MacIntyre ever adopts, finds a redeeming and uplifting message there. Despairing of making literal sense of what Marcuse says, Marks interprets him as a poet purveying a social vision "in the great [ill-defined] tradition." His exposition proceeds, as a consequence, in tension between enchantment and outbreaks of critical good sense, the latter for the most part predominating. For example, after quoting a particularly romantic passage from *Eros and Civilization* describing a utopian life, Marks becomes enthusiastic: "Marcuse himself seems to flower in these affirmations. He forgets the dialectic. As if liberated for the moment by his own dream of liberation, he breathes freely, structures his hopes. And in this space, the Mozartean Marcuse breaks through. The reader hears the Magic Flute." Well, not quite. A few pages later Marks is sufficiently recovered to point out that the abstractions in which the vision is purveyed are never defined (or else defined so quixotically as to be impenetrable to ordinary intellects), and so one can never discover what manner of thorns may be hidden beneath the bright petals of Truth, Beauty, and Freedom. One should, perhaps, be wary of those who play on magic flutes. Fortunately, critical good sense seems to prevail, and indeed, there is enough of it, contrary to Marks's intentions, to disenchant some of his readers altogether.

Marks makes one quite interesting suggestion. Given the sheer opacity of much of Marcuse's prose and its thick abstractions of nineteenth-century German idealism, he asks why so many students are attracted to it. And he suggests that it may be Marcuse's obscurities that have contributed as much as anything to his popularity among young radicals. By cloaking their gut reactions in what they take to be signs of scholarship, Marcuse provides them with an aura of respectability they otherwise lack. This may, unfortunately, be true. Charles Sanders Peirce once said of a book he was criticizing that it was a first-rate piece of philosophic work. It was clear, it was clearly wrong, it could be clearly demonstrated to be wrong, and once that was done, mankind need never again worry about that position. And that, he concluded, was progress. Ours is another problem. Elastic nonsense may resist criticism indefinitely. Marcuse may be with us a long time.

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