# Liberation and Contemplativity

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This is the second stage of an attempt to make a fresh assessment of the foundations of Christian morality, or of Catholic moral theology, in the light of the ideas of some of the thinkers who are concerned with the possibility of an alternative society. We who are committed to living and thinking eschatologically are bound to be interested in every serious endeavour to transcend the existing state of things. This paper will try to bring out the analogy between Marcuse and Heidegger.

§1—*Repression and Liberation*

Herbert Marcuse's work stands well outside the ordinary Anglo-American framework of academic social and political philosophy. The reason for this is no doubt that he belongs to a tradition in which the impact of Hegel has been undergone and assimilated. What this amounts to, as we should see, is that he can take for granted, in his philosophizing, the intimations about the nature of man and of meaning which we associate with the Romantic movement. This has become part of our common consciousness too, but on the whole extra-philosophically. Indeed, the specifying difference between English and continental philosophies at the present time is not so much to do with technique and approach as with acceptance or rejection of the Romantic idea of man.

It is instructive to reflect on the divided response to Marcuse's work. He is the most widely discussed thinker among the opponents of our way of life in America today. On the Old Left (orthodox communist Marxists and such-like) he meets with unanimous hostility: he is condemned as a defeatist, a pessimist, who thinks not scientifically but poetically. This line of criticism is conveniently summarized in the review of Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* published in *Monthly Review* (June 1967), three years after the book appeared (it took that long for the Old Left to realize it mattered enough to be debated). The failure of the Old Left, so it would be argued, is that it has not only proven itself incapable of a radical critique of advanced capitalist civilization but that it cannot recognize such an enterprise when it is offered, as by Marcuse. This is, of course, unfair: Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, authors of *Monopoly Capitalism*, belong to the Old Left. But what the New Left seeks, in Paul Breines' words, is 'extrication from what it believes to be the stunted and fragmented socialist theory it might have inherited,

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as well as from the stunting and fragmenting capitalist reality in which it must live'. The totalizing critique of our society has been attempted by Marcuse, along with an image of the utopia which it daily suppresses and dissipates. *One-Dimensional Man* is a bid to make an analysis of our way of life, our thinking and our feeling, which simultaneously unveils and discloses the human needs, desires and capabilities balked and repressed by them. A typology of our present sin-situation is made to reveal some vision of possible grace. The continuum of repression is exposed and illuminated in such a way as to anticipate liberation. And the real point is to shift out of the Old Left's tendency to define exploitation entirely in terms of sheer physical-economic suffering (material impoverishment and brutalization) towards a much more inclusive and total consciousness of the connectedness of personal-psychological problems and social-political problems, which bears more directly and immediately on our own situation and requires us to change *it*, however reluctant we may be to admit that the real problems are at home and not on the other side of the world. We are discovering the politics of our own unhappiness; we are beginning to be able to see what it is, structurally and institutionally, which fragments and frustrates our being. We are becoming able to analyse and liberate ourselves from the competition compulsions, the aggressions and the sexual-emotional modes of domination and servility, which originate in our society and shape the lives of its opponents as well as those of its adherents and creators. This is not to say that many of us have actually started to do so, or that it is being attempted collectively; but the significance of the Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation and associated phenomena is surely that the need for such a project is now widely felt. The increasing poverty, over-population and exploitedness of the Third World remains the one most appalling fact of our time. There is no way for us to change this, however, unless we begin by changing our own society, its needs, desires and capabilities. What *we* can do to solve the problem of the Third World is to reform *our own society*.

It was in *Eros and Civilisation*, published in 1955, that Marcuse introduced the idea of a non-repressive mode of existence. 'Such an existence', as he says, 'if it is possible at all, can only be the result of qualitative social change. However, the consciousness of this possibility, and the radical transvaluation of values which it demands, must guide the direction of such a change from the very beginnings, and must be operative even in the construction of the technical and material base.' Consequently, the project is to seek consciously to anticipate, in living within the ongoing society, the utopia one hopes to create. In prefaces to subsequent editions of the book, in 1961 and 1968, Marcuse becomes increasingly bleak about this: 'one can practise non-repressiveness within the framework of the established society: from the gimmicks of dress and undress to the

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wilder paraphernalia of the hot or cool life. But in the established society, this sort of protest turns into a vehicle of stabilization and even conformity, because it not only leaves the roots of the evil untouched, but it also testifies to the personal liberties that are practicable within the framework of general oppression.' He believes in the almost infinite capacities of the established society to co-opt, administer and neutralize opposition to it. But for once, even in the *Time* dossier on the hippy scene, the accept-and-castrate technique seems unusually fumbling and uncertain. The threat to the dominant model of civilized man is becoming uncontrollable and irrepressible. The conception of being human which prevails still in the public rhetoric of our society is being steadily eroded, and this means in turn that our experiences of being political and of being moral, of art and of God-seeking, and so on, are altering. A non-repressive civilization would be based, as Marcuse says, 'on a fundamentally different experience of being, a fundamentally different relation between man and nature, and fundamentally different existential relations'. It is not just capitalism as a particular system of production and exchange which is being challenged here. On the contrary, how we find ourselves having to work is being identified and interpreted in the context of how we find ourselves addressing one another (community relations, love, domination—servility), how we find ourselves looking at the world around us (ecology, art), and how we find ourselves making sense of our ends and endings (eschatology, worship). It is a different experience of being, a different *Seinserfahrung*, which Marcuse seeks to reveal and communicate, and this is where his purpose links up with that of Martin Heidegger. But what is Marcuse's vision of this different experience of being?

*Eros and Civilisation* is basically a prolongation into politics of the work of Freud. The argument runs as follows. The pleasure principle is the tendency inherent in all human desires to seek expression and satisfaction independently of any other consideration. This rules the individual from the outset and, though repressed, remains the guiding principle in the unconscious. The reality principle designates the conditions imposed on the expression of the pleasure principle by having to cope with the physical and social environment. Socialization is fundamentally a systematic and regulated thwarting of the pleasure principle by the reality principle. We have assumed that civilization is possible only if this happens. Growth requires sacrifice, progress requires suffering, freedom requires repression. In Freud, so Marcuse declares, the classical theory of the nature of human existence reaches its final statement: culture is the negation of Nature, the natural hedonism of the uncivilized man must be inhibited to free him to participate in society. Nobody can be free unless he accepts an antecedent unfreedom. The reality principle is in permanent conflict with the pleasure principle, we have to opt for work against play, duty against pleasure, productivity, performance and

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achievement against spontaneity, luck and grace. It is at this point that Marcuse begins to go beyond Freud and to evoke the possibility of a different type of man. He asks, in fact, whether we need accept the opposition between work and play, action and contemplation, performance and gift. Do we have to opt, is it possible to envisage a situation in which they would coincide?

Could there be a society without repression, domination, sublimation and renunciation, or would this just be chaos, savagery and barbarism? Marcuse's first, surely unanswerable point would be that what we have now is something little short of chaos, savagery and barbarism. But he agrees with Freud: repression is necessary so long as there is scarcity, shortage of food requires austerity, a primitive economy means toil and labour, and so on. The hedonistic principle of continuous self-expression (spontaneity) has to be negated by the realistic principle of permanent self-repression (law). We cannot afford to gratify ourselves. Nobody has spoken more impressively about the repressive form of all culture and counted the personal cost of it more honestly than Freud. Marcuse does not deny any of this. He is asking whether the situation has changed. He is suggesting that scarcity has given way to abundance, toil to automation, and it is possible that the once indispensable repressiveness is now being maintained uselessly and superfluously, or rather maliciously and mystifyingly (to maintain super-abundance in some places at the cost of artificial scarcity elsewhere). In any case, the repressiveness that has been necessary for the creation of civilization has always been challenged. The reality-principle which establishes society and assures stability has always been subverted by forces which point beyond any and every established principle of reality and the status quo it guarantees. Religion, mythology, dream, art, utopian thinking: these are elements of what Whitehead called the Great Refusal, these are the forms of a return of repressed prototypes of happiness and communion. Marcuse's basic thesis is that when society, under the primacy of the reality-principle of repression, reaches a level that makes the continuing repression fundamentally unnecessary (abundance, the affluent society), then the Great Refusal can become a historical agency, it can emerge from the gratuitous space of prophecy, fiction, neurosis, proleptic liturgy and psychedelics, to become a transforming force in the social-political area.

The prototypes of happiness and communion, the paradisal myths, which have had to be suppressed and transposed while we reduced misery and internecine conflict, are rising again. They are urging us to remember (re-member!) what we are. 'Whatever liberty exists in the realm of the developed consciousness, and in the world it has created', so Marcuse writes, 'is only derivative, compromised freedom, gained at the expense of the full satisfaction of needs. And in so far as the full satisfaction of needs is happiness, freedom in civiliza-

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tion is essentially antagonistic to happiness: it involves the repressive modification (sublimation) of happiness. Conversely, the unconscious, the deepest and oldest layer of the mental personality, *is* the drive for integral gratification, which is absence of want and repression.' The function of anamnesis, whether in psycho-analysis, in myth, liturgy or art, is to remember the past to release the present into a future which will be more nearly 'integral gratification', wholeness, *salus*, 'holiness': 'As cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies. Regression assumes a progressive function. The rediscovered past yields critical standards which are tabooed by the present.' We can no longer put up with the achieved stability of the present: precarious and precious as we know it is, we summon up and recollect, or find ourselves summoned and released by, the possibilities of gratification which we have had to sacrifice in order to get where we are, and the time comes when we must retrieve them: 'the equation of freedom and happiness tabooed by the conscious is upheld by the unconscious. Its truth, thought repelled by consciousness, continues to haunt the mind; it preserves the memory of past stages of individual development at which integral gratification is obtained. And the past continues to claim the future: it generates the wish that the paradise be re-created on the basis of the achievements of civilization.' And to show where this is heading as well as to relate it to something else, let me quote the editor (*New Blackfriars*, August 1968): 'as whenever in times of great unrest archetypal forces and fantasies are released anew to inspire and delude, certain priorities may be perceived again with an obscure clarity. One of these is the priority of love.' It is surely true that Marcuse's idea of a *libidinal morality* is what most inspires him. Whether it also deludes him is a question for the third stage in our enquiry.

In the second part of *Eros and Civilisation*, then, Marcuse tries to go beyond the present reality-principle. He suggests that, with the abundance economy and the affluent society, we need no longer have civilization only by frustrating the hedonistic-erotic principle; on the contrary, it may now be possible for us to create a non-repressive community. He works with such archetypes of human existence as Narcissus and Orpheus: 'If Prometheus is the culture-hero of toil, productivity, and progress through repression, then the symbols of another reality principle must be sought at the opposite pole. Orpheus and Narcissus (like Dionysus to whom they are akin: the antagonist of the god who sanctions the logic of domination, the realm of reason) stand for a very different reality. They have not become the culture-heroes of the Western world: theirs is the image of joy and fulfilment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labour of conquest; the liberation from time which unites

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man with god, man with nature.' Reason, *logos*, has been characteristically experienced as the power by which man dominates things: culture is the negation of Nature, man imposes meaning on being by the categories, mind is more important than matter; and so on. In the classical western tradition, reason has always been opposed to feeling and sensuality: 'this idea of reason becomes increasingly antagonistic to those faculties and attitudes which are receptive rather than productive, which tend towards gratification rather than transcendence—which remain strongly committed to the pleasure principle. They appear as the unreasonable and irrational that must be conquered and contained in order to serve the progress of reason.'

Reason is how man subdues instinct and passion, our lives are run by *logos* and not by *eros*, we are classically defined as animals that are logical and the erotic in us is excluded from the specifyingly human about us. The erotic has simply gone underground, into dream, myth and art, and bided its time, which is perhaps now. The rationality of repression, *logos* as *Begriff*, comes to a head in technology, and it is precisely the success of technology which creates the possibility of a way of life that would do justice to a different rationality and give expression to the extruded and subterranean elements of human need, desire and capability. What has been possible only in myth and in art may at last become available practically and historically, for everybody: 'In a genuinely humane civilization, the human existence will be play rather than toil, and man will live in display rather than need.' So long as scarcity and labour define our condition we are confined within the rationality of a repressive society; but this rationality has produced a technology which makes for abundance and leisure: Marcuse's point is that it is time we began to realize that the type of man it took to create this situation is not the type of man who can enjoy it. 'Once it has really gained ascendancy as a principle of civilization, the play impulse would literally transform the reality. Nature, the objective world, would then be experienced primarily, neither as dominating man (as in the primitive society), nor as being dominated by man (as in the established civilization), but rather as an object of "contemplation". With this change in the basic and formative experience, the object of experience itself changes: released from violent domination and exploitation, and instead shaped by the play impulse, nature would also be liberated from its own brutality and would become free to display the wealth of its purposeless forms which express the "inner life" of its objects. And a corresponding change would take place in the subjective world. Here, too, the aesthetic experience would arrest the violent and exploitative productivity which made man into an instrument of labour. But he would not be returned to a state of suffering passivity. His existence would still be activity, but "what he possesses and produces need bear no longer the

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traces of servitude, the fearful design of its purpose"; beyond want and anxiety, human activity becomes *display*—the free manifestation of potentialities.' Marcuse draws heavily here on Schiller's writings on how an 'aesthetic education' would make people like God: it is in such work as this, dating from the 1790s, that Marcuse's roots in the first generation of Romantic poets and thinkers may be traced (Herbert Read might be profitably compared with Marcuse). The German word for 'display', here, is *Schein*: a world in which man would be free to play with his potentialities and those of Nature, without having to dominate and exploit them, indeed where only by playing with them could he be free at all, would be a world existing according to the laws of beauty (as Schiller would say), a world in which the being of things could come to light, a world in which being would be manifest, where *Sein* would be *Schein*.

A society in which libidinal morality would operate, would be one in which the pleasure principle was gratified. Technology is making this possible, though it is itself the product of a repressive culture. The basic and formative experience which Marcuse sees as now viable and available, the alternative *Seinserfahrung*, is living under the primacy of play rather than of toil, of contemplativity rather than of productivity, of gratification rather than of repression, of *eros* rather than of *logos*. This experience of being would certainly require, or create, a different kind of human being. It should be possible, at this point, to spell out Marcuse's central ideas in terms of analogous suggestions in the work of Heidegger.

§2—*Technocracy and Contemplativity*

The historical connexion between Marcuse and Heidegger would not be difficult to show. We now have the evidence in *Negations*, a collection of his essays published by Allen Lane, The Penguin Press. In one of these papers, which dates back to 1934, we find Marcuse analysing the sort of philosophy associated with Heidegger's name then and condemning it very strongly: 'Existentialism collapses the moment its political theory is realized. The total-authoritarian state for which it longed gives the lie to all its truths. Existentialism accompanies its debacle with a self-abasement unique in the history of ideas, bringing its own history to end as a satyr play. In philosophy, existentialism begins as the antagonist in a great debate with Western rationalism and idealism, intending to save their conceptual content by injecting it into the historical concretion of individual existence. It ends by radically denying its own origin; the struggle against reason drives it blindly into the arms of the powers that be.' The opposition to liberal capitalism and rationalist positivism took the disastrous form of fascism: the rejection of what is bad in the western tradition for what is even worse.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, however, Marcuse uses Heidegger's later work to make the point that technology as technocracy means

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politics. A computer is a computer in any society, capitalist or socialist; a cyclotron may be used in war or in peace. But the neutrality of the apparatus goes only so far—as Marx himself once noted: 'the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist.' When technology as a method becomes the universal form of material production, it structures and circumscribes the whole culture, it defines one's 'world'. The technological *a priori*, in Marcuse's language, is a political *a priori*. When mechanization takes command, technology becomes power. It becomes technocracy: the organization and management of man and Nature by technical experts for the good of the whole community. The problem is that the good of the community is defined as that which technology can organize and manage. Both Marcuse and Heidegger maintain that this is bound to exclude a great deal that could validly be human needs, desires and capabilities. What Marcuse means by one-dimensional man is in effect the type of man who has accepted the technological *a priori* and become a positivist. In this sense Marcuse would be happy enough to be declared not a scientific but a poetic thinker. In his own way, in fact, he seeks to open up the dimension that is accessible best through art and myth. He sees the technological *a priori* as narrowing our experience and invalidating whole dimensions, whereas it ought to be providing the material base upon which far more people than ever before might be introduced into a richer life, the 'free and pacified existence' of which he speaks.

The purpose of philosophy, according to Heidegger, is to unbare and assess the limits of the system of thought and feeling in terms of which any particular historical community actually lives and understands itself. He is primarily concerned with the history of the culture which is western civilization. He sees the articulation of this culture, its reaching consciousness, in what he calls *Metaphysik*: the whole history of philosophy from Plato to the present day. This he interprets, very much as Marcuse does, as a process in which reason, *logos*, gradually and inevitably emerges as the power to dominate. Man becomes the one who imposes meaning on things (Kant), man is the one by whose will things are subdued (Nietzsche). There are two points here. In the first place, Heidegger's enterprise is to identify and question, and therefore to modify and extend, the bounds within which we are accustomed to feel, think, speak and act; he wants to reveal and revise the bounds of sense, of sensibility, imagination and behaviour. This is something which we are more inclined to expect from poets and novelists, from D. H. Lawrence's oeuvre to *Finnegan's Wake* and *The Naked Lunch*. On another front, it is what Marshal McLuhan and Norman O. Browne are up to. There would be agreement, I think, that this attempt to put the skids under western consciousness is worth while, that it is part of the growth of any society, and that a rather different type of human

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being is emerging now to correspond to the new phase in technology. The second point is that Heidegger, again like Marcuse, recognizes a pattern of development in the history of western consciousness; he is prepared to identify what is characteristic about western man. He wants to see continuity between the type of man who articulates himself in *Metaphysik*, reaching definition finally in the idea of man imposing meaning on things and in the notion of the absolute will to power, and the type of man who expresses himself in *Technik*: not just in making the apparatus of modern technological society but in adopting and presupposing the technological *a priori*. The notion of reason as *logos* and *Begriff* in classical metaphysics from Plato to Hegel is thus seen as issuing in technocratic ways of thinking. This is as much as to say that classical metaphysics has produced positivism. Heidegger is dealing, in fact, with precisely the problem raised in F. R. Leavis's debate with Lord Snow: 'Technological change has marked cultural consequences. There is an implicit logic that will impose, if not met by creative intelligence and corrective purpose, simplifying and reductive criteria of human need and human good, and generate, to form the mind and spirit of civilization, disastrously false and inadequate conceptions of the *ends* to which science should be a means. This logic or drive is immensely and insidiously powerful.' It becomes much easier to read Heidegger if one realizes that this is exactly what he is concerned about. Leavis speaks, splendidly, of 'the technologico-Benthamite ethos': it is against this that he has recourse, desperately, to the word 'spiritual'. This is what he says (*Lectures in America*, page 51): 'my own recourse to the word "spiritual" (and all important words are dangerous) is determined by the contemplation of a world in which the technologico-Benthamite ethos has triumphed at the expense of the human spirit—that is, of human life. There is an intrinsic human nature with needs that don't exist for the technologist and the Benthamite as such; there is a need for significance, for that which makes life significant—something that can't be discussed or taken account of in terms of what can be measured or averaged or defined, though rationality and intelligence (whether they know it or not) are thwarted when it fails.' When Heidegger speaks of *Technik*, it is precisely the technologico-Benthamite ethos which he means; and having thus characterized the dominant mode of sensibility and thought in our society, he accepts the burden of seeking some alternative. Anyone familiar with the present condition of theology and worship (which have no sense unless they are to do with that which makes life significant) will not wish to deny that the technologico-Benthamite ethos, with its simplifying and reductive criteria, has established itself: 'spiritual' is a dirty word. To surpass this situation, to subvert the positivism of one-dimensional man, Heidegger has for years been advocating renewed attention to *how we really are*.

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We make our own history, Heidegger has no doubt about that: we are not the playthings of fate. But the basic structure of being human is *existenzial*, rather *ekstatisch*: open, receptive, responsive, in a certain sense passive and submissive. All our meaning and feeling depends on what we are given, our deciding is finally a kind of accepting. There is surely no doubt that Heidegger has changed his mind about this in the course of his life. The Heidegger who succumbed to fascism is the Heidegger who insisted on the importance of *Entschlossenheit*, determination, resoluteness, peremptoriness, energy, pluck: what mattered was to decide, no matter what; but the Heidegger who quaintly reinterprets *Entschlossenheit* as *Entschlossenheit* is the one who, with a hyphen, rejects the arbitrariness of dominating will in favour of an accepting correspondence with deep needs and desires. The stance of subject towards object, man towards being, man towards Nature, one man towards another, which Heidegger once identified as will to dominate, now becomes transformed into letting be, *Seinlassen*. It is not difficult to see that Heidegger's will to dominate is equivalent to Gregory Bateson's arrogance and Marcuse's repression as well as to the Lawrence-Leavis notion of hard will. It is clear too that this involves a transformation in one's *Seinserfahrung*: something very like a conversion (metanoia, a reversal of perspectives and prospects). Letting-be and letting-go are also forms of commitment, indeed the basic ones: in the sense of never straining to manage what you commit yourself to, not pushing, not forcing, not manipulating, not trying to programme the outcome. Heidegger is rejecting Sartre's notion of human life as *projet* and accepting something analogous to Gabriel Marcel's sense of being human as fundamentally *recueillement*. For this consenting responsiveness Heidegger has revived the language of the German mystics, especially that of Meister Eckhart, and speaks of this basic attitude as *Gelassenheit*: collectedness, coolness. There is certainly a community of theme in Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit* and the coolness of the hippy generation (Norman Mailer has pointed this out already): in both cases it is the dominative rationality of western man that is being challenged. Heidegger is in effect opening the way to an experience of the *humanum* in which non-violence, patience, openness, grace, and so on, would be more important, in the end more human and more humane, than force, confrontation, will and conscious purpose. It fits in with this view that in *Der Satz vom Grund*, the last set of lectures Heidegger gave before retiring and in many ways the finest statement of his position, he replaces Leibniz by Angelus Silesius, just as he had previously substituted Eckhart for Kant; and this deliberate releasing of the potent thinking of the adversary and subterranean figures in the western tradition ends in a superb evocation of 'that which makes life significant' in terms of play, *Spiel*: the game, the dance, the quartet, in which man joins with the holy, the sky and the earth, to bring significance into

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being, to let being give meaning. And at this point the archetypes are certainly arising. It is by participating in this game that the significance of life is discovered, and this is what has been traditionally known as 'contemplation'. The best translation of *Gelassenheit* is 'contemplativity'.

The two essential books, then, are *Eros and Civilisation* and *Der Satz vom Grund* (both written in 1955 oddly enough). It would obviously take a book to expound and compare them. Our purpose here was simply to show how, in the thinking of Herbert Marcuse (so central in the para-Marxist opposition to our society) and in that of Martin Heidegger (so central in the European philosophical tradition), there is an analogous critique of the nature of western man and his experience of being. With this in mind we may next move on to re-examine the notions of liberation and contemplativity, of happiness and love, in the classical documents of western theology.

*(to be completed in the June issue)*



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