
BOOKS & WRITERS

The Dialectics of Despair

On Herbert Marcuse — By JULIUS GOULD

THIS is a new book in an old mood.¹ Professor Marcuse is out not only to interpret the world but also to change it. He brings to the task an equipment rarely found among professional philosophers and an idiom—Hegelian, Marxist, and Freudian—that is altogether his own. In the tradition of Karl Mannheim he attempts a diagnosis of our times—something which social scientists and philosophers to-day abjure. It is also a polemic *with* our times, a steady often repetitive condemnation. Especially exposed to this polemic are the intellectuals who, in Marcuse's account, are betraying their calling. For, in the full Marx-Mannheim pursuit of the sociology of knowledge, he seeks to show how the categories of thought, the epistemology of science and morals, are all governed (and, in his view, corrupted) by the "forces of domination" in advanced societies.

Let us begin with the modern "intellectual" and his failings. His timidity is, by now, a standing reproach. Few of us feel able to capture—let alone condemn—the spirit of our age: nor can we sense, with prophetic certainty, the spirit of the next. If the philosopher or social scientist shows zeal at all, it is now to perfect his methods or qualify his judgments. This is really a cool professionalism, alive to the complexity of things but seeking out the concrete manageable objects with which its methods can cope. The grand syntheses of an earlier time (and the even grander political passions) are left behind. Where 19th-century writers speculated, we (or our machines) can only calculate. Where they thought in epochs (both backwards and forwards), we are confined to the present tense. This confinement robs the intellectual of his historical role. Modern intellectuals may not knowingly truckle before contemporary values (though some do so with pleasure), but in their usefulness to society they absorb and uphold a spineless conformism. By limiting their horizon,

by becoming technique-bound and method-bound, the intellectuals commit a new kind of treason—one more potent and deep-seated than the old. For, at least in the Western world, ideological passions never became part of "established" values. The new intellectualism, in contrast, is built into the "established" order: and those who dominate society are all too skilled at controlling the vanity and concreteness of the scribes. Few critical postures on domestic or foreign affairs will thus emerge. The scribes will buttress, where they do not actually celebrate, the waste and irrationality of modern society: and they will subscribe to the Cold War ideology and its myths. The intellectual's role, we are assured, has been perverted by a sick society: and he is made to do its business instead of his own. What is more—and worse—he enjoys his perversion: instead of protesting the mindlessness of the social system he takes part, like everyone else, in its stupid and dangerous trivialities.

These familiar charges echo, with some novel overtones, through the pages of Professor Marcuse's book. I do not accept the bill of indictment, but it is presented here with vigour and with a genuine, if exaggerated, concern. It is only occasionally (when, for example, Professor Marcuse is outraged beyond endurance by such disparate figures as Herman Kahn and Ludwig Wittgenstein) that the polemic slips over into scornful abuse. As will be obvious (and as Marcuse acknowledges in his Introduction), his critical conclusions are very similar to those of C. Wright Mills. But the methods of Marcuse are, in general, more serious and dignified: they are also—but that is another matter—more high-flown. Mills, for all his distaste for America, was profoundly American—in his populist assumptions and his free-ranging, often naïve moralism. Marcuse has lived long in America, but his roots are elsewhere: in European Marxism and in Weimar Germany. He is haunted by the intellectual task of squaring Marxism (not, of course, Stalinism)

¹ *One-Dimensional Man*. By HERBERT MARCUSE. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 42s.

with the facts of social development, with the past and future course of industrial society. However much "capitalism" may have changed from the free-for-all condemned by Marx, it remains for Marcuse a source of tragic corruption. If it has not collapsed on the lines forecast by Marx, other ways can and must be found for the "disintegration of the system." This is a task which those who are not themselves Marxists will find less pressing. We may be wrong, but can we rule out the possibility of yet further advances "within the system"—much needed advances in living standards and the use of real leisure? This sort of question is no answer to Marcuse. For his sense of social sickness has a further source: the Nazi triumph over reason and civilisation. Like many Marxists of his generation he is seized, at times extravagantly, by the pervasive risk of "fascism" and by the fragility of existing (as distinct from ideal) democratic institutions. This goes beyond a proper scepticism about democratic façades. It comes near to the view that the whole edifice of democracy is a dangerous illusion. Perhaps Marcuse is committed to this by his "dialectical theory" (of which more later), by the remark of Ernst Bloch that he cites with approval: "...that which is cannot be true." But is it more than a deep-seated habit of mind? For one who lived through Weimar and who saw his countrymen set up Auschwitz, the smell of barbarity and repression is almost universal. A truly original sin was committed by his generation, and one can see why he is dedicated to expiating it. We may sympathise with his emotion and yet reject his analysis.

ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN sets out to depict the condition of advanced industrial societies, but it does not rest, or claim to rest, upon any vast inductive, comparative study. Primarily, it is a critique of the United States. Marcuse is one of those for whom the American dream has become the American nightmare: a state of affairs in which vital human dignities are affronted, in which basic human needs have been distorted. It is a realm of necessity whose key quality is that of repression, both cultural and psychological. It is a world where the political and economic authorities have cozened the mass of the population into welcoming the chains that bind them. Objectively there is repression: the felt satisfactions of the ordinary man are set within a "repressive" framework. Subjectively "individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction." Similarly: "the inner dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down." One-dimensional man is

homo conformans at many levels. Political and intellectual conflict is smoothed over by a modest yet evasive empiricism. High culture and "lower" culture overlap as "ideas become materialised." Through vulgarisation the classics of literature are re-made: "The interest and function of these works have fundamentally changed. If they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out." All this has its counterpart, perhaps even its roots, in the realm of instinct and libido.

For example, compare love-making in a meadow and in an automobile, on a lovers' walk outside the town walls and on a Manhattan street. In the former cases, the environment partakes of and invites libidinal cathexis and tends to be eroticised. Libido transcends beyond the immediate erotogenic zones—a process of non-repressive sublimation. In contrast, a mechanised environment seems to block such self-transcendence of libido. Impelled in the striving to extend the field of erotic gratification, libido becomes less "polymorphous," less capable of eroticism beyond localised sexuality, and the *latter* is intensified.

Marcuse, of course, is more agitated about the political than the erotic sickness of America. Despite his saving-clauses, I am left with the



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impression that he undervalues the positive uses of the "affluence" we have already attained. In one place, at least, he compares the Affluent Society to Hell. Once at least he lapses into un-historical nostalgia: what he calls the "pre-technological world" was, he claims, "a world in which man and nature were not yet organised as things and instrumentalities." What is more serious than these lapses, he seems to play down the peculiar achievement of the working classes in many societies—his own no less than mine. By sheer politics, without benefit of the dialectic, they have legitimised their claims. The idea of citizenship is *not* pure ideology. Of course there are gaps, often shameful ones, in its coverage, but in a substantial and unprecedented way its rights *are* enjoyed and their extension is an urgent and continuing priority. And all extensions will rest upon two "old-fashioned" requirements: first, a continuing growth of real productivity; and second, sanguine political pressure realistically applied. It is far too soon to despair of these arrangements, for whatever their faults may be they are the best arrangements we have got.

This would, I am sure, sound much too cheerful and speculative for Marcuse. For his pessimism is implicit in the way, right from the start, in which he defines his theme. I fear that one defect of the grand manner has always been a certain looseness of definition. But what are we to make of the following:

By virtue of the way it has organised its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political co-ordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic technical co-ordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole. Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and distribution which may well be compatible with a "pluralism" of parties, newspapers, "countervailing powers," etc.

This clarifies neither the notion of totalitarianism nor that of industrial society, and its result

² At one stage Marcuse concedes

"...for the administered individual, pluralistic administration is far better than total administration. One institution might protect him against the other: one organisation might mitigate the impact of the other: possibilities of escape and redress can be calculated. The rule of law, no matter how restricted, is still infinitely safer than rule above or without law."

He is quite right. But what then remains of the premise of *general* totalitarianism?

can only be to blur all distinctions. It may well be that in some sense there is a "tendency" towards "totalitarianism" in advanced (or, for that matter, emerging) societies of very different kinds. But in fact the "tendency" has only been actualised in a few societies, among which the United States or Great Britain are emphatically not included. A similar looseness of thought prompts his rhetorical question: "Is there to-day, in the orbit of advanced industrial civilisation, a society which is not under an authoritarian régime?" This blanket-approach eliminates, without explaining, the differences between industrial orders—notably, but not solely, the distinction between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A.

In all recent phases of the Cold War, critics have held that each Superpower is becoming a mirror-image of the other and that some "convergence," whether welcome or not, is to be expected. For Professor Marcuse some such convergence between "opposites" is perhaps presupposed by "dialectical theory." Yet the despised empirical sociologist may have the truth on his side—even where dialectics are against him. Of course there are resemblances between the Superpowers, but there are profound differences as well. These differences are not only, in the broadest sense, cultural—differences in societal tone.³ There are divergences which stem from the still different levels of economic development to be found in the countries compared. If we try to assess the similarities and divergences in a cautious systematic way, we must fall, let us face it, into the vice of sociological concreteness... In general, one is uneasy at Professor Marcuse's apparent liberation from attention to historical circumstance. It is all the more remarkable in that Marcuse refuses (and the refusal does him credit) to worry lest he be accused of "historicism." The method of dialectics to which he attaches such importance is supposed to yield a special kind of "historical truth." His readers may be forgiven if, on occasion, they doubt whether dialectical respect for historical truth entails respect for historical *evidence* as this is normally understood. So far as it is concerned, as much of this book is concerned, with the United States, the dialectical method might have suggested a worthier, more historically-grounded critique. Surely opposing principles can co-exist within one social system? Is everything in America's past and present as dark as *One-Dimensional Man* implies? Whatever one's judgment about the crudities and fictions which mark American life at mid-century, it is false to say that they outweigh everything else. There is, after all, an American pattern of egalitarianism and anti-élitism which some Europeans have been known to envy. This has deep historical roots but, significantly, no

serious place in a "dialectical" historical record. Nor does this record admit of the heterogeneity of American life: the regional and other diversities so fascinating to the unhappy empiricist and so invisible to the Logic of Reason.

MARCUSE'S IDEAL of social health is of a society qualitatively different from anything at present known. The *aim* is a total one, a restatement of human happiness and freedom; the *prerequisite* is the redefinition of needs. Existence is to be pacified: this means "the development of man's struggle with man and with nature, under conditions where the competing needs... are no longer organised by vested interests in domination and scarcity...." To-day, energy, in all senses, is channelled "into the handling of goods and services which satisfy the individual, while rendering him incapable of achieving an existence of his own, unable to grasp the possibilities which are repelled by his satisfaction." The ideal of autonomy, on the other hand, "demands conditions in which the repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again: their liberation demands repression of the heteronomous needs... which organise life in this society." In many ways this is a very noble and relevant ideal, one which, taken out of its dialectical dress, might command widespread assent. But, for a Marxist, assent is not enough. Such an ideal has to be demonstrably—or as earlier Marxists used to say "scientifically"—grounded in the ultimate stuff, the "relations of production." Now Marcuse is absolutely honest about this Marxist crux. Whatever may once have been asserted by Marxists, to-day "the critical theory" has a point of weakness: "its inability to demonstrate the liberating tendencies *within* the established society." This weakness reflects the new, post-bourgeois, techniques of "domination," so much more effective than the old.

In discussing both America and Russia, Marcuse has a try at harnessing the dialectic to the potential of automation. Growing productivity, in a quite new industrial setting, might cut the "chain that tied the individual to the machinery" and make possible the desired "historical transcendence." But, quite clearly, the effort—not a worthless one—does not satisfy him. The book ends on a note of quiet despair. We must make—presumably by way of example—the "absolute refusal": the demand "for the end of domination—the only truly revolutionary exigency and the event that would validate the achievements of industrial civilisation." In the author's very last words: "It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us."

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ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN is much concerned with the role of the intellectual in the "repressed society." I have already sketched the unflattering view of the intellectual professions held jointly by Marcuse and Mills. Given the premises from which these critics move (the Marx-Mannheim platform), they are understandably in anguish. Whatever else the intellectuals of advanced societies are up to, they are not acting as a revolutionary leaven, detached from the class-structure and freed from the blinkers imposed by "false consciousness." Marcuse is at his best when he describes the moral consequences of, for example, behaviourism in the social sciences; and even those who in no way share his assumptions will share his concern. Many intellectuals, especially in philosophy and the socio-political sciences, have become accustomed to thinking small. Trivialities abound, covered up by ritual scientism and pretentious language. The distinction between "facts" and "values" is vastly overworked. There is quantophobia—an obsession with statistics as the sole ground of certitude in a changing world. Some of this is to the pecuniary advantage of the intellectuals: a narrow professionalism pays off, not least in prestige. Yet on so large a theme there is more to be said. The critics, with their by now routine onslaughts, are both too sweeping and too narrow. Some of what looks like scholastic triviality may be necessary labour. Much of what is denounced as jargon, as status symbols of the ignorant, may be a painful, unavoidable groping for a much needed scientific discourse. Nor have the ideas of freedom and equality totally vanished from the social sciences. So far as this field in Britain is concerned, one can argue that it has shown, and still shows, excessive moralism in the service of desirable causes: and that there has been a corresponding failure to think in theoretical terms. Certainly the fashionable critics, even in the United States, have no monopoly over the traditional, wider concerns of social science. Not every social scientist is a mindless word-spinner or computer-attendant. In this book Professor Marcuse gives off a good deal of heat on these issues. He is often both acute and amusing, but spoils his effect both by exaggeration and by selective interpretation of his foes. He is specially hot on the Oxford school of "linguistic analysis," always an open target for pseudo-sociological attacks. Oxford has seduced philosophy from its great concerns and has turned it into yet another tool of "the administered society." I have read many critiques of recent Oxford philosophy but I have not, till now, seen anything as odd (and unintentionally revealing about the critic) as the following:

Analytic philosophy often spreads the atmosphere of denunciation and investigation by committee. The intellectual is called on the carpet. What do you mean when you say...? Don't you conceal something?...

Can the gap between Gilbert Ryle and Joe McCarthy really be bridged so smoothly? Shouldn't someone have told Marcuse about the Oxford habit of tutorial inquisition, a custom perhaps as painful or as limiting as Senatorial inquisition but, surely, "qualitatively different"?

MARCUSE'S OWN STANDPOINT is that of "dialectical" or "critical" theory to which he counterposes "anti-critical" procedures. What is involved in dialectical procedures is not difficult to grasp: whether it amounts to a meaningful "theory" is highly questionable. Dialectics is a way of describing methods that allow of "open development" and emphasises, even requires, a fruitful dialogue or relationship between "opposites." Such a method would be, in the language of this book, "two-dimensional"—in that it does not reduce, in politics or thought, the distinction between alternatives to a flat one-dimensional monochrome. Marcuse is aware that dialectics can be fraudulently as well as honestly deployed—that they have been degraded in the past into Stalinist mumbo-jumbo. He is, indeed, passionately honest about this. But he does not go on to enquire whether there may not be something in the "logic of dialectics" which lends itself more aptly than other logics to the service of distortion. I am certainly not convinced that it would be an unqualified advantage to replace the "spurious" concreteness of conventional logic or empiricism with the more dramatic dialectical truths. Marcuse, as I have noted, seems to be polishing the dialectics of despair. In this book he is often carried away, with admirable consistency, into the general, rather windy statements inseparable from this *genre*. And I suspect that these statements derive less from any logic, old or new, than from an act of faith.

When historical content enters into the dialectical concept and determines methodologically its development and function, dialectical thought attains the concreteness which links the structure of thought to that of reality. Logical truth becomes historical truth.

Or again:

This negative freedom—i.e., freedom from the oppressive and ideological power of given facts—is the *a priori* of the historical dialectic.

On some level of abstraction Professor Marcuse may be absolutely right, but it is awfully diffi-

A

vant Garde

At the beginning of August THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT published the first of two specially enlarged issues devoted to the avant garde movement throughout the world—primarily in literature, but also in the other arts wherever they seem related. Entitled *The Changing Guard*, it confined itself chiefly to the English speaking nations and carried statements from (among others) W. S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Maurice Girodias and Michael Horovitz.

The second number, *Any Advance?* will be published on September 3 and will cover Europe and the rest of the world. It too includes statements from many of the movements (Lettrism, the Zero Group, Situationism, the Noigandres Group, the international concrete poetry movement) or the individuals (H. C. Artmann, Max Bense, Raoul Hausmann, Isidore Isou, Bruno Munari, Jorgen

Nash, Otto Piene, Roger Planchon, Diter Rot) most intimately concerned. Both numbers carry original work by such writers and artists, as well as reviews of the relevant magazines and literature, and major critical articles discussing the implications of the movement.

This is an ambitious theme. The aim is two-fold: to present a cross section of the avant garde today, whether fertile or futile, and to examine "avant garde" as a notion in itself. The term, which is not an old one—it was unknown to the 1888 O.E.D. in any but the military sense—may be due for a transformation. These two numbers, striking a balance between enthusiasm and blank dismissal, could provide not only a useful work of reference but also a new turning-point in the history of ideas.

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cult to know. Many of us will prefer the foothills, where there is less abstraction of this sort and fewer hints of the apocalypse. It is true that our neighbours will be social scientists or even analytical philosophers, but that risk, in our folly, we shall take in our stride.

Clare: The Vanished Man

The Later Poems of John Clare. Edited by ERIC ROBINSON and GEOFFREY SUMMERFIELD.

Manchester University Press, 37s. 6d.

The Shepherd's Calendar. By JOHN CLARE. Edited by ERIC ROBINSON and GEOFFREY SUMMERFIELD. *Oxford University Press, 21s.*

The Life of John Clare. By FREDERICK MARTIN. With Introduction and Notes by Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield. *Frank Cass, 35s.*

A HUNDRED YEARS after his death, how far is the problem of Clare resolved? For most sophisticated poetry-readers to-day it is hard to imagine how anyone can fail to respond to that element we call genius in his work. Yet generations of textbook writers have found this possible. Elton (1920, reprinted 1948) looks at a swarm of minnows, but mentions Clare not at all. The revised (1964) Legouis & Cazamian still touches him off among

poets who are of a clearly inferior order, but are saved from oblivion through some individual accent, some occasional flash of personality; as, for example, the peasant poet John Clare, in whom a remarkably spontaneous feeling for nature creates for itself a form that is unfortunately less fresh.

Extraordinary? Yet why has any academic approval taken so long to find a voice? Why has the Oxford University Press not included him up to now in its canon of poets? (Admittedly, this is being remedied; a massive *Collected Clare*—edited by the alert new Clare-explorers Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield—is on the way: but this is at some years' distance.) And is it not significant that the most-used anthology piece should be the impressive but untypical *I Am*?

There are practical answers to most of these questions. When Clare (1793–1864) made his name in the early 1820s, it was as an oddity, a peasant who wrote verses. The mass of his later and greater work (except for one slow-selling volume in 1836) was never published in his lifetime—nor indeed for years after that. Much is unprinted still. Clare is in fact the vanished man of 19th-century poetry. Long before he entered the Epping asylum in 1837, he had slipped out

of the public mind; and in the years that followed, few people even knew that he was alive. But he was, and actively writing (as we see it now) some of the most original lyrical poetry of his time.

A further obstacle is the nature of the manuscripts themselves. The sheer quantity, for one thing, is enormous. The transcripts made by W. F. Knight, the kindly Steward of the Northampton Asylum where Clare spent the final third of his life, number nearly 900—and this for a few years alone. Poems are written in the mad disguise of Byron or of Burns, yet they are often major Clare underneath. Lines and images are repeated from poem to poem. In verses of marvellous beauty, streaks of unmistakable lunacy are lodged. (The outstanding examples are in that most remarkable of poems, Clare's *Child Harold*.) And anyhow, looking at some striking Blake-like image, where do you draw the line between deliberate effort and frenzied accident? And should an editor resist the temptation to tidy Clare's spelling, punctuation, and grammar? Good selections of Clare exist, of course: notably Blunden's careful pioneer book of 1920, Grigson's, Reeves', and above all the two-volume Tibble collection, the largest so far available. (A revised edition of this will be published by Dent in the autumn.) Not one of these gives us Clare entirely in the rough—for what the matter is worth.

It is worth a good deal to his latest editors, Robinson and Summerfield. The centenary year has brought them into the open, ready to face all the problems touched on above, and with three publications as a preliminary token of what is to come: a new edition of Clare's early *Shepherd's Calendar*; another of Frederick Martin's 1865 biography of the poet; and a volume selected from later manuscripts.

It is curious that Clare's story hasn't attracted more biographical attention. As one of those inexplicable case-histories of genius, it has very few rivals. A Northampton labourer's son, the youthful Clare scribbled verses passionately as soon as he could write. After enormous difficulties, a volume of his poetry was published in 1820; it sold extraordinarily well. (Keats' main work, published at the same time by the same publisher, hardly sold at all.) Clare came to London in a new green coat, had a riotous few weeks with Hazlitt, Lamb, and others of the writing crowd—and this was the beginning and end of his luck. He remained a farm labourer by trade; there were not a few lettered men in humble positions in the still-feudal countryside—butlers or gardeners who were expert in some field of science or natural history: Clare corresponded with two such homespun scholars.