

# Marcuse on Education: Social Critique and Social Control

By Joseph L. DeVitis

Traditionally, education in the form of schooling has tended to reflect the needs and interests of dominant group and institutional forces within any given society. Schooling has by and large acted to transmit the prevailing culture—its customs, mores, and modes of rationality—to relatively powerless youth. In the words of Emile Durkheim,

It is society as a whole and each particular social milieu that determines the ideal that education realizes. Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands . . . It [therefore] follows . . . that education consists of a methodical socialization of the young generation.<sup>1</sup>

For John Dewey, too, education enables society to sustain and perfect its existence:

The natural or native impulses of the young do not agree with the life-customs of the group into which they are born . . . [Consequently, society must] endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that . . . better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on their own,<sup>2</sup>

In a more active sense, the institutionalization of education may be looked upon as an instrument of repression and social control which fosters “social order and cohesion by developing within the individual codes of conduct and social values directed toward the maintenance of existing social relationships.”<sup>3</sup>

Recent “radical” literature on social theory presumably proffers a critique of such repressive measures. On that score few contemporary critics are as incisive as Herbert Marcuse, the adopted patron saint of the New Left. Marcuse has sought to tackle, transcend, and transform those repressive features of social life which men normally take for granted. The aim of this paper is to consider whether Marcuse actually attempts to undermine, and therein liberate, the traditional equation of education with repression.

Since Marcuse has made no systematic analysis of education, his views on that subject will necessarily be largely inferred from his broader social theory. (Marcuse’s ideas on higher education *are* explicit and, therefore, will be dealt with more specifically.) What *can* be generally ascertained is the methodology and value orientation which Marcuse would bring to educational decision making. In brief, these may be delineated in terms of a dual objective: the primary necessity of generating a social critique followed by an equally important concern for a radical transformation of human needs.

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1. Emile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology*, trans. Sherwood D. Fox (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956), pp. 70-71.

2. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1961), pp. 47, 79.

3. Joel H. Spring, “Education as a Form of Social Control,” unpublished manuscript (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, n.d.), p. 1. On the theme of social control, see Clarence J. Karier, Paul Violas, and Joel Spring, *Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1973).

Presumably, such an educational effort will aid in raising man from repression. However, this remedy suggests the inner weakness of Marcuse's thought: it tends to educate "from above." Indeed, it can and will be argued that Marcuse practices a form of repression in his own right. His educational vision merely *promises* praxis and liberation for all; like several utopian schemes, it actually delivers social control.

With Marx, Marcuse would begin his educational decision making only after a lengthy survey of the whole social structure—its politics, economics, and culture.<sup>4</sup> Critical reflection is seen as an essential part of praxis; it allows human reason to transcend the limiting nature of purely empirical, linguistic, or phenomenological analysis. The outcome of Marcuse's socio-educational critique is implicit in his own Marxian analysis: schooling has become thoroughly politicized, i.e., surplus-repressive.<sup>5</sup> Education preserves a repressive status quo, its class system, sightless leadership, and unnecessarily hierarchical social structure.

According to Marcuse, the political socialization of children begins in the cradle and proceeds beyond the university. Throughout one's life, the process of mimesis, or immediate social identification, provides an elaborate system of readily available rewards and subtle, yet powerful, sanctions. Assimilated by a pervasive logic of domination, the individual is largely oblivious to his actual unfreedom. Consequently, like Marx, Marcuse contends that the negation of "false consciousness" and the realization of the necessity of change must accompany any growth in objective material conditions. The educator must take it upon himself to free men who do not know that they are not free.

Unfortunately, Marcuse forgets Marx's saving advice: "the educator himself must be educated."<sup>6</sup> Instead, Marcuse's methodology is conspicuously immune to public testability; in fact, it remains unabashedly intuitionistic. While Marcuse maintains that the open use of intuition permits him to mediate concrete experience and sets the stage for a convergence of Logos and Eros, the general thrust of his social theory ushers in a thoroughgoing pan-rationalism. In other words, Marcuse, as educator, seems to be attempting to recapture something similar to the Greek ideal of true Forms. That is, he seeks to re-create a *two-dimensional* universe in which appearance and reality can be distinguished by those (presumably like himself) who claim to be close to Truth. "Inasmuch as the struggle for truth 'saves' reality from destruction, truth commits and engages human existence. It is *the* essential human project."<sup>7</sup> Hence, Marcuse likens himself to a Platonic guardian, one who would rather be right than free. In the name of Truth, anyone and everyone is subject to repression.

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4. Similar to Durkheim's sociological method, Marcuse's mode of inquiry seems to be layered in metaphysical holism; particular facts and factors are meaningful only as they are related to a larger system, i.e., the total societal context. In the political tradition of Plato and Hegel, Marcuse also constructs an organicist social theory; that is, social activity is based on the relatively autonomous functioning of the social system rather than that of its individual members. (Marcuse's notion of subjective consciousness precludes any complete embracement of organicism.)

It is, therefore, no accident that Marcuse seeks to defend his holistic orientation against a possible attack from Karl R. Popper, the most notable critic of the totalitarian tendencies in Platonic and Hegelian thought. Cf. Marcuse, "Notes on the Problem of Historical Laws," *Partisan Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 (Winter 1959), pp. 117-129; and Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vols. I and II (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

5. "Surplus repression" refers to those socio-historic (i.e., unnecessary and changeable) restrictions that are made justifiable by dominant groups and institutions. Unlike "basic repression," it is not vital to biological survival. See Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 7, 32-34.

6. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, ed. R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1939), pp. 197-198.

7. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 125. (Italics are added.)

Positioning himself as a negativistic depositor of Truth, Marcuse offers an educational program which, while apparently aiming at personal and social freedom, actually becomes counter-productive to that purpose. Throughout his socio-educational thought, Marcuse assumes that his dialectic acts merely to negate the imperfections and injustices of established practice. That unwarranted justification would not seem to give him the right to *act* above and beyond the wishes and judgment of others. For Marcuse himself is unable to control that same logic of domination from which he, too, must proceed.<sup>8</sup> In the realm of pure thought, Marcuse is sometimes an incisive and suggestive critic; however, once he enters the realm of action, his social critique loses its cutting edge and instead becomes a bluntly repressive force.

*An Essay on Liberation* (1969) and *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (1969) provide an inferential basis for assessing the ends and means of Marcuse's plan for action. In detailing his program, Marcuse perforce falls into the same theoretical pitfall which he claims plagues positivist and pragmatic philosophy: an intellectual progression "from contemplative enjoyment to active manipulation and control" and "from knowing as an esthetic enjoyment of the properties of nature . . . to knowing as a means of secular control."<sup>9</sup> At this point Marcuse's formerly transcendent reason becomes absorbed in action, thereby limiting the scope and dimension of free thought and alternative choice and judgment.

In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse proposes a utopian educational scheme, a plan for qualitative change which necessitates a complete and cataclysmic transformation of human needs. He assumes that utopian possibilities are now inherent in the technology of advanced industrial society. Surplus repression is no longer legitimate; indeed, there need be no incompatibility between basic (biological) repression and an "instinctual basis for freedom." In bold, yet speculative, terms Marcuse postulates a biological foundation for "true" socialism. His intention is to re-condition and re-educate man and society, to alter radically the entire individual and institutional infrastructure:

Freedom would [then] become the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life . . . . Such a [transforming] practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world.<sup>10</sup>

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8. In his critique of the unsociological character of certain radical theorists, Mannheim might just as well be speaking of Marcuse: "The revolutionary who is anxious to change society overnight will be only too apt to focus his attention solely on the total social structure. . . . [He is] disposed to what Hegel would call the 'unhappy consciousness'—'unhappy' because the too elevated, too abstract premises inculcated by its artificial education render its owner incapable of mastering the conflicts which are the stuff of real life; he tends to feel at home only when dealing with the possible, the potential, and to discount all reality as *a priori* bad." Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: Studies in Modern Social Structure*, trans. Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940), p. 305; and *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 232.

9. Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), pp. 95, 100, as quoted in Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 167. Cf. Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 213-214. Marcuse contends that the Soviet attack on Dewey is due to his "conformistic ethical relativism," i.e., his inability to transcend beyond the repressive limitations of his society for an "objective" view of future historical possibilities. In Marcuse's eyes, efficiency and workability become Dewey's criteria for knowledge and valuation.

10. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 4-6. The means to Marcuse's utopia are highly suspect; he appears to make a much too facile leap from harsher aspects of reality. For example, Malthusian roadblocks, e.g., scarce resources and spiraling birth rates, still obstruct social change throughout large portions of the globe—especially in the Third World, supposedly one of

Thus, Marcuse hopes to build a political and moral radicalism which will create socially induced needs conducive to a truly rational aesthetic sensibility and a "pacified existence." On the one hand, as social critic, he assumes that a certain indestructible core of resistance characterizes man's instinctual biological nature. Yet, as planner, Marcuse treats the human being as a mere plastic creature which can be molded and manipulated:

Once a specific morality is firmly established as a norm of social behavior, it is not only introjected—it also operates as a norm of "organic" behavior: the organism receives and reacts to certain stimuli and "ignores" and repels others in accord with the introjected morality, which is thus promoting or impeding the function of the organism as a living cell in the respective society.<sup>11</sup>

With this view of conditioning at his bestowal, Marcuse proceeds apace in his own brand of social engineering. In the process, he makes men his personal marionettes.

While Marcuse employs the prospect of liberation to stimulate men to violent revolution, he enjoys the rarefied air of a more contemplative praxis. As others shed blood and chance the loss of their humanity, Marcuse envisions the creation of an *aesthetic ethos* in which "technique would . . . tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality."<sup>12</sup> Here Marcuse blends his Hegelianism with an Aristotelian conception of praxis; potentiality is equated with actuality so long as men act in concord with "true" consciousness. This view implies a capacity for *moral conduct* which Marcuse assumes he possesses to a degree far greater than that of most mortals. In essence, Marcuse seeks to be a moral educator without fully sharing moral responsibility with those who would act upon his teachings. Since he pictures himself as a guardian, he evidently sees no need to justify such policy to his warriors.

When one surveys the revolutionary cadre which Marcuse musters as a symbolic expression of negation against established social order, he finds Marcuse aligning himself beside a privileged minority, i.e., *affluent* radical students and a new working class of *professional* men. For almost the sum total of his educational thought is devoted to purely contemplative praxis on the university level. As Marcuse recognizes, intellectual education *in abstracto* can serve as an immensely important critical device in potential social change:

If "education" is more and other than training, learning, preparing for the existing society, it means not only enabling man to know and understand the facts which make up reality but also to know and understand the facts that establish the facts so that he can change their inhuman reality.<sup>13</sup>

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Marcuse's major foci of concern. Moreover, Marcuse does not fully elaborate the educational implications of the master-slave theme. The slave learns to introject the destructive behavior of his master. Marcuse leaves unsaid the manner in which *each* of these opponents "may [in fact] become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world."

11. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 11. "Operationalism is indeed an indispensable supplement to want and fear as forces of cohesion." (*Ibid.*, p. 84) Ironically, Marcuse nearly accepts the premises of operationalism, a mode of thought which he describes as unnecessarily restrictive, indeed repressive, in *One-Dimensional Man*. (pp. 12, 85f., 156) Cf. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, pp. 26-27: "[There are ways] of enlisting the person's own participating disposition in getting the result desired, and thereby of developing within him an intrinsic and persisting direction in the right way."

12. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 24. For an argument which portrays Marcuse's love of man as abstract rather than concrete, see Maurice Cranston, "Herbert Marcuse," *Encounter*, Vol. XXXII (March 1969), pp. 38-50.

13. Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, with Robert Paul Wolff and Barrington Moore, Jr. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 122. Marcuse thus recommends a course of study

However, freedom would also seem to necessitate the existence of viable alternatives which allow man to *choose* how to control his life. Intellectual education can offer an essential guide, but there may be affairs of heart and hand in which men may also want to indulge. For example, emotional education is one possible option, though it might yield only internalized (perhaps illusory) freedom. Granted, too, vocational and technical education has been notoriously misused to keep man in his place. But, turning Marcuse's thesis against itself, this would appear to be a question of socio-historical (i.e., needless and surplus) repression. In principle, however, Marcuse himself seems to rely on a convoluted form of such repression in his denial of freedom of choice. To an intellectual leader like himself, such practical concerns as agricultural and mechanical arts must represent seedy and soiling chores; for he gives them little place in his utopian designs.<sup>14</sup> (Yet these matters may be especially vital in the Third World. To neglect them would seem to invite further *external* repression from social forces already able to exploit material conditions.)

Indeed, if Marcuse's utopian possibilities were realized, automated technology would presumably allow man to live in a leisure society and a contemplative universe. In his own surplus-repressive way, Marcuse believes that he must still re-educate man to accept what he considers to be "desirable." If Marcuse were true to his own utopian ideas, he would hold that education itself would be largely unnecessary in his new utopian reality. Rather than participate in a liberating education *with* men on earth, Marcuse instead takes an ideational god's eye-view of his pedagogical mission. In a tradition as old as Plato and as recent as Dewey, he believes that intellectual education affords the best means for fuller freedom *and* control. For Marcuse envisions himself as a philosopher-king, not as a worker.

Marcuse's sanctuary for reflection is the university, the one institution which he would protect against any revolutionary upheaval. Besides the pleasure of his self-proclaimed "authoritarian" position as a professor,<sup>15</sup> Marcuse has more substantial theoretical reason for making an exception of the university. Above all, he wants to renew a severely suppressed responsibility of higher education: social criticism. According to Marcuse, the critical function of the university has been muted by discriminatory policies in regard to support and priority. Largely funded by government, foundations, and corporations, research and development is waged in conjunction with brutalizing, rather than humane, interests. Marcuse therefore recommends an uncontaminated "academic reservation" where advanced study can be free of outside pressures, particularly from the military.<sup>16</sup>

In an effort to incorporate the Greek ideal of *cosmos*, Marcuse desires to re-establish

consisting in critical analysis of contemporary societies and a general survey of the "great nonconformist movements in civilization"; e.g., *speculative* philosophy and *theoretical* sociology, psychology, and political science. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 61.

14. This slighting is directly counter to the teachings of Marx, Marcuse's intellectual mentor. Cf. Maurice J. Shore, *Soviet Education: Its Psychology and Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), pp. 58-59: "It is evident that Marx thought of technological instruction, both theoretical and practical, as most essential in the new education. Moreover, he believed that 'there can be no doubt' that in the educational movement following the workers' seizure of power, technological instruction will become *necessitas consequentis*."

15. Sam Keen and John Raser (eds.), "A Conversation with Herbert Marcuse," *Psychology Today*, Vol. IV, No. 9 (February 1971), p. 39.

16. Marcuse, "Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture," *Daedalus* (Winter 1965), pp. 205-206. Here Marcuse's focus on the powerful triad of government, business, and the military parallels that of C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959). Ironically, Marcuse's policy proposal might grant the latter an even freer reign than it now possesses, i.e., a diminution of critical checks on its internal activity. (Oddly enough, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* was written under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation.)

the university as a "refuge of mental independence."<sup>17</sup> This would entail a pronounced shift in emphasis in favor of pure theory over applied research. Given his assumption that a planned democracy amounts to the most subtly "efficient form of domination over man," Marcuse is understandably worried about the illegitimate use of technological knowledge by a political system which he considers to be totalitarian.<sup>18</sup>

Seemingly as an alternative to the present system, Marcuse adopts an explicitly non-egalitarian university structure. Separated from lowly vocational colleges, "elite" universities would stand at the top of his educational scheme. Dependent upon no private financial sources, these institutions would have to rely on fair and just treatment from the government for their very protection and existence. Marcuse admits that such "a condition . . . has only to be formulated in order to reveal its utopian character."<sup>19</sup> However, it is interesting that he ultimately counts on the State to reconcile the perennial problem of conflicts of interest. (Plato and Hegel were obsessed by that same problem and resolved it in analogous fashion.) Moreover, Marcuse's proposal might tend to reinforce the same structure which he presumably intends to overturn: a hierarchical model of education based upon a rigid division between the academic (higher) and the vocational (lower). Once hidden in a dark cave, Plato's men of Gold, Silver, and Bronze now appear just beyond the horizon.

Unless and until society can attain his utopian aims, Marcuse stands vigorously opposed to democracy (as ordinarily conceived) in education. "For the prevailing democratic culture fosters heteronomy in the guise of autonomy, arrests the development of needs in the guise of their promotion, and restricts thought and experience in the guise of extending them everywhere to all." In short, democracy is a sham perpetrated on unknowing, impotent subjects; established democratic freedom functions as a "vehicle of adjustment and confinement." However, it seems equally obvious that Marcuse's notion of intellectual-elite education would also serve to adjust and confine the limits of free choice, thought, and experience. Exhibiting an uncommon disrespect for human diversity, Marcuse justifies his elitism on the ground that his university system would select "from the school and college population as a whole, a selection solely according to merit, that is to say, according to the inclination and ability for theoretical thought." In a word, Marcuse wholly accepts the basic assumptions and premises of meritocracy. He also has a quick, if not readily attainable, answer for the query, "What knowledge is of most worth?" Beyond Aristotle and heading toward a revival of Plato, Marcuse reveres a contemplative wisdom which would border the power of the divine.<sup>20</sup>

Specifically, in his use of art forms to manipulate consciousness, Marcuse implicitly conjures up the ghost of Platonic pedagogy. In that theory and practice, too, the Muses expose schoolchildren to only "good" forms of music, literature, and art. Just as Marcuse's notion of mimesis condemns social identifications which it deems perverse, the Greek model for mimesis (in dramatic representation) forbids students to portray those "bad" characters which disobey society's gods. In brief, Plato and Marcuse presume to know the "good life"; they therefore propose to *impose* their view on others. This step

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17. Marcuse, "Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture," pp. 199-200.

18. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 52. On the exclusion of *humanitas* in a Fascist system of higher education, see Frederic Lilje, *The Abuse of Learning: The Failure of the German University* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948). In the final analysis, Marcuse's concern for the university seems purely academic: in an actual totalitarian situation, the university would *not*, in any case, be in a position of control.

19. Marcuse, "Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture," p. 200.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200. Cf. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 61: "The development of a true consciousness is still the professional function of the universities." This would seem to be a rather presumptuous, weighty task—even for Marcuse's intellectual elite.

from thought to action bears the stamp of repression, indoctrination, and authoritarianism. As moral censors, Plato and Marcuse fail to answer the perennially justifiable question: who judges the judges, who educates the educators? Where can *anyone* derive the *right* to control and mold men?

Marcuse's education for "liberation" thus composes a restrictive social compact; it is limited to those who are, or will be, "in the know." The power of negative thinking is indeed an important and legitimate tool; it sorely needs to be lifted from repression. However, Marcuse wants to equip each member of his "liberating" forces with essentially the *same* educational arsenal. As if in a Brave New World, his minions would have "incentives" built into their instinctual structure. In fact, "their sensibility would register, as biological reactions, the difference between the ugly and the beautiful, . . . intelligence and stupidity" *ad infinitum*.<sup>21</sup> They have no real choice in the matter. Far from creating "individuals . . . liberated from all propaganda, indoctrination, and manipulation,"<sup>22</sup> Marcuse seeks to create men in his own image. In this divine dream, he follows a long grey line of utopian educational thinkers from Plato, through William Torrey Harris and G. Stanley Hall, to B. F. Skinner. Marcuse allows human beings to create themselves only once *his* "good society" has become reality. By that time, however, he will have contributed to the already needlessly layered surplus repression in existing society.

If it be possible, "Repressive Tolerance" affords an even more explicit statement of Marcuse's repressive plan of action. Because he wants to beget a counter culture that can reverse the present repressive inhibition of "true" rationality, Marcuse justifies his own enjoyment of tit-for-tat in a different direction. In a sense, he makes the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, i.e., to raise to a higher stage of existence, seem like an intrusive re-direction rather than an authentic transformation. *Ipsa facto*, on Hegelian theory, any counter culture would represent merely an isolated reflection of a transcendent ideal, i.e., an antithesis. As such, it constitutes only a potentially liberating, yet still distorted, glimpse of the whole reality. Undaunted, Marcuse proceeds to offer a specifically political form of indoctrination, which he terms "counter-education." It is an effort to purge dominant and rival theses from existence.

According to Marcuse, the classic liberal idea of tolerance amounts to a form of repressive deception. In a society of near total control, a powerless citizenry is mollified by the belief that it has effective voice in political decisions. Tolerance is a mere appearance, not a reality. That appearance allows those in power to soothe public sensibility to the point that self-evidently intolerable actions are made to seem tolerable. In other words, surplus repression takes on the markings of basic repression, false consciousness is confused with true consciousness.

From this instructive, if intuitive, critique, Marcuse concludes that any "realization of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed."<sup>23</sup> Curiously, however, Marcuse would faithfully practice only the first part of his preachment. He would not, in any case, extend tolerance to those beliefs which *he* deems worthy of repression, regardless of whether they are publicly outlawed or suppressed. For example, a Fascist would not be permitted freedom of speech in the Marcusean political system. *Prima facie*, he does not represent "good" form; consequently, he is silenced to avoid an offense to the ruling gods. Presumably, growth in synthetic knowledge has been preempted by Marcuse's counter

21. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

22. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 252.

23. Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," p. 81.

culture.<sup>24</sup> On its terms, other competing interest groups possess "false" consciousness.<sup>25</sup> After all, it seems self-evident to Marcuse that his judgment must be more correct than that of a Fascist. While this may be true, it is also possible that there may be an eerie commonality in their views. Marcuse and the Fascist do share an absolute negative negation, a mutual kiss of death: each pursues the other's lips.

From a psychological and political perspective, Marcuse appears inordinately absorbed in problems of truth, power, and control. That absorption produces enviable results in his role as critic. However, once Marcuse projects his own proposals for power, the expected consequences are frightening. He fails to heed Wilhelm Reich's sobering warning: "[Over] one hundred years after the birth of the truths of 1848, the muck, which goes back thousands of years, still prevails. *Power and truth do not go together. This too is a bitter, unfortunate truth.*"<sup>26</sup> Marcuse himself seeks rather complete power over social reality. From his criticism, he claims to glean certain truths and plans to use them in his own form of social control.

Though the implicit intention of "Repressive Tolerance" is to transcend the seemingly limiting features of John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty," Marcuse puts far greater constraints on human behavior than any which could conceivably emanate from even a feigned "free market of ideas." Marcuse concurs with Mill:

Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion . . . [D]espotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, Marcuse himself approaches freedom from the vantage point of Classical Liberalism. In his own program, he sets similar distinctions in levels of freedom. He too rallies the support of only those in the proverbial full "maturity of their faculties", i.e., rational and autonomous men.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, Marcuse also establishes an internal

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24. *Ibid.*, p. 88. Thus, Marcuse's dictum is more illiberal than even "clear and present danger" doctrine. Such extreme fear of views which oppose one's own (which may be expressive of one's own insecurity and sense of powerlessness) is evident in recent American educational history. For example, George S. Counts, William H. Kilpatrick, and V. T. Thayer, among other liberal educators, energetically campaigned to exclude from the teaching profession those with "totalitarian", i.e., alien, beliefs. See Paul Violas, "Fear and the Constraints on Academic Freedom of Public School Teachers, 1930-1960," *Educational Theory*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (Winter 1971), pp. 70-80.

25. Marcuse assumes the "truth value" of his elite to be considerably superior to that of countervailing, more powerful, groups. However, like Mannheim's divers critical elites, Marcuse's faction is definitely *not* in control. But because Marcuse's unitary elite is so hard and single-minded of purpose, it might actually be less receptive to communication and criticism from the masses (whose presumed co-opted thought makes their opinions worthless, in any case).

26. Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), p. 328. For Marcuse, "that the people must be capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis of knowledge" is a precondition of democracy. (Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," p. 95) From this premise and on the terms of his own assumptions of knowledge and valuation, he justifies his educational dictatorship: "To the degree to which the slaves have been preconditioned to exist as slaves and be content in that role, their liberation [must] necessarily . . . come from without and from above." (Marcuse, as quoted in Martin Peretz, "Herbert Marcuse: Beyond Technological Reason," *Yale Review*, Vol. LVII, No. 4 (Summer 1968), p. 525)

27. Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," p. 86.

28. *Loc. cit.*



connection between liberty and truth. Indeed, he contends that "truth is the end of liberty, and liberty must be defined and confined by truth."<sup>29</sup> Thus, for Marcuse, truth is more than the very *telos* of tolerance: it is *the* end, liberty is *its* means.

The underlying point is that Marcuse seems to employ freedom largely as a psychological vehicle for his overriding practical objective: control through Truth. Inasmuch as he cannot *control* repressive social conditions, i.e., actually *be* free, he attempts to control that intellectual instrument (truth) which he believes has traditionally served to manipulate the limits of freedom in the Western mind. Consequently, Marcusean thought also contains strong residual elements of German Idealism. Blended with action, it conjures up the "best" and "wisest" of despotic rule, as portrayed by the oracle in Sarastro's temple: "I cannot wait until all men are wholly rational."<sup>30</sup>

Truth must be the realistic goal of those who are committed to freedom. This is the kernel of Marcuse's hidden reality principle: one must sacrifice freedom for greater Truth. Yet rationality holds out the prospect of freedom as only a "chance," "hope," "possibility," or "potentiality." Moreover, Marcuse's truth seems more irrational than rational: it forbids alternative input, adverse criticism, and public scrutiny of its own internal structure. Unlike Mill's more tolerant quest, it never faces the possibility of its own fallibility.<sup>31</sup> Marcuse sees his system as nearly *totally right, authoritative, and unaccountable*. Therefore, on its own logic, Marcuse's conception of reason and education is unnecessarily (surplus) repressive. According to Marcuse, Reason has historically been irrational because of its inability or unwillingness to transcend the limitations of phenomenological events. Strangely, Marcuse's social and educational thought is even more restricted; beyond its social critique, it is largely limited to an adumbration of its own profundities—but, of course, not its densities. Like a philosopher-king, Marcuse intimates that his Truth can be *prescribed*, but not *criticized*.

In his intuitionist educational recommendations, Marcuse merely belabors the obvious and multiplies mistakes beyond necessity. Any reflective theory of schooling, which depicts the school as a comparatively silent mirror of dominant social interests, would tend to assent to his contention that education has become a political matter. However, Marcuse only adds to that predicament by establishing his own minority elite as *the* vanguard of a new political consciousness. His alternative is all the more surplus-repressive because it begins exactly where the present system leaves off: in control by guardians and suppression of dissent. Only Marcuse and the gods can tell where it will lead, if and when it will end. In his zeal for dialectics, Marcuse attempts to forge an open society by closing his own. He has actually created a partisan camp short on self-examination and admittedly unable to deliver on its promise of freedom for all.

If his social critique is correct, Marcuse ultimately breaks his own rules for truth and

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 106. Marcuse seeks truth, rather than liberty, because he apparently does not believe that critical thought can save the day for freedom: "Nothing indicates that it will be a good end. . . . It is nothing but a chance. The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future." (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 257) (These are among Marcuse's last words in that extraordinarily pessimistic book.)

30. Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 153-154.

31. For a similar criticism of Marcuse, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 103-104. Another interesting shift in thought appears once Marcuse abandons his critique for more practical concerns. In *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), he had gone to great lengths to disprove any connection between Hegel and the rise of Fascist totalitarianism. In *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Marcuse commits a form of Hegelian suicide: he breaks his ascent toward synthesis through his own arbitrary abolition of rival theses. Thus, his pragmatic program intentionally precludes antithetical argument. In his feckless effort to control, does Marcuse, playing a Nietzschean superman in Left-wing Hegelian garb, unconsciously introject the values of those who have at least been more successful in their unchecked leadership?

freedom. Given his repressive world, he cannot fully control even his own mental images. Plato learned a similar lesson once he left the *Republic* for the *Laws*. For him, Syracuse was not like the Academy of Athens. For Marcuse, earthly frustrations can afford him no control over Apollo's ear or Zeus' power. In the end, his mind seems to be part and parcel of an homogenous mold, with memorable traces of phylogenetic descent from Plato to the present. Marcuse may be a drummer with a different rhythm, but the repressive beat goes on.