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ABSTRACT

The article consists of a re-examination of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* in the light of continuing interest in that work. After a brief consideration of Marcuse's attempt to use Freud to indict contemporary civilization, focusing on the concepts of surplus repression and guilt, the article turns to his utopian sketch of Eros as a culture builder and the reconciliation of reason and instinct. These themes, which form the focus of recent interest, are explored by examining Marcuse's interpretation of Kant and Schiller as well as Freud. In all cases Marcuse's interpretation is shown to be flawed. The conclusion is that Marcuse's attempt to indict established reason in the light of instinct and yet to hold out the prospect of a reconciliation of reason and instinct leads to an impoverished concept of both.

Key words critical theory, Freud, Marcuse, philosophy, psychology

Eros and Civilization was Herbert Marcuse's most provocative book. The contentious interpretation of Freud, the general thesis, namely that a society pervaded by Eros was within the grasp of men, as well as the celebration of 'polymorphous perversity' and many other details of interpretation, all contributed to its status as a radically utopian work. Over 20 years later Jürgen Habermas recalled the 'stunning impression' of Marcuse's exposition of his ideas in a lecture on Freud in 1956. For Habermas and his fellow research assistants in the Institute for Social Research 'this was the moment when we first faced an embodiment and vivid expression of the political spirit of the old Frankfurt School' (Habermas, 1985: 68; see also Dews, 1992: 206–7).

Despite the numerous and often telling criticisms of *Eros and Civilization*,

it has continued to exert a certain fascination, partly in its own right and partly because of a revival of interest in Erich Fromm. It has naturally been of concern in the surveys of Marcuse's thought, though these do not show any consensus about its validity and wider significance (Flego and Schmied-Kowarzik, 1989; Geohagen, 1981; Institut für Sozialforschung, 1992; Katz, 1982; Kellner, 1984; Pippin, 1988; Schoolman, 1980). Indeed the editors of one volume drew attention to the growing divergence in attitudes to *Eros and Civilization*, ranging from outright dismissal to enthusiastic assertions of its contemporary relevance (Flego and Schmied-Kowarzik, 1989: 7–8). It also figures prominently in some approaches to Freud and in works concerned with the relation between critical theory and psychology, again with no evident consensus (Jacoby, 1975; Ricoeur, 1970; Whitebook, 1995; Whitebook, 1996). The revival of interest in the ideas of Fromm, whose supporters claim he has been unjustly neglected, in part at least as a result of the accusation levelled at him by Marcuse, has also contributed to persistent interest in *Eros and Civilization* (Bronner, 1994; Burston, 1991; Erich-Fromm-Gesellschaft, 1991; Funk, 1980; Rickert, 1986). Like Marcuse, Fromm had been a member of the Frankfurt School. He had, however, parted, amid some animosity, in 1939 (Horkheimer, 1995: 666–7). Fromm's revision of Freudian theory came under attack from Marcuse in an article in *Dissent* shortly before the publication of *Eros and Civilization*. The polemic between Marcuse and Fromm, the ground for which had been laid earlier, helps to explain, if not justify, Marcuse's sometimes obdurate defence of Freud. Marcuse's avowed concern was 'not with a corrected or improved interpretation of Freudian concepts but with their philosophical and sociological implications' (Marcuse, 1969: 25).[1] By constantly insisting upon denial of gratification, the repression of instincts for the sake of 'civilization', Freud's theory was an indictment of existing civilization. In Marcuse's eyes, Fromm's revisionism, the rejection of Freud's theory of instincts, called into question 'a radically critical theory' and was, by that very fact, suspect (Marcuse, 1969: 167).

The polemic against Fromm and other revisionists forms part of the background to *Eros and Civilization*, but only part. Also essential to understanding Marcuse's stance in *Eros and Civilization* is his advocacy of hedonism, which pre-dated any sustained interest in Freud. His essay of 1938, 'On Hedonism', criticized the disparagement of sensual pleasure but at the same time claimed that 'The designation of happiness as the condition of the comprehensive gratification of the individual's needs and wants is abstract and incorrect as long as it accepts needs and wants as ultimate data in their present form' (Marcuse, 1968: 189).

The third element to the background to *Eros and Civilization* was, of course, the patent absence of any revolutionary impulse in the western world after the Second World War. Along with his colleagues in the Institute for Social Research he had taken it as axiomatic that the productive capacities of

modern, capitalist societies had developed to such an extent that a radically different type of society was possible. They further assumed that this should have been evident to all and that if it was not some explanation had to be found for why the anticipated insight into the possibility and desirability of a new type of society had been blocked (Marcuse, 1969: 11).[2] The questions underlying *Eros and Civilization* were really those bequeathed by Marx: How do we know when a mode of production is obsolete? Why should men recognize this obsolescence? Why should they act on that insight and abolish that mode of production? Turning to Freud for an answer to these questions was not the most obvious strategy. Earlier, in 'On Hedonism', he had remained on more traditional socialist ground and had argued that 'only those groups with the greatest purchasing power can take advantage of the expanded capacities [provided by modern technology] and their gratification' (Marcuse, 1968: 184). But this made no sense against the backcloth of the post-war affluent society. Worse still the affluent society was also a more permissive one. As he acknowledged in 1966 'it made no sense to talk about surplus repression when men and women enjoy more sexual liberty than ever before' (Marcuse, 1969: 12).[3] But talk about it he did.

These issues, the often bitter dispute over the status of Freud's theories, the significance of hedonism in affluent and permissive societies, the problem of how to sustain a radical critique of society with revolutionary ambitions in an age in which radical social movements and utopian perspectives had disappeared from the agenda, all help to explain the initial impact and continued interest in *Eros and Civilization*, as well as Marcuse's own motives and style. This article, however, is concerned to assess Marcuse's arguments and to do so by measuring the claims he makes against his own sources. It seeks to proceed through an immanent critique, which he and the other members of the Institute for Social Research held up as their own preferred method.

Surplus repression played a key role in Marcuse's argument. It was this which allowed him to assert the obsolescence of current society. Surplus repression was defined as follows: 'the restrictions necessitated by social domination. This is distinguished from (basic) *repression*: the "modification" of the instincts necessary for the perpetuations of the human race in civilization' (Marcuse, 1969: 42). The distinction between basic and surplus repression has induced much dubious speculation on analogies with Marxian concepts. According to Morton Schoolman Marcuse's concepts of basic and surplus repression are extrapolations from Marx's socially necessary and surplus labour (Schoolman, 1980: 94–5; see also Kellner, 1984: 164). But this is wrong. The problem with surplus labour for Marx is not that it exists. The problem is that its product is expropriated by capitalists. The problem with surplus repression for Marcuse is that it exists at all. The point is to abolish it.

There is, however, one useful thing to emerge from the comparison with Marx's concepts. Surplus labour is, in principle, measurable. At least it was

in the abstract models in which Marx introduced the concept. Can the same be said for surplus repression? It is important that it can, for it is surplus repression alone which has to be abolished. Moreover, the concept of surplus repression promised to provide a solution to another problem, that is, how can we talk about surplus repression in a more permissive and affluent society? According to Marcuse, '[t]he same and even a reduced scope of instinctual regimentation would constitute a higher degree of repression at a mature stage of civilization' (Marcuse, 1969: 74). From this perspective even the affluent and permissive society could be repressive, and even more repressive than less affluent and less permissive stages of civilization. If the gap between the level of repression required, given the level of economic development, and that actually operative grew, the more mature stage would be more repressive. At one point Marcuse seemed to find an answer. He picked up two distinct themes in Freud. The first was the idea that sexual instincts were inimical to civilization and had to be repressed. The second was that there was an erotic component to society. Seizing upon the apparent ambiguity he proclaimed that 'the free Eros does not preclude lasting civilized societal relationships . . . it repels only the supra-repressive organization of societal relationships' (Marcuse, 1969: 46–7).

Marcuse wanted an instinct, Eros, to discriminate. It is, indeed, possible to talk of instinctual discrimination between all kinds of things. But not in this case. Marcuse required discrimination between necessary and surplus repression, where what is necessary and what is surplus are, at his own insistence, historically variable. Although he repeated the assertion that Eros could discriminate in the way required, he did not develop the suggestion in any detail (see Rotenstreich, 1970: 46–7). Indeed, he may have been aware of the weakness of the idea for he reverted to a more prosaic position. At the end Marcuse was reduced to asserting that everyone would recognize, consciously, the distinction, were they not prevented from doing so. But that was merely to go back to the starting-point. Instinct had not been able to provide a substitute for insight but the insight was stubbornly absent.

An alternative was to try to find some other psychological index of the repressiveness of society. An obvious candidate was guilt. Indeed in recent interpretations Marcuse's account of guilt has been singled out for praise (Schmid-Noerr, 1990: 206). In the lecture which inspired Habermas, Marcuse declared that 'This is Freud's revolutionary insight: the conflict . . . between the reality of repression and the almost equally real possibility of doing away with repression' (Marcuse, 1970a: 18). It was precisely this which was supposed to account for the feeling of guilt. Guilt was not merely internalized repression but was also 'guilt about a freedom that one has both missed and betrayed' (Marcuse, 1970a: 18). One would expect that this would lead Marcuse to argue that the feeling of guilt had increased parallel with the possibility of putting an end to repression. Indeed, he did. He was able to quote

Freud speculating upon the increase of guilt to the point 'perhaps . . . that individuals can hardly support' (Marcuse, 1969: 70). But for Freud this had nothing to do with the possibility of putting an end to repression. According to Freud's speculation, guilt increased because, in some opaque way, the conflicts within the family that first led to the feeling of guilt, were repeated as the community was extended beyond the family. Hence, the wider the community the greater the feeling of guilt. It is ironic that Marcuse quoted the very passage in which Freud said this, for he was then obliged to lament that 'the change in the *quality* of guiltiness, its growing irrationality, seems to disappear' (Marcuse, 1969: 70). If Marcuse had followed through the line of Freud's speculation the incompatibility between his interpretation and Freud's would have become even clearer. For when Freud suggested there might be a 'cultural super-ego' whose excessive demands threatened to produce 'neurotic' civilizations he did not bemoan the renunciation of gratification. Instead he quoted the Christian injunction to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' in order to denounce it as incompatible with the egoism of human nature (Freud, 1975: 80).[4]

The dubious interpretation of Freud would not matter if Marcuse had been able to find other support for his contention that there was a feeling of guilt which could be tied to his postulation of 'surplus repression'. But this he could not do. He did seek to deploy other Freudian models to explain why men did not rebel. There, however, he took it for granted that rebellion was warranted, that the obsolescence of the existing socioeconomic order would have been evident were it not for the mechanisms that blocked this insight.[5] All he could do beyond this, was to point to the well-known horrors of the 20th century and denounce the destructiveness of modern civilization.

This weakness may well explain why the distinction between basic and surplus repression now receives cursory attention, where it is noted at all. It is not the appropriation of Freud as part of a, ultimately Marxian, theory of revolution that now holds centre stage, but the appropriation of Freud as part of a utopian sketch. Marcuse's utopia, as outlined in *Eros and Civilization*, rested on two related claims. The first was the general point that 'the free Eros does not preclude lasting civilized societal relationships' (Marcuse, 1969: 46). Here all Marcuse had to do was to demonstrate that men were not inherently anti-social beings. The second was the more specific claim that there was a 'libidinous morality'. This is a much more demanding assertion. Here it was not sufficient to prove that the contours of 'civilized societal relationships' could be discerned in the instincts.

The compatibility of Eros and civilization was defended on two levels. First, Marcuse claimed that Freud's psychology was an adequate basis for sketching his utopia. This was bound up with his hostility to the revisionists who claimed that Freud's theories had to be corrected or supplemented by social and cultural factors. Ironically though, in his strongest formulation of

the social character of Freud's psychology, it was his fellow opponent of revisionism, Adorno, who came in for criticism. Marcuse noted that 'the psychological approach seems to fail at a decisive point: history has progressed "behind the back" and over the individuals, and the laws of historical progress have been those governing the reified institutions rather than the individuals'. This was Adorno's view. But Marcuse continued, 'Against this criticism we have argued that Freud's psychology reaches into a dimension of the mental apparatus where the individual is still the genus, the present still the past. Freud's theory reveals the biological de-individualization beneath the sociological one' (Marcuse, 1969: 85).[6] Marcuse sought to buttress this bold assertion in two ways. In the first instance he turned to Freud's speculation concerning the murder of the father of some primal horde. This, Marcuse conceded, was to say the least contentious. Indeed he claimed to make use of it purely for its '*symbolic* value' (Marcuse, 1969: 57). Once again, Freud was of less use than Marcuse pretended. He also sought support elsewhere, namely Hegel. But here he had to gloss over his own insight into Hegel's work. Much earlier, in a work devoted to Hegel, he had discussed the concepts of species and individual only to conclude that here there was merely an 'indifferent universality' (Marcuse, 1987: 224).[7] In other words, the equation of genus and individual, which he asserted in *Eros and Civilization*, was superficial.

The second attempt to demonstrate the compatibility between Eros and civilization focused on Freud's concept of Eros. Marcuse quoted Freud's characterization of Eros as 'the effort to "combine organic substances into ever larger unities" ' (Marcuse, 1969: 46). Again Marcuse's enthusiasm tended to carry him away. He readily referred to Freud's reference to an 'oceanic' feeling, but failed to note that Freud was sceptical about the notion. Freud, in fact, laconically observed that he himself had never experienced such a sentiment (Freud, 1975: 2; see also Görlich, 1992: 180–1). Nevertheless, the general point, that Freud postulated an erotic disposition towards civilization, was sound. In this, of course, Freud was scarcely novel. That was grist to the mill. For part of Marcuse's thesis was that Freud formed part of a philosophical tradition which, despite lapses, upheld the possibility of a non-repressive civilization. Here, both Plato and Nietzsche could be invoked in support of Freud (Marcuse, 1969: 92–6).[8]

Marcuse recognized that there were problems with Freud's notion of Eros. He devoted much attention to the fact that Freud postulated an aggressive instinct (the death instinct) alongside Eros. Marcuse's strategy was to argue that the aggressiveness associated with the death instinct was a by-product of repressive civilization. The real purpose of the instinct was not aggression but 'unconscious flight from pain and want' (Marcuse, 1969: 39; see also ibid.: 164–6). However, it is not the attempt to conjure away the postulation of an inherently aggressive instinct that is the main problem. The problem lies

closer to home, namely in Marcuse's reformulation of the notion of Eros. One difficulty is simply the plasticity of the notion. Here Marcuse faithfully followed Freud. Both denied that Eros could be reduced to a sexual instinct. According to Marcuse Eros 'denotes a larger biological instinct' (Marcuse, 1969: 147). This was consistent with his repeated assertion that he was not advocating any kind of pan-sexualism. As far back as 'On Hedonism' he had dismissed the 'bogey of the unchained voluptuary who would abandon himself only to his sensual wants' (Marcuse, 1968: 198). But Marcuse exploited Freud's ambiguity to maintain the link between Eros and sexuality. That in turn created more confusion.

According to Freud's original model the sexual instincts were compatible with civilization only if they were, in part at least, sublimated. Indeed it was this process of sublimation which formed the basis of Freud's account of how civilization was possible. With the introduction of the concept of Eros this earlier account should have been made redundant. Eros was, after all, supposed to be a social instinct. There was no need to talk about its 'sublimation' for the sake of something which it was supposed to do in the first place. Yet both Freud and Marcuse continued to talk about sublimation (Flego, 1992: 190–4; see also Hyman, 1988: 159–64).

These ambiguities are less important than the implications of Marcuse's general thesis. The general thesis is clearly that there is an erotic element underlying society. But if this is so, would it not underlie all societies including the one he despised? In his 'Political Preface 1966' Marcuse conceded as much: 'the established society too has its Eros' (Marcuse, 1969: 16). The problem is the same one encountered in his attempt to suggest an instinctual ability to distinguish between basic and surplus repression. The instinct, Eros, cannot discriminate in the way Marcuse needed it to. If there is an instinct, Eros, which has the characteristics claimed for it by Marcuse, then it must be at work in all societies. The more Marcuse insists that there is such an instinct the more inescapable this conclusion becomes. He could, of course, have argued that some societies, including the present one, are not founded upon that instinct but that a future society *could be*. This, however, would have involved finding a different explanation for societies not founded upon this instinct and hence weakening its ubiquity and force. It would also have meant denying the universality of Freud's theory and joining the revisionists.

There are other difficulties in a recourse to instinct, difficulties reflected in Freud's work and in the broader tradition of political thought. The majority of those who have sought to find a social bond in sentiment or feeling, whether explicitly sexual or not, have emphasized the limited extent to which the bond can prevail. Moreover, the stronger or more violent the sentiment, the greater has been the inclination to stress its limited extent. Those who have relied upon a weaker sentiment have tended to allow it more scope,

though the nation has normally been the prime focus (Burke, 1969: 135).[9] Freud, who discerned a decidedly violent sentiment, followed in this general trend. When he conceded the possibility of more expansive group sentiments he directly associated hostility to outsiders with the strength of the bond within the group. Worse still, the more expansive the group, the more intense he supposed the hostility to be. Thus, 'When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those outside it became the inevitable consequence' (Freud, 1975: 51).

The other features of the group sentiment as described by Freud were scarcely more appealing. Reflecting the elitist inclinations of other observers of group behaviour like Le Bon and Pareto, Freud presented the 'herd instinct' as one of 'a regression of mental activity to an earlier stage such as we are not surprised to find among savages or children' (Freud, 1985: 148; see also Anderson, 1993). He also insisted upon the importance of a leader as a focus of group sentiment (Freud, 1985: 150–3). The picture of group solidarity which emerges from Freud's account could hardly be less appealing for Marcuse. It is characterized by common subordination to the leader, aggression towards outsiders and a lack of restraint or discrimination. It is closer to the authoritarian political movements which formed the focus of the work of the Institute for Social Research in the 1930s and 1940s than to Marcuse's vision of 'lasting civilized societal relationships'.

Marcuse did not gloss over these features, though he did not flesh out their implications to the extent that one might have expected in the light of his earlier work (see Marcuse, 1972: 49–155). Freud's emphasis on the role of the leader, he argued, was simply obsolete. Even the repressive society no longer needed 'leaders' as a focus. In part he justified this by claiming that authority had been dispersed among anonymous bureaucracies (Marcuse, 1970b; see also 1969: 79–80). It also fitted in with the belief, characteristic of the Institute for Social Research's approach, that the family, and hence the father figure, were no longer the primary instruments of socialization (Marcuse, 1969: 78–9). Marcuse's response to Freud's comments on 'a regression of mental activity' was different. This, he conceded, was a valid observation, though he extended it beyond the framework of specific groups. It was, he claimed, characteristic of the affluent society in general. A lack of discrimination and fear of nonconformity were supposed to be endemic (Marcuse, 1970b: 49). This conclusion is significant for Marcuse's solution of the other problem posed by Freud's account of the group sentiment, the aggression towards outsiders.

Again Marcuse accepted the existence of the phenomenon. The affluent society was characterized by aggression towards outsiders, aggression which was easily channelled in the service of the cold war. This formed part of the 'destructive dialectic' whereby society repressed Eros, weakened it and hence

weakened the restraint of aggressive instincts which was the allotted task of Eros (Marcuse, 1969: 47). But even if Eros and the death instinct were as Marcuse supposed them to be, had he not conceded that the affluent society was also the permissive society? If so, then why should Eros be *increasingly* weakened? He confronted this problem most explicitly in 'The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man' and even emphasized that there was '*indeed a large desublimation*' in the affluent society (Marcuse, 1970b: 57). But he went on to suggest that there was something wrong with this, it was 'a controlled liberalization' which ran counter to the 'essentially erotic quality, that of freedom from control' (Marcuse, 1970b: 57). It was controlled because it was manipulated by the consumer industry and any satisfaction which people might find in this way was tainted. The same point was made in *Eros and Civilization* in the context of claims that people ordinarily took pleasure in work. Marcuse conceded that they did, but claimed that 'this pleasure is extraneous (anticipation of reward), or it is the satisfaction (itself a token of repression) of being well occupied' (Marcuse, 1969: 155). With that assertion he was back on the familiar, if problematic, ground of distinctions between true and false needs, and hence true and false pleasures, which he had called for in 'On Hedonism' (see Malinovich, 1982: 158–80).

Ironically Marcuse had rather neglected that problem, hence, in part, the triviality of the examples he invoked in *Eros and Civilization.* He had neglected it in favour of another issue, one which was also evident in 'On Hedonism'. This was the claim that what was wrong with modern civilization was its repression of needs and pleasure. It was this which Freud claimed to diagnose. It was this which Marcuse took up in his indictment of the affluent society. It was this which led to his stubborn defence of Freud against the revisionists. But Freud proved to be an unreliable ally. Marcuse constantly had to distinguish between Freud's supposed insights and the blindness induced by his biological orientation which failed to take into account the historical dynamic of the instincts and the reality principle. But when Marcuse did this and sought to draw out the consequences of his historicization of Freud, his own distinction between basic and surplus repression was left hanging in the air. He had suggested that the difference could be recognized by an instinct, Eros, but failed to pursue this and lapsed into reliance on the self-evidence of the distinction. He was no more successful when he turned to Eros as culture builder. Eros as culture builder turned out to be similarly indiscriminate. If it existed it permeated all societies, including the repressive one. In both cases he sought some psychological index, a substitute for instinctual discrimination, which would indict the affluent society. Perhaps guilt or aggression could do what Eros had not been able to? In both cases he turned to Freud for support but in both cases Freud's logic, once placed in the context of the affluent and permissive society, failed to predict an increase in guilt or aggression.

In the second half of *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse identified the problem which dogged his efforts:

> In Freud's theory, the mental forces opposed to the reality principle appear chiefly as relegated to and operating from the unconscious. The rule of the 'unmodified' pleasure principle obtains only over the deepest and most 'archaic' unconscious processes: they can provide no standards for the construction of the non-repressive mentality nor for the truth value of such a construction. (Marcuse, 1969: 108)

If instinct alone cannot discriminate perhaps the answer lies in some combination of instinct and reason? This was what Marcuse supposed. Hence he invoked a 'libidinal rationality', a '*sensuous* rationality' or 'libidinal morality' (Marcuse, 1969: 143, 161). Throughout the various permutations the constant theme was that reason and sensuousness were not isolated from each other or self-contained. This came naturally to someone who set out from a critical stance towards the neo-Kantian orthodoxy, which dominated the German academic establishment when Marcuse embarked upon his philosophical career. It is also a theme which is prominent in recent interpretations of *Eros and Civilization* (Erich-Fromm-Gesellschaft, 1991; Institut für Sozialforschung, 1992; Schmid-Noerr, 1990).

Marcuse's first two attempts to elucidate what he meant started out from the reason side of the pair reason–sensuousness. The first candidate was phantasy. Its attraction is self-evident. For the most part reason was bound up with the reality principle which required repression of the instincts. Reason dictated what was necessary in order to survive and what was necessary was repression. But phantasy was not constrained in this way. In Chapter 7, 'Phantasy and Utopia', Marcuse invoked the idea of phantasy but gave little indication of what phantasy might suggest to us. Finally, in the following chapter he drew upon myth to provide some illustration for his appeal to phantasy. He contrasted the myth of Prometheus, 'the archetype-hero of the performance principal', with the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus. It was the myth of Narcissus which was the more important for narcissism played a role in Freud's theory (Marcuse, 1969: 123). Critics were quick to point out that advocacy of narcissism was tantamount to advocating regression to an infantile stage (Schoolman, 1980: 111–15; see also Whitebook, 1995: 3–4, 35–73). That criticism formed part of the original polemic between Marcuse and Fromm (Weber, 1991: 198–201). More recently, however, an attempt has been made to rehabilitate Marcuse's interest in narcissism, albeit a critical one. According to Fred Alford, Marcuse erred in counter-posing narcissism to man's control of his environment. Drawing upon recent psychological theories Alford writes that Marcuse missed 'the way in which the quest for mastery and control can also contribute to narcissistic gratification, by fostering a sense of worth' (Alford, 1987: 877). Even

if this is so, its implications for Marcuse's project are hardly reassuring. For in Alford's account the distinction between Prometheus and Narcissus vanishes, and it was precisely that difference which Marcuse wished to draw. Alford, in effect, puts forward an account of how man might be reconciled to this world whereas the point of Marcuse's excursus on Narcissus was to illustrate how phantasy might characterize a different world.

Marcuse knew that his brief invocations of Orpheus and of Narcissus were no more than suggestive, for he concluded that chapter with the comment that 'These images refer to the *aesthetic dimension* as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated' (Marcuse, 1969: 125). This was his second attempt to reconcile reason and sensuousness. When he turned to the aesthetic dimension, however, it was not Freud whom he cited but Kant. Marcuse described Kant's account of aesthetic judgement and emphasized first that pleasure was supposed to accompany the judgement. Second, he pointed out that aesthetic judgement was a matter of the imagination. Third, that aesthetic judgements, according to Kant, laid claim to universal validity. Marcuse seemed to have linked together all of the elements he needed. In his words 'In the aesthetic imagination, sensuousness generates universally valid principles for an objective order' (Marcuse, 1969: 130). But he had glossed over a central distinction in Kant's account. Kant distinguished between the feeling of pleasure associated with aesthetic judgements and the faculty of desire (Kant, 1952: 16–17).[10] In Kant's words 'The delight which we connect with the real existence of an object is called interest . . . [but] where the question is whether something is beautiful, we do not want to know, whether we, or any one else, are, or even could be, concerned in the real existence of the thing, but rather what estimate we form of it on mere contemplation' (Kant, 1952: 42–3). This pleasure, the pleasure accompanying aesthetic judgement, has nothing to do with desire. Kant's aesthetic judgement may be possible independently of the existence of an object, but the gratification of instinct is patently not.

There were even more substantive limits to the extent that Kant could provide support for Marcuse's position. Kant did, as Marcuse claimed, construe 'Beauty as the symbol of morality' (Kant, 1952: 221–5; Marcuse, 1969: 129). For Marcuse this signified a link between sensuousness and reason but for Kant it did not. Indeed, at each point at which Kant invoked the link between aesthetic pleasure and morality he did so on the grounds that it involved 'a certain ennoblement and elevation above mere sensibility' (Kant, 1952: 224). Marcuse glossed over this, though he did acknowledge Kant's general point that aesthetic judgement, and hence aesthetic pleasure, was concerned purely with the '*form* of the object' (Marcuse, 1969: 134). For Marcuse, this limit merely signified that the sensual origin of this pleasure had been repressed. That assertion, however, was no more than an assertion. He had turned to Kant ostensibly to validate the insights he had discerned in

myth. Kant, however, proved no more reliable an ally than Freud. Where Marcuse insisted upon a link, Kant insisted upon a distinction.

Schiller seemed to provide more fertile ground. In his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* Schiller speculated upon 'impulse being sufficiently in harmony with reason to qualify as universal legislator' (Schiller, 1967: 4.1).[11] He claimed to find this harmony in aesthetic experience and associated this with a 'play-drive' (*Spieltrieb*) (Schiller, 1967: 15.5). Here, Marcuse claimed to find an earlier attempt to draw from Kant the same conclusions that he himself drew. Indeed in the chapter on 'The Aesthetic Dimension' in *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse quoted Schiller much more frequently than he did Kant. The attraction is clear. Schiller's proclamations are frequently close to Marcuse's call for a 'release of sensuous energy [which] must conform with the universal *order* of freedom' (Marcuse, 1969: 137).

Both Marcuse and Schiller needed to substantiate their claim that the customary opposition of reason and sensuousness was misguided. But Marcuse, reflecting on Schiller from the perspective of his interpretation of Freud, needed something more. For Marcuse 'Freedom would have to be sought in the liberation of sensuousness rather than reason, and, in the limitation of the "higher" faculties in favor of the "lower" ' (Marcuse, 1969: 137). Neither Marcuse nor Schiller managed to do the former and Marcuse's ascription of the latter ambition to Schiller glossed over the characteristics which Schiller ascribed to aesthetic experience, in much the same way that Marcuse glossed over important characteristics of Kant's view of aesthetic experience.

For Schiller the advantage of the aesthetic mode of experience was that it seemed free from the constraints which arose from merely sensuous existence, where we are impelled to act by nature, and moral existence, where we are compelled to act by the law which we have prescribed for ourselves (Schiller, 1967: 14.5, 15.5, 20.4). In this aesthetic state the totality of man's powers were activated. But there was a price to pay for this freedom and harmony. In Schiller's words:

> In the aesthetic state, then, man is Nought, if we are thinking of any particular result rather than the totality of his powers. . . . Hence we must allow that those people are entirely right who declare beauty, and the mood it induces in us, to be completely indifferent and unfruitful as regards either knowledge or character. They are entirely right; for beauty produces no particular result whatsoever, neither for the understanding nor for the will. (Schiller, 1967: 21.4; Chytry, 1989: 89–90)

Marcuse readily took up Schiller's characterization of the play of our faculties in the aesthetic experience, especially since Schiller associated this with an attitude to nature which was neither riddled with fear of the omnipotence of natural forces nor guided by the desire to manipulate and exploit nature.

He glossed over the consequence that this enviable state gave us no guidance as to how to act.

Schiller's qualification arose from his indebtedness to Kant, as did other characteristics of his account of the aesthetic condition. As part of the effort to reconcile reason and sense Schiller tried to take the sting out of both. By abstracting from the moral requirement to act and from the compulsion of nature the play-drive reconciled both. It did so, however, to 'the extent that it deprives feelings and passions of their dynamic power . . . the laws of reason of their moral compulsion' (Schiller, 1967: 14.6). It is, of course, the former that is fatal to Marcuse's enterprise. His interpretation of Freud required that he write of the 'liberation of sensuousness rather than reason' and gloss over Schiller's attempt to quieten the insistent demands of both. Marcuse was no more able to extract morality out of sensuousness than Schiller. Moreover, when he acknowledged that the ' "sensuous impulse" requires a restraining transformation', he turned to reason. The restraint was to be provided by the 'free individual' (Marcuse, 1969: 137–8). Just as with the attempt to distinguish between basic and surplus repression, Marcuse first invoked sensuousness or instinct in place of a tainted reason, only then to install reason to supply what sense and instinct could not.

The third and final attempt to elucidate the meaning of the reconciliation of reason and sensuousness was based on Freud. At this point Marcuse returned to Freud's basic supposition of the conflict between sexual instincts and the demands of civilization. The conflict existed because of the incompatibility of the insistent demand for gratification and the restraint required by civilization. This time Marcuse suggested that the instinctual demand for gratification might not be so insistent. The warrant for the suggestion came from Freud, according to whom 'something in the nature of the sexual instinct is unfavourable to the achievement of absolute gratification' (Marcuse, 1969: 160; Freud, 1977: 258). Here Marcuse implied that Freud was suggesting that there was some kind of self-limiting or self-restraining element to the instinct. But Freud was doing exactly the opposite. The impossibility of 'absolute gratification' was explained by Freud in terms of the idea that objects of gratification inevitably changed and that the later, substitute, objects were never as adequate as the original ones. His conclusion, a mere two paragraphs after the one from which Marcuse quoted, was that 'we may perhaps be forced to become reconciled to the idea that it is quite impossible to adjust the claims of the sexual instincts to the demands of civilization' (Freud, 1977: 259).

None of the major ambitions of *Eros and Civilization*, the attempt to distinguish between basic and surplus repression, the image of Eros as culture builder, the reconciliation of reason and sensuousness, stand up to scrutiny. The prime sources upon which Marcuse drew, Freud and Kant, flatly contradict what he claimed to discern in them. It is true that he turned to other

sources as well, to miscellaneous psychologists, from Jung to Geza Roheim, as a supplement to Freud, to Schiller as a supplement to Kant. But these were supplements. The basic insights were supposed to be in the work of Kant and Freud.

That Marcuse's interpretation of Freud especially was arbitrary has long been acknowledged. Why then does *Eros and Civilization* continue to attract favourable attention? The answer is probably quite simple. It is the sheer boldness of its basic assertions. It is useful, however, to distinguish between two aspects of Marcuse's radicalism. On the one hand there is the vigour of his denunciation of established society as a repressive mechanism. On the other there is his avowedly utopian sketch of an alternative form of society. The latter is, as has been frequently noted, rather neglectful of the political structure of that society. What Marcuse offered was really a psychology whose main characteristic was the supposed reconciliation of reason and sexual instinct. The attempt to hold these two things together goes a long way to explaining the inadequacies of *Eros and Civilization*. Arguably either could have been pursued with more vigour and consistency on their own. But there would have been a price to pay in each case. Marcuse could have followed his colleagues, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, in painting an even bleaker picture of history as a nexus of domination. The price in this case is that the repressive character of society becomes so endemic that it is difficult to suggest any plausible alternative. That was the fate of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and, more recently, of Foucault's work (Honneth, 1991). The alternative was to focus on the reconciliation of reason and sensuousness. Here the potential price is the loss of the critical dimension. The more that reason and sensuousness are plausibly related, the more likely it is that the proposed psychology becomes all too compatible with the existing society.

Ironically, it was Marcuse's commitment to what he saw as Freud's radicalism, the antipathy of established reason and instinct, that proved to be the greatest obstacle to any reconciliation of reason and instinct. Ultimately reason, in Marcuse's account, is largely extraneous to the vicissitudes of the instincts. In 'repressive' societies, which are the only ones we are supposed to have known, reason is equated with the social order. The reasoning of the individual then becomes mere adjustment to that order, with all the attendant repression, in the interests of survival. Moreover, in speculating upon the leap to a future order, characterized by a 'non-repressive development' of the instincts (1969: 102), Marcuse's concept of reason remains extraneous and rather impoverished. It shrinks to either a common sense insight into the obsolescence of the existing society or the free decision of enlightened men who set some unspecified limit to the liberty to be accorded to instinct. The converse of this impoverishment of reason is an indiscriminate approach to instinct. It is this that leads Marcuse to his foolish speculation upon 'polymorphous perversions' (Marcuse, 1969: 145–6). Having construed reason as

external to and repressive of instinct, at least in all known societies, the only criterion is the satisfaction of instinct, whatever the instinct may be. Some such outcome is likely wherever reason and instinct or its cognates are set too far apart. For this it is not necessary to be either an utopian or a Freudian. Thus, David Hume, who can scarcely be accused of either, proclaimed that 'Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions', and concluded on this basis, that 'It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my little finger' (Hume, 1972: 156–7). Hume's rhetoric did not reflect his considered opinion (Baier, 1991), and Marcuse's probably carried him further than he wished. But, whereas Hume, in less rhetorical moods, allowed reason a benign influence upon passions, Marcuse could not, save when reason was construed as the rationality of some future order, a rationality which, at the end of the day, he could not define.

The inherent flaws of *Eros and Civilization* clearly have broader implications for the assessment of Marcuse's later work, in some of which he continued to grapple with the problems evident in *Eros and Civilization.* Yet the weaknesses of that text are far from characteristic of Marcuse's work as a whole. He was the author of *Reason and Revolution* as well as *Eros and Civilization*. As the title of the former indicates, Marcuse's commitment to reason in the earlier work was radically different from the doubts and ambiguities of *Eros and Civilization* (Anderson, 1993).

NOTES

1 Consequently Marcuse glosses over the pertinent question: are Freud's theories true? (See Rickert, 1986: 362.)
2 See the 'Political Preface 1966' (Marcuse, 1969: 11) for the assumption. He referred to the assumption as an explanation for his 'optimism' in the 1950s and then speculated on reasons why members of the 'affluent society' did not recognize the obsolescence.
3 There are general problems with Marcuse's use of the term repression (see Fromm, 1973: 29-30; Burston, 1991: 218–19).
4 Worse still Freud promptly warned that this was all speculation and that it was dangerous to tear concepts from the context in which they had been developed (Freud, 1975: 81). For a recent assertion of the egoism of human nature in Freud's work and its incompatibility with Marcuse's thesis see David M. Anderson, 'Freudian Anthropology and Political Theory' (1993).
5 As Habermas claimed, Marcuse swung from claiming that reason was located in the instincts to claiming that reason was totally unproblematic (see Habermas, 1978: 31–4).
6 This assertion was facilitated by a central ambiguity in Freud's concept of the id. According to Eagle (1984: 115) the id is identified as, on the one hand, instinct and, on the other hand, 'that which in the personality is *impersonal* or disavowed'.

Eagle continues: 'By conflating both meanings, one arrives at a conceptualization in which the instinctual is necessarily impersonal' (see also ibid.: 116–22).

7 *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* (1987: 224). For an assertion that Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* foreshadows *Eros and Civilization* see Karl Reiter (1989: 160–1).

8 Freud, of course, took the word *eros* from Plato and made much of their supposedly common stance. For the differences between Freud and Plato see Gould (1963: 15–16 and 173–6).

9 Thus with Edmund Burke (1969: 135), 'to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle . . . of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.'

10 Curiously, Schoolman (1980: 124) writes that 'No objections can be raised to Marcuse's interpretation of Kant and Schiller'. For the importance of Kant's distinction see Zimmerman (1968: 387–91) and Adorno (1984: 14–17).

11 References to this work are identified by the number of the letter and paragraph.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

PETER M. R. STIRK is a Lecturer in Politics and a member of the Centre for the History of Political Thought at the University of Durham. Dr Stirk's previous publications include *Max Horkheimer: A New Interpretation* (1992) and as co-editor *An Introduction to Political Ideas* (1995).

Address: Department of Politics, University of Durham, 48 Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3LZ, UK. [email: p.m.r.stirk@durham.ac.uk]