

# Philosophy and the New Left

## Part 4 of 5

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Marcuse employs a method which he calls “negative thinking,” and it seems to be derived from the dialectical process; the justification for which would seem to be as follows. If you start with any thesis whatsoever, as for instance “movement upward in the vertical dimension”, the negation of that is the contradictory, that is the “not movement upward”; or, in formal terms, if one is called  $a$  the other is  $not-a$ . Then, it is true that if you take the whole contradictory, the negation of the contradictory will give you the original thesis; in other words, the not  $not-a$  is equal to  $a$ . And so the not-“not-upward movement in a vertical dimension” will give you “movement in the vertical dimension upward.” So far, negative thinking is valid; but when this is applied concretely we come into certain difficulties, and for that I will suggest the following schema. Let the letter  $a$  represent the thesis; let the opposite of the letter  $a$  be called  $b$ . Thus, if the thesis is goodness, and that would be the value of  $a$  and the opposite would be evil. But the contradictory includes a good deal more than simply the opposite. It is everything that is “not-goodness.” That which is not-goodness includes that which is neither good nor evil. So let us represent as the additional content of the contradictory, over and above the opposite, by the letter  $c$ . Then the contradictory of  $a$  would be  $b + c$ . But the contradictory of  $b$  would be not  $a$ , but  $a + c$ . Thus, you would have the potentiality of the negation of  $b$  in the affirmation of some value in  $c$  as well as in the value represented by  $a$ . This, then, renders, I believe, the simple application of negative thinking invalid, for concretely, we do not have before us the contradictory of  $a$  but specific conditions, specific movements, and if the specific movement fell in the class represented by  $c$  the negation of  $b$  could be found in  $c$  as well as in  $a$ .

One application of this double negation which I have heard proposed took the following form: that evil which is present today leads to good by the inevitability of its negation; in other words, that good comes out of evil *automatically*. I submit that my analysis of the logic involved here proves that this does not follow automatically. It could so happen, under the right conditions, that good emerged from evil. But it is a serious error to assume that because there is evil manifested, therefore automatically, and of logical necessity, good must follow; something more is involved. It is indeed true that under the right attitudes, out of evil, good can come. But the principle for that, which is laid down, is as follows: that he who does evil, and then ultimately recognizes that it is evil and repents it and resolves to correct that which has been done wrong, can produce good, can produce, perhaps, even a superior good by what Aurobindo has called the alchemy of the Divine. The reason why this cannot be called an automatic process is that the act of repentance and the resolution to correct the wrong done is a *voluntary* act and not an *autonomous* act. There is no certainty, whatsoever, that the doer of evil will automatically take this course.

There are two fundamental facets in the thought of Marcuse. One of these is an orientation to the dialectic development of Karl Marx which led to what we call “communism” today. The other is an orientation to the thesis of Sigmund Freud which maintained that the development of culture was based upon the repression of sexuality. For the present, let us glance briefly at the first of these. I do not wish, at this time, to devote my attention to a general critique of the Marxian theory. I shall, however, merely state that there are certain points in which I take strong exception to his thesis, feeling that they are invalid and probably demonstrably so. First, as I have shown, I criticize his application of the dialectic of Hegel for the reasons given earlier. Second, I challenge his interpretation of capitalism as being based upon the principle of exploitation. I do not deny that in the life of man there is exploitation of one against another in many ways, but I deny that this is essential to the principle of what we call capitalistic development. Third, I take exception to his labor theory of value, which is fundamental to the whole thesis. I consider that theory essentially unsound and the expression of very amateurish thinking. Fourth, I regard his thesis that mental contribution to the productions in society is to be regarded as a simple multiple of the simplest form of labor, for this fails to take into account the principle of incommensurability which so far separates simple muscular labor from the mental contribution that it is utterly impossible to treat the latter as merely a simple multiple of the former. If it becomes necessary to develop this critique, I can do it elsewhere; but I do not wish to go into this field of rather sordid thinking at this time.

Marcuse adds this distinction or deviation from the Marxian thesis: that instead of regarding the enemy, as it were, in terms of capitalism, rather to view it as industrialism. And he purports to find that the industrial society, whether capitalistic or communistic, is, in either case, an enslaving sort of society. He, therefore, is a critique of the Soviet interpretation of Marxism as well as of capitalism, and, indeed, has aroused even greater antagonism from the Soviet representatives than he has from the capitalist representatives. That I think will be enough in connection with this part of Marcuse’s work.

More important for our purposes is his thought concerning the *ergs*, or “pleasure principle,” which is central to the psychological thought of Sigmund Freud. There have been certain ethical theorists who have maintained that the one motivation which makes the wheels of the human entity turn round is the motivation of pleasure. These are known as the hedonists. The idea being that man seeks simple enjoyment, and that that is the one sufficient explanation for all of his effort—physical, mental, or otherwise. This can be challenged, but it is the principle expressed by the psychology of Sigmund Freud. And no doubt it is true that many individuals, perhaps most in this world, are more motivated by the desire for pleasure, or at least the avoidance of suffering, than there are whose primary motivation is something else. And there can be no doubt that it is a fact of psychology that there are individuals who have experienced neurosis and possibly even psychosis as a result of over-repression of this particular motivation towards pleasure, and that the treatment of such individuals may well require a relaxation of such repression. Dr. Carl G. Jung acknowledges that this is so; that this particular approach to the neurotic and psychotic problem is in certain cases quite valid. But he also points out that it is most likely to be valid in the case of young people and very definitely inadequate in the case of people who are approaching the normal terminus of life, where a problem that is more in the nature of a religious problem occupies a premiere position, namely, the problem of whether there is existence beyond the grave or not.

It was the contribution of Adler, which added to the limitations of the Freudian assumption, in which he developed the conceptions of the superiority and inferiority complexes as being factors that produced neurotic and psychotic conditions. Here the emphasis is upon what may be called the “power principle”—the principle of ambition, the principle of attaining a commanding position, an authority which could be exerted over others, or with respect to others, in one way or another. This, too, has been recognized by Dr. Jung as a valid interpretation of certain other forms of neurosis or of psychosis which could not be adequately handled by the assumption of the Freudians.

Now, I wish to suggest that these two motivations, that of pleasure and that of power, do not exhaust the field of the possible commanding motivations in the life of the individual. There is at least a third motivation which I see that can be dominant. Even though it is true that nobody likes to suffer and nobody likes to be insignificant, nonetheless, this third motivation may be the strongest of the three. And this I shall call the “motivation of Truth”; that before all things, truth is desired. But here we must extend the meaning of ‘truth’ from its most rigorous definition, namely, that of a correspondence between idea and external fact, which is the interpretation that is fundamental to what we call science. Truth can, and has had the meaning of being in adjustment with the All, in religious terms, as being in attunement with God. Here there is a certain subtlety of meaning which cannot be wholly reduced to formal definition, so we must be satisfied with partial definition. Truth carries the sense of right relationship to the All, of being in harmonious accord. One whose prime motivation is an orientation to Truth, in this sense, may indeed have a due feeling for preferring the comfortable and the pleasurable over and above the uncomfortable and the disagreeable, and may indeed appreciate being a person or a center of influence in the world; nonetheless, reduces all of this to the commanding authority of Truth. If Truth required the individual to accept deprivation in place of enjoyment, such an individual would accept the deprivation. If Truth required that one should occupy a place of apparent insignificance in the human whole, even though he appreciated and valued influence, nonetheless, he would accept the position of insignificance. And vice versa, if Truth required him to relax his austerities in a life practice, he would so relax them. And if Truth required him to occupy a position of authority and prominence in the world, he would accept such a position of authority and prominence. In a word, he would subordinate all preferences, all desires, all predilections, to the determinations and programs instigated by Truth. As a matter of fact, the primacy of this motivation is an absolute fundamental in the practice of the true ascending yoga.

We must bear these points in mind in the discussion that follows concerning Marcuse; and that he has taken the rather bucolic position of viewing the pleasure motive as the one and only dominant motive in the life of mankind. It is one motive—but only one—and the most primitive, and the least evolved, and least dignified of all three motivations. I might make this correspondence: that the pleasure motive corresponds to the pre-adolescent cycle in the development of the soul. It is probably the outstanding motivation of the animal. It has its place, but it is not a large place. It may dominate with many individuals in this world, perhaps even the majority of the individuals here, even unto old age, but in stature of soul that implies that they have not risen above the status of the pre-adolescent. They are only children or infants.

I would suggest that the power motivation corresponds to the adolescent stage in the soul. The sense that, I am the big *it*, that I can make men bow down to me, is more mature than the pre-adolescent position, but is far from being fully mature. Men that represent this sort of thing have been the great conquerors—the Alexander the Greats, the Napoleons, the Hitlers, the Stalins, the Genghis Khans—and, at a higher level, the men who have gloried in position in the fields of scholarship, philosophy, letters, and the arts, and center in themselves a feeling, here I am, the big *it*. That is a more mature position than that of the simple pleasure motive, but is only an adolescent stage in the growth of the soul.

Beyond all these, lies the motivation of the adult soul who is oriented to Truth and subordinates everything else to this motivation. He accepts what Truth may demand. If Truth demands his own extinction, he accepts it. If Truth demands his own continuation in embodied life, against his inclination and preference for non-embodied existence, he accepts the continuation in embodied life. If Truth requires that he shall maintain consciousness forever, he so maintains it.

Now, the orientation to Truth does not mean, in point of fact, that one necessarily forgoes enjoyment and forgoes influence and power. It's simply that the attitude is such that if it were required to forgo enjoyment and power in order to be loyal to Truth, the one so oriented would so proceed. But in point of fact, this is most likely to lead to the greatest possible enjoyment and the highest kind of power. If one seeks yoga, for instance, because of the enjoyments that it can bring, he is motivated in the wrong way. If he seeks yoga because he wishes to become one with Truth, enjoyment may be added unto him, in fact almost certainly will be added unto him, in degrees and kinds beyond his power to conceive; indeed, in such states of pure wonder, beauty, and delight that he would say that if the price of this were a thousand lifetimes of suffering, yet the price was low. And he may have added unto him the power that moves below the scenes; that commands what the soldier, and the politician, and the man of money cannot command; that can redeem the human soul; and that can set the pattern for all future life. And this is POWER, spelt with upper case letters, far beyond the accomplishments, and even the aspirations or imaginings, of those who are only oriented to power in the ordinary sense.

Let us now proceed to a more specific expression of the philosophy or point of view of Marcuse. I must confess that I have not read Marcuse extensively, but base my understanding primarily upon the exposition of Dr. Robert W. Marks, who has done a rather heroic work in rendering the obscurities of Marcuse more or less intelligible.<sup>1</sup> The portion of Marcuse which will present itself to our attention at the present time is that which is written in his book *Eros and Civilization*. In this, he ties in with the thesis presented by Freud's statement in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. While he takes exception to certain conclusions drawn by Freud, namely the more pessimistic elements, nonetheless, the base is Freudian; and if we are to understand this, we should consider certain facts concerning Sigmund Freud.

The best insight, of which I have knowledge, concerning Sigmund Freud is to be found in the final book of Dr. Carl G. Jung known as *Memories, Dreams, [and]*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Marks, *The Meaning of Marcuse* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970).

*Reflections* and published after his death. The quotation here will throw a light upon Sigmund Freud that I think is of central importance since the whole structure of Marcuse, and the seeming justifications in the youth movement, is based upon this. The quotation will be a considerable length, since this subject is of fundamental importance. Jung says, beginning on p. 148:

I first took up the cudgels for Freud at a congress in Munich where a lecturer discussed obsessional neuroses but studiously forbore to mention the name of Freud. In 1906, in connection with this incident, I wrote a paper for the *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift* on Freud's theory of the neuroses, which had contributed a great deal to the understanding of obsessional neuroses. In response to this article, two German professors wrote to me, warning that if I remained on Freud's side and continued to defend him, I would be endangering my academic career. I replied: "If what Freud says is the truth, I am with him. I don't give a damn for a career if it has to be based on the premise of restricting research and concealing the truth." And I went on defending Freud and his ideas. But on the basis of my own findings I was still unable to feel that all neuroses were caused by sexual repression or sexual traumata. In certain cases that was so, but not in others. Nevertheless, Freud had opened up a new path of investigation, and the shocked outcries against him at the time seemed to me absurd.

I had not met with much sympathy for the ideas expressed in "The Psychology of Dementia Praecox." In fact, my colleagues laughed at me. But through this book I came to know Freud. He invited me to visit him, and our first meeting took place in Vienna in February 1907. We met at one o'clock in the afternoon and talked virtually without a pause for thirteen hours. Freud was the first man of real importance I had encountered; in my experience up to that time, no one else could compare with him. There was nothing the least trivial in his attitude. I found him extremely intelligent, shrewd, and altogether remarkable. And yet my first impressions of him remained somewhat tangled; I could not make him out.

What he said about his sexual theory impressed me. Nevertheless, his words could not remove my hesitations and doubts. I tried to advance these reservations of mine on several occasions, but each time he would attribute them to my lack of experience. Freud was right; in those days I had not enough experience to support my objections. I could see that his sexual theory was enormously important to him, both personally and philosophically. This impressed me, but I could not decide to what extent this strong emphasis upon sexuality was connected with subjective prejudices of his, and to what extent it rested upon verifiable experiences.

Above all, Freud's attitude toward the spirit seemed to me highly questionable. Wherever, in a person or in a work of art, an expression of spirituality (in the intellectual, not the supernatural sense) came to light, he suspected it, and insinuated that it was repressed sexuality. Anything that

could not be directly interpreted as sexuality he referred to as “psychosexuality.” I protested that this hypothesis, carried to its logical conclusion, would lead to an annihilating judgment upon culture. Culture would then appear as a mere farce, the morbid consequence of repressed sexuality. “Yes,” he assented, “so it is, and that is just a curse of fate against which we are powerless to contend.” I was by no means disposed to agree, or to let it go at that, but still I did not feel competent to argue it out with him.

There was something else that seemed to me significant at that first meeting. It had to do with things which I was able to think out and understand only after our friendship was over. There was no mistaking the fact that Freud was emotionally involved in his sexual theory to an extraordinary degree. When he spoke of it, his tone became urgent, almost anxious, and all signs of his normally critical and skeptical manner vanished. A strange, deeply moved expression came over his face, the cause of which I was at a loss to understand. I had a strong intuition that for him sexuality was a sort of *numinosum*. This was confirmed by a conversation which took place some three years later (in 1910), again in Vienna.

I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, “My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.” He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, “And promise me this one thing, my dear son: that you will go to church every Sunday.” In some astonishment I asked him, “A bulwark—against what?” To which he replied, “Against the black tide of mud”—and here he hesitated for a moment, then added—“of occultism.” First of all, it was the words “bulwark” and “dogma” that alarmed me; for a dogma, that is to say, an undisputable confession of faith, is set up only when the aim is to suppress doubts once and for all. But that no longer has anything to do with scientific judgment; only with a personal power drive.

This was the thing that struck at the heart of our friendship. I knew that I would never be able to accept such an attitude. What Freud seemed to mean by “occultism” was virtually everything that philosophy and religion, including the rising contemporary science of parapsychology, had learned about the psyche. To me the sexual theory was just as occult, that is to say, just as unproven a hypothesis, as many other speculative views. As I saw it, a scientific truth was a hypothesis which might be adequate for the moment but was not to be preserved as an article of faith for all time.

Although I did not properly understand it then, I had observed in Freud the eruption of unconscious religious factors. Evidently he wanted my aid in erecting a barrier against these threatening unconscious contents.

The impression this conversation made upon me added to my confusion; until then I had not considered sexuality as a precious and imperiled concept to which one must remain faithful. Sexuality evidently meant more to Freud than to other people. For him it was something to be religiously observed. In the face of such deep convictions one generally becomes shy and reticent. After a few stammering attempts on my part, the conversation soon came to an end.

I was bewildered and embarrassed. I had the feeling that I had caught a glimpse of a new, unknown country from which swarms of new ideas flew to meet me. One thing was clear: Freud, who had always made much of his irreligiosity, had now constructed a dogma; or rather, in the place of a jealous God whom he had lost, he had substituted another compelling image, that of sexuality. It was no less insistent, exacting, domineering, threatening, and morally ambivalent than the original one. Just as the psychically stronger agency is given “divine” or “daemoniac” attributes, so the “sexual libido” took over the role of a *deus absconditus*, a hidden or concealed god. The advantage of this transformation for Freud was, apparently, that he was able to regard the new numinous principle as scientifically irreproachable and free from all religious taint. At bottom, however, the numinosity, that is, the psychological qualities of the two rationally incommensurable opposites—Yahweh and sexuality—remained the same. The name alone had changed, and with it, of course, the point of view: the lost god had now to be sought below, not above. But what difference does it make, ultimately, to the stronger agency if it is called now by one name and now by another? If psychology did not exist, but only concrete objects, the one would actually have been destroyed and replaced by the other. But in reality, that is to say, in psychological experience, there is not one whit the less of urgency, anxiety, compulsiveness, etc. The problem still remains: how to overcome or escape our anxiety, bad conscience, guilt, compulsion, unconsciousness, and instinctuality. If we cannot do this from the bright, idealistic side, then perhaps we shall have better luck by approaching the problem from the dark, biological side.

Like flames suddenly flaring up, these thoughts darted through my mind. Much later, when I reflected upon Freud’s character, they revealed their significance. There was one characteristic of his that preoccupied me above all: his bitterness. It had struck me at our first encounter, but it remained inexplicable to me until I was able to see it in connection with his attitude toward sexuality. Although, for Freud, sexuality was undoubtedly a *numinosum*, his terminology and theory seemed to define it exclusively as a biological function. It was only the emotionality with which he spoke of it that revealed the deeper elements reverberating within him. Basically, he wanted to teach—or so at least it seemed to me—that, regarded from within, sexuality included spirituality and had an intrinsic meaning. But his concretistic terminology was too narrow to express this idea. He gave me the impression that at bottom he was

working against his own goal and against himself; and there is, after all, no harsher bitterness than that of a person who is his own worst enemy. In his own words, he felt himself menaced by a “black tide of mud”—he who more than anyone else had tried to let down his buckets into those black depths.

Freud never asked himself why he was compelled to talk continually of sex, why this idea had taken such possession of him. He remained unaware that his “monotony of interpretation” expressed a flight from himself, or from that other side of him which might perhaps be called mystical. So long as he refused to acknowledge that side, he could never be reconciled with himself. He was blind toward the paradox and ambiguity of the contents of the unconscious, and did not know that everything which arises out of the unconscious has a top and a bottom, an inside and an outside. When we speak of the outside—and that is what Freud did—we are considering only half of the whole, with the result that a countereffect arises out of the unconscious.

There was nothing to be done about this one-sidedness of Freud’s. Perhaps some inner experience of his own might have opened his eyes; but then his intellect would have reduced any such experience to “mere sexuality” or “psychosexuality.” He remained the victim of the one aspect he could recognize, and for that reason I see him as a tragic figure; for he was a great man, and what is more, a man in the grip of his daimon.<sup>2</sup>

But to complete the picture, I will make another brief quotation at a later point in connection with one of the fainting spells of Sigmund Freud. This was on the occasion when both Sigmund Freud and Dr. Carl G. Jung were invited to give lectures at Clark University in New England and were traveling together. They had reached Bremen, and there was a story of certain mummies in lead cellars and in the swamps which interested Dr. Jung considerably at that time.

Having read about these peat-bog corpses, I recalled them when we were in Bremen, but, being a bit muddled, confused them with the mummies in the lead cellars of the city. This interest of mine got on Freud’s nerves. “Why are you so concerned with these corpses?” he asked me several times. He was inordinately vexed by the whole thing and during one such conversation, while we were having dinner together, he suddenly fainted. Afterward he said to me that he was convinced that all this chatter about corpses meant I had death-wishes toward him. I was more than surprised by this interpretation. I was alarmed by the intensity of his fantasies—so strong that, obviously, they could cause him to faint.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 148-153.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.



And now, does this not reveal that in Sigmund Freud we indeed have a sick man—sick in the psychological sense? One who lost his God in the heights and replaced it from the truly muddy depths below; and one who feared that his then protege had death-wishes for him as the father. And in connection with this, it should be remembered that psychical states are contagious; psychical health and psychical illness is contagious. And would not this mean that for all Freudian practitioners and for all those who go to Freudian practitioners there is an exposure to this psychical illness? In other words, as I have said before, however fine the motivation of Sigmund Freud as a man may have been, nonetheless, the influence of his work is very largely dark and evil.