

From Alienation to Sublimation: An Analysis of Herbert Marcuse's Views About Ethics From a Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

The Frankfurt School is best represented by Herbert Marcuse. As a so-called leftist philosopher, he uses psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud to supplement theory of Marxism. His research takes place in the context of the entire broad picture of the Western world in the 20th century, that is, western culture has reached its pinnacle, but the accelerator of culture has also sparked some problems and people are overburdened by them. As a result, complex social structures have reshaped people's personalities and more importantly, suppressed their instincts for living or in another word "Eros", which Herbert Marcuse believes to liberate.

Key words: Herbert Marcuse; Eros; Cultural ethics

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The name of the Frankfurt School was initiated in the 1960s. It was originally a group of scholars composed of the first generation members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. It is an interdisciplinary synthesis of modern society, especially contemporary capitalist society. The school of philosophy, sociology and aesthetics whose main task is to study and criticize sexuality is also the school with the longest duration and the most systematic and complete theoretical system in the Western Marxist camp. Herbert Marcuse's philosophical viewpoint was formed under the influence of Heidegger, Hegel and

Freud. At the same time, he was also interested in Marx's theory. He tried to integrate Hegel's and Freud's theories with those of Marx to explore the prospect of western social revolution. His aim is to combine dialectical rationality with the historicity of human existence in order to overcome the binary opposition between rationality and sensibility, and find a path for us to understand human rationality as being concrete.

1. INTERPRETATION OF MARCUSE'S EROTIC DESIRE'S PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

Freudian theory was formed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and its core is the libidinal theory and the unconscious hypothesis. Life instinct, id, ego and superego constitute the main pillars of his theory. Freud's research object expanded from mentally disordered patients to the whole mankind. He applied the basic principles of psychoanalysis to various fields of human social life and cultural and historical development, thus turning psychoanalysis into a philosophical theory and a social and cultural theory. Freud's personality theory is called "Eros Personality Theory". "Eros" in Freud's psychoanalysis primarily refers to the instinct for living. It has creative and constructive forces that are diametrically opposed to the instinct for death. In Greek mythology, Eros is a god of love, one of nature's original forces and Zeus' son, representing creativity and harmony. Later legends claimed that Eros was Aphrodite (the goddess of love and beauty) and the son of Ares (God of War), that Eros possessed the power of love, and was known as Cupid in ancient Roman mythology. In philosophy and psychology, Eros represents the universe, human desires, and love. According to Plato's philosophy, it is an attraction to the kingdom of ideas, which contains the lowest levels of sexual desire and natural beauty.

Marcuse's use of eroticism as a starting point for exploring ways to solve the negative problems that have arisen as a result of the development of Western civilization can be traced back to Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud used psychoanalysis to divide the human psychological mechanism into multiple structures, primarily by the structure of consciousness, pre-conscious and the unconscious.

Freud further divided the two opposite structures into Id, Ego and Superego. Id is a chaotic state that is in direct contact with bodily processes, receives instinctual needs from them and makes these needs manifest psychologically. Id has no unified will, only the impulse to satisfy the instinct needs according to the principle of pleasure. While philosophers have asserted that time and space are necessary forms of our mental behaviors, this does not apply to Id. Id does not recognize the passage of time. The passage of time does not cause changes in psychological processes. Some intentional impulses never surpass Id, and some impressions are suppressed into Id. These intentional impulses are repressed into Id and persist forever. The Id-principle does not understand goodness and evil. It seeks the benefits associated with the principle of pleasure. These Id-stored energies are in a flux, looking forward to pouring out. Ego is a perception-consciousness system that points to the external world through which it produces conscious phenomena in the system. The receiver of Ego receives not only external stimuli, but also internal ones. Since Id is only concerned with blindly satisfying instincts, regardless of overwhelming external forces, the role of Ego is to protect Id from destructive catastrophes. Ego holds the image of the external world in the memory imprint of perception, it represents Id, the path to agency, inserts the delay factor of thinking between desire and action, and replaces pleasure with the principle of reality. Superego is the moral principle, which is the ultimate criterion for action. If Ego is not well coordinated with the external world, and the action does not comply with the criterion of morality, Superego will adopt means to make Ego feel uncomfortable, and this is the cause of anxiety.

2. INTERPRETATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF MARCUSE'S DESIRE FOR DEATH

An in-depth analysis of the concept of desire reveals that it is multi-dimensional. George Bataille sees the world as three realms: the animal world, the secular world and the sacred world. Human desires exist in various forms, including desire for life, desire to possess and desire for death. The first level is animal desire, which is the original desire when man and animal are mixed into one; the second is human desire, which is the desire for reasoning after the establishment of human nature; the third is sacred

desire. It is the "secret desire" hidden under the explicit worldly desire, the desire to return to the animal desire, including the desire for a negative power or a desire for extinction. It is the inner drive to return to the sacred world. Because human nature or reason tramples on beast nature, the so-called history of secular world is deduced. Conversely, it is precisely because of beast nature, the so-called death experience in the sacred world emerges from the desperate struggle for death

The desire for death is a common trace of organic life, and it is the driving force of an internal organic life to return to its original state, but this inherent inertia remains the same. Because the living body itself is evolving, its own repeated impulse to return to its original state is often ignored. If the goal of life is a state that things have never reached, then this contradicts the preservation nature of instinct. Rather, it must be an old state of things, an initial state in which the living body leaves at some point. This state, and then along the winding road followed by its development, returns to this state.

3. PERSONALITY FORMATION MECHANISM OF SELF-REPRESSION AND ALIENATION

Human history is a process of deepening individualization and increasing freedom. The consciousness of human freedom has gone through the stages of germination, development and sublimation. Each stage is filled with individuality and chaos. The history of human society began in an unconscious state of pre-human life. In the pre-industrial era, it was a state of integration with the natural world. It was described as the Garden of Eden in the Bible. Individuals vaguely realized that they were separated from the surroundings. The separation of the individual from the original bond that gives him a sense of security and belonging is an accelerated process of individualization, and the consciousness of being an individual is gradually awakened by inner consciousness. On the one hand, the intensification of individualization is manifested in the growth of self-power, but this self-power is constrained by social conditions; on the other hand, the accompanying process of individuation is the loneliness shrouded in oneself, the individual feels powerless, and the sense of oppression is unnerving. In order to overcome this sense of helplessness, individuals dissolve themselves in the external world, and the process of surrendering to the external world is full of confrontations. Man has a spontaneous connection with nature, so the self establishes a new connection of solidarity with others, and in this way, the individual exerts his inner creativity, creates tools, gets rid of bondages and apply their reason to obtains freedom, but if the external society does not support individuals to repair new bonds in time after the original bond is broken, the lag makes freedom a heavy burden,

and the individual will have a psychological mechanism to escape, and would rather sacrifice freedom to get rid of this feeling of powerlessness that cannot reshape life. This sense of powerlessness creates a Freudian repressed agent which is unable to liberate his individuality and obtain happiness.

The basic driving force comes from the unsatisfied desire or the release of the unquenched excitement, thereby eliminating tension and obtaining happiness. The modernized process of society violates this principle of pleasure to some extent. Max Weber described the modern society from a sociological sense as a world in which reason awakened but gradually disappeared. Rationality leads society to deviate from tradition and rely on reason to conquer the world, which greatly expands instrumental rationality. In the fields of natural science, administration and law, this plausible but utilitarian rationality is constantly expanding its territory. In the process of modernization, the increasingly developed industrial civilization has produced more and more sophisticated social structures, suppressing this inner principle of pleasure and turning it into principle of reality. For example, in order to survive better, people have to be overwhelmed by physical and mental works in order to gain a meager income. The principle of reality derives a wide range of forms. Behind the industrial machines that conflict with the human body and soul, there are political, cultural and educational mechanisms which consolidate the existing social order and increasingly become a lingering force that people can only obey. Consequently, the principle of pleasure has been replaced by principle of reality and this is very traumatic. People become slaves to machines, and the spirit of asceticism and the purpose of surrendering to others make them feel more humble. This kind of altruistic mentality is actually to cover up the inner egocentrism.

Then, under such circumstances, man can no longer make free choices, but go into the quagmire of alienation. It is mainly reflected as follows: no longer believes in his self, but looks up to authoritarianism by longing to surrender to Fatalism which holds life itself is governed by uncontrollable forces. Because of this, everyone satisfies masochistic impulses by following authority as one of the ways to achieve this goal. To get rid of Ego can remove the burden of freedom, but in fact, such a method cannot eliminate the unbearable emotional predicament, and the individual becomes a powerless atom. He cannot be integrated with the power of attachment, and the individual and the Others cannot form symbiosis. The authority to which the individual renounces Ego can be a person or organization, or it can be an internal authority. Modern thoughts, from Protestantism to Kantian philosophy, are characterized by internal authority replacing external ones. Concealed authority is replacing explicit ones, and the identity of the commander disappears. The universal feature of authoritarianism

is the belief that the only happiness is surrendering to these forces, but this is precisely the manifestation of inner weakness. Relying on a mysterious helper who is empowering from the outside makes the mind transition to a safe place, and this dependence stemming from spontaneous obstruction keeps Ego trapped in the cage of the mind. The second point of alienation mechanism is the inflated desire for destruction, which is produced by the constant sense of helplessness. Individuals choose extreme ways to destroy the world, and even rationalize the desire for destruction with love, responsibility, duty and conscience. The survival instinct (the continuation of life) and the death instinct (the destruction of life) are confronted with each other. When the spontaneity and emotion of a person's growth and development are blocked, he will keep the desire for destruction. The third point of alienation is the mechanical convergence. Individuals give up their inner authentic thoughts and conform themselves to others according to the cultural model of the external society, so as to eliminate the sense of loneliness and powerlessness in their consciousness and use the protective color of pseudo-self to passively protect themselves. He accepts the hypnosis of the external society constructed by herd mentality, becomes the imitation of others and the receiver of other people's wishes, substituting false wishes for primitive desires. One is bound to be controlled by others and only in this way can he find inner peace through others' approval.

4. NON-REPRESSIVE CULTURAL VIEW

Civilization, however prosperous, depends on steady, methodical work, and thus on delayed, unpleasant gratification. The progress of being civilized is accompanied by an increase in the degree of freedom. The degree of freedom is further reinforced by the increased regulation of the individual by society. From primitive fathers, through fraternal clans, and developing into the institutionalized system of rights characteristic of civilizations, more and more rules become impersonal, objectified and universal, while also becoming more rational, effective, and productive. The functions of the hierarchy are clothed with objective rationality. It is in this process that repression also becomes dehumanized, as the suppression and regulation of pleasure is now a function and a natural consequence of the social division of labor. By laboring, we are alienated from ourselves. This is because labor is external to us, not a part of our nature. Not voluntarily, but imposed on us. We feel pain rather than happiness. Instead of realizing ourselves, we have to deny ourselves. We are not developing our physical and mental abilities freely, but we are physically exhausted and mentally degraded. Most importantly, we are alienated from our labor because it is not our own, but working for others. In this sense, workers do not belong to themselves, but to others.

On the other level, people are alienated from their existence, that is, from their true human nature. The characteristics of any species exist in the types of activities it conducts. Human beings are featured by free and conscious activities. When our labor is alienated, this unique feature of human life gets lost. When someone is separated from his goal of work, his free initiative and creativity are also deprived, in this way, someone can only become a means for his own survival.

The repression of civilization is reflected in two aspects: first, the suppression of sexual desire leads to the stability and development of collective relations; second, the suppression of destructive instincts produces individual morality and social morality from the control of man and nature. The combination of these two forces effectively sustains collective life, and Eros overwhelms its opponents, but as civilization advances, Eros is weakened and destructiveness is unleashed. Schiller mentioned the trauma caused by the alienation of human beings in *Letters on Aesthetic Education of Man* as the separation of enjoyment and labor, the separation of means and ends, the separation of work and rewards. Since all he hears is the monotonous roar of the machine, he can never have a peaceful state of mind. Instead of shaping the human nature, he becomes the pure mark of his profession.

The decline of instinct for life leads to the degeneration of human beings. Contrary to the concept of Being based on Logos, there is a concept of Being based on will and pleasure. Freud's psychoanalysis holds that the essence of existence is eroticism, contrary to the traditional view that defines the essence of existence as logos. The instinct for death affirms the principle of denial of existence, while Eros is the principle of affirmation of existence, consistent with the traditional metaphysical fusion of existence and non-existence in the West. The essence of existence is the pursuit of happiness. Culture should not be the sublimation of repression, but the development of erotic

desires. libido may achieve non-repressive development.

In addition, Marcuse holds that art is the way of redemption. Redemption is the theological term referring to salvation from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus. It has a strong theological color in itself because the aesthetics of the Frankfurt School is deeply rooted in Jewish metaphysics and the mystical Utopia-Messiah theme. Aesthetics reflects a hidden theology as Adorno said in *Minima Moralia*, that is, to think in terms of all things as they appear to be from the standpoint of redemption. We must create such a perspective: replace or alienate the world, reveal its cracks and distortions, just as one day it will appear in the light of Messiah. Art is to find a way out of a beautiful utopia in this miserable world filled with instrumental rationality. It means that actions are only driven by the motivation of pursuing utility and one can achieve his goal with instrumental rationality purely from the perspective of maximizing the effect by ignoring other people's emotional and spiritual values. However, when we observe a work of art quietly, we call it a purely cognitive object. What we observe in the work of art, whether in painting or music, are those general or universal elements. Works of art elevate us from secular struggle to the level beyond will.

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