

EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF MARCUSE'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

It is important, in the context of empirical social science, that we examine Marcuse's revolutionary theory to assess its empirical validity and utility to determine whether it represents an important contribution to empirical social science.

The criteria of empirical social science relevant to this task require that theories must present a set of logically consistent, precise propositions, which may or may not be prescriptive in nature, but which must be capable of explaining and predicting human behavior. Marcuse furnishes many relevant and empirically testable hypotheses; however, he is not a systematic, consistent theorist, and some of his most salient ideas do not compare favorably with the available empirical evidence. From an empirical perspective Marcuse's contribution to empirical revolutionary theory is therefore in question.

INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Marcuse's political thought is best explained from the broader context of Marxian theory, which is Marcuse's greatest intellectual inspiration and reference point. Marcuse has assumed the task of evaluating, reinterpreting and revising Marxist revolutionary theory in light of historical development and contemporary society, the task which always seems necessary to adjust those theoretical predictions which are proven inaccurate with the test of time and experience. According to Marx's concept of dialectic materialism history is viewed as a process of class struggle. The transition from capitalism to socialism, Marx predicted, would inevitably follow a pattern in which 1) a high degree of industrial productivity would benefit the bourgeoisie, largely to the exclusion of the proletariat; 2) productivity would grow beyond capabilities of private control; and 3) the international proletariat would ultimately grow conscious of common political and economic interests and organize as a revolutionary class for the overthrow of capitalism.

History has demonstrated the failure of the proletariat either to internationalize or to over-

throw capitalism, thus far. This does not constitute a refutation of Marx in Marcuse's view, as long as the proletariat opposes and struggles against the bourgeoisie. However, if the development of mature capitalism evidences a general historical trend toward class collaboration, instead of toward proletarian internationalism, then Marcuse (1961:4) suggests a need for revision. This question lies at the heart of Marcuse's revolutionary thought and is the focus of most of his writing. In his characteristic Hegelian manner, however, Marcuse does not conclusively answer this question. He vacillates between two opposing positions: "(1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future, (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode society" [Marcuse, 1964: xv]. As a historical materialist, Marcuse supports the Marxian view that the economic factor is the base which determines society and civilization. Marcuse thus regards the relationship of men to the means of production as the essential factor which determines human consciousness. He views human history in terms of class relationships, though he sees a blurring of class lines in the contemporary period. Like Marx he views the state as the agency through which the bourgeoisie administers its policies and he calls for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist order as the ultimate goal of revolution. Finally, Marcuse like Marx predicts a withering of the state following the revolution, though neither theorist elaborates specifically on the nature of society following the revolution.

The difference between Marx and Marcuse is largely one of different means to the same revolutionary end. Marcuse argues that capitalism and mass democracy are self-perpetuating and will not lead to violent revolution, as Marx predicted. Marcuse, in sharp contrast to Marx, views technology and advanced industrial society as counterrevolutionary. Marcuse sees armed revolution as virtually impossible, not inevitable. Also, Marx argued that violence is the "midwife of revolution" and necessary for the establishment of a socialist soci-

ety, whereas Marcuse argues that violence is counterproductive to revolution, though personally Marcuse does not totally abjure violence [Wolff: 1965].

If Marcuse is to adhere to the Marxist doctrine of revolution, his only viable alternative is to develop his revision along lines of a cultural and consciousness revolution. Thus where Marx emphasized the political realm for means to revolution, Marcuse bases his analysis on Freudian theory which emphasizes the social psychological. Marcuse has synthesized Marxian political theory and Freudian psychological theory. His purpose is Marxian, his solution is Freudian.

MARCUSE'S THEORY OF ONE-DIMENSIONAL SOCIETY

Marcuse contends that the tendency toward class collaboration and nationalism, and hence the tendency toward containing revolutionary change, predominates and mitigates tendencies toward progressive change. Advanced industrial society, he contends, is one dimensional, monolithic and has the capacity to absorb or defeat all opposition to it. The substance to this theory is two-fold. First, advanced industrial nations manipulate individuals, organize technology, and mobilize the whole society for purposes of increasing industrial and technological strength, as these are basic prerequisites of modern national political power. Thus, technological rationality and technological development are purposefully perpetuated through rewards, punishments, and manipulation. Second, the very nature of technology induces psychological changes in men which tend to perpetuate technology; thus technology is self-perpetuating. The individual psyche, Marcuse contends, appears to be more and more a reconstruction of the social totality. It absorbs the essence of the social structure. Accordingly, if a society and its institutions are authoritarian structures, then the personalities of the society will become more authoritarian. "The supergo," Marcuse (1970:2) writes, "absorbs the authoritarian model." Based on Freud, the main substance of this theory is that technology alters and dominates the personality through its appeals to instincts which strive for pleasurable release of tension, painless satisfaction of needs, delayed gratification, and most impor-

tant, self-autonomy [Marcuse, 1970:1-5]. The result is the perpetuation of personalities which are authoritarian, apathetic to societal concerns, and submissive to manipulation.

Marcuse (1964, 1961a) concludes that a society composed of authoritarian personalities is one-dimensional in which technological rationality and technological language dominate society. Opposites are unified, and all opposition is absorbed. Labor, he contends, has been imbued with middle class materialistic values through manipulation by the mass media. This results in labor-management collusion, the blurring of class distinctions, and a counterrevolutionary consciousness among the proletariat. Student opposition he sees as a sign of disaffection, but not as revolutionary since students lack a mass following. Art and nature, he posits, have lost their aesthetic sensual, and critical functions in technological society. Furthermore, he believes that technology destroys indigenous culture and replaces it with a monolithic technical culture of the industrial economy. Third world revolutions are not capable of overthrowing capitalism, though he acknowledges their internal, temporary success. Moreover, he concludes that the totalitarianism of technological society exists universally in modern society, regardless of the form of governmental structures. Marcuse thus regards the ideological labels to which modern societies adhere as facades which obscure the nearly identical nature of these societies. Ideological terminology, he maintains, when applied to modern societies, is meaningless and anachronistic but is applied by governments to manipulate individuals and foster nationalist sentiments.

With this combination of manipulative governments and obedient masses, Marcuse is pessimistic about the tendency of modern societies to advance humanitarian and libertarian goals. He further regards armed revolution as all but impossible in advanced industrial society, given the immense power and efficiency of modern military police; and he suggests that armed revolution is dangerous in modern society because revolutionary violence might initiate a national drift toward fascism. To summarize in Marcuse's own words, "the highest state of capitalist development corresponds, in the advanced capitalist countries, to a low of revolutionary potential" [Mar-

cuse, 1972:5]. The contrast here with Marxian theory of revolution is striking, Marx considered capitalism a prerequisite and an inevitable step toward revolution. In essence the contrast is one of Marxian theory of dialectic materialism as opposed to Marcusean theory of one-dimensional society.

MARCUSE'S THEORY OF CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Marcuse vacillates but supports the position that the overthrow of capitalism through revolution is taking place presently, though by revolution he refers to a cultural and consciousness revolution, not a political revolution. He criticizes Marx's emphasis on political consciousness as the basis for revolution. Social relationships, he argues, are the roots of liberation in individuals, and are the prerequisites for construction of a free society (Marcuse, 1972:62). Thus, the first task of opposition is to liberate the consciousness of members of other social groups, especially the working class, which Marcuse still regards as the historical agent of revolution by virtue of its population size, contribution to industry and exploited condition. The creation of a "new type man" is suggested as a solution, though he offers no program for changing man. Rather, he believes the transition is occurring naturally, through historical processes. Accordingly, bourgeois culture and capitalism are presently disintegrating, not from external opposition, but internally from its own failures and inability to cope with change, maintain a balance with nature, and from widespread refusals to work, participate, and cooperate. With the decline of bourgeois, capitalist influence, Marcuse predicts a rediscovery of nature as an ally in the struggle against the exploitive society (1972:59-60).

As classical bourgeois culture declines, Marcuse believes its repressive influence (Classicism), is declining, leaving room for new forms of art expression which "can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness." [Marcuse, 1972:125] He thus makes the tenuous and empirically unverified assumption were verified, he fails to explain the catalyst necessary to inspire a mass interest in art. Moreover, he concludes that capitalism is weakening; a cultural revolution is underway in

this country; student unrest and ghetto rebellion are the first signs of strain in the system; and, revolution is possible, but only through a coalition of third world and industrial world opposition.

His theory of cultural revolution is not predicated upon a decline of technology and technological rationality. According to his previous reasoning concerning one-dimensional society, these elements generate authoritarianism, the cornerstone of one-dimensional society. To remain consistent, Marcuse must either offer an explanation of how technology and technological rationality will decline and how they will exist during a cultural revolution without generating authoritarianism, or he must show how both can exist at once. Similarly, according to his theory of one-dimensional society, art and nature are negated by technology's capacity to preoccupy the masses. How can art and nature foment a cultural revolution without a decline in technology? Marcuse has made what appears an error in logic here. He identifies technology as the most counterrevolutionary force in society, but does not account for the decline of technology prior to revolution. In addition, several related explanations are absent, notably those concerning the incipient decline of capitalism, the reasons for mass rejection of the consumer-oriented society and its replacement.

EMPIRICAL UTILITY OF MARCUSE'S THEORY

Marcuse's theory is normative in evaluations of what is positive or negative for the social, economic and political order. It is empirical in so far as it attempts to explain and predict the social and political world.

On the criterion of consistency Marcuse does not fare very well. His propensity for contradiction and tendency to counterpose opposites make consistency a problem. The most visible contradiction is evident in contrasting the theories of one-dimensional society and cultural revolution. This is not contradiction according to Marcuse, who emphasizes that these are two opposing tendencies in society. However, underlying this is a contradiction in basic assumption. According to the theory of one-dimensional society, social and economic existence determine consciousness. In con-

trast, the theory of cultural revolution assumes that consciousness precedes and determines social and existence. To remain consistent, Marcuse must either take one position or the other, or he must reconcile the contradiction by showing that there is an interplay between the two. However, he has not done this. Thus he actually presents two opposing theories. Marcuse's practice of presenting two opposing alternatives, "collapses into incoherence," MacIntyre (1970:40).

If one considers the theory of one-dimensional society and the theory of cultural revolution as two separate theories, rather than one, many incongruities and inconsistencies may be avoided. However, Marcuse does not indicate whether he is propounding two separate theories and it is not always clear then which propositions belong to which theory.

Art itself, in practice, cannot change reality, and art cannot submit to the actual requirements of the revolution without denying itself. But art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very form, from the then-prevailing revolutionary movement -- for revolution is in the substance of art. [Marcuse, 1972:116]

Another problem is that his theory often lacks an adequate explanatory frame work required of social science theory. For example, his theory of cultural revolution does not explain the process through which the masses are to generate an interest in art and nature, particularly in the face of expanding technology. Finally, the imprecision and vagueness of his language, impinge on the inter-subjective criteria necessary for scientific communication. For example, it is often difficult to discern Marcuse's exact meaning of revolution, as he uses the word to mean different phenomena in different contexts.

As empirical theorist, Marcuse leaves himself open to criticism because much of his analysis consists of logical argument to validate factual propositions which are subject to validation through observation and empirical analysis. Epistemologically, however, Marcuse is highly critical of value free neopositivist empiricism:

"The trouble is that the statistics, measurements, and field studies of empirical sociology and political science are not rational enough. They become mystifying to the extent to which they are isolated from the truly concrete con-

text which makes the facts and determines their function." [Marcuse, 1964:190].

One would expect a scholar who advances grand theories about modern industrial societies to base his conclusions on factual studies of such societies, Marcuse does not. Most of his assumptions and propositions are neither systematically studied, nor based on available studies. He offers no evidence to support his assumption that pre-industrial society is less repressive than advanced industrial society. He concludes that urban guerrilla warfare methods are helpless against modern military and technological strength, but he has not, as far as we can tell, undertaken even the simplest study of urban guerrilla warfare. Recent guerrilla activity in Northern Ireland indicates that urban guerrilla warfare can be successful against modern military strength and technology. Likewise he concludes that capitalism is declining but cites no studies which demonstrate this, and undertakes nothing more than a passing discussion of it.

Marcuse is not a systematic theorist, nor are his methods of validation epistemologically sound. However, he has presented some important propositions for social scientists to investigate. Testing a few of his most important propositions will be valuable enterprise for social science and will yield some clue as to the overall validity of his theory.

The proposition that revolution is least likely in the most industrialized societies has empirical evidence to support it. However, Marcuse has erred in attributing the counterrevolutionary nature of industrial and technological society to authoritarianism. Contrary to Marcuse's assumption there is ample evidence indicating that rural populations are more authoritarian than those of industrial populations. Several single nation studies support this conclusion. Friedrich's (1937) showed that support for Nazism came more from agricultural areas than industrial areas. From this he inferred that authoritarianism was stronger among the rural sector of the population. Stouffer's (1955) national probability sample of nearly 5,000 Americans found farmers and farm workers to have the lowest proportion of male respondents who are tolerant with respect to civil liberties issues. Similarly, the rural population of Japan (Kido and Sugi, 1954, and NPOI, 1951) was found to be more authoritarian and

less concerned with civil liberties than the middle and upper classes. Furthermore, the cross-national studies of authoritarianism indicate that authoritarianism is negatively related to industrialization. Populations of industrial countries scored lower on the authoritarian attributes of cynicism and misanthropy than did those of non-industrial countries (Almond & Verba, 1965). A comparative study (Melikian, 1959) of authoritarianism in the United States and Egypt found not only that Middle Easterners scored higher on authoritarianism than did Americans, controlling for education and religion, but that rural origin in both countries was consistently associated with authoritarianism. Similarly, a comparison of Puerto Ricans and Americans (Munoz, Serra and de Roca, 1953) showed that 84 percent of the Puerto Ricans were "somewhat authoritarian" as compared to 46 percent for the United States population.

There are several explanations for this. Langton (1969) found in his study of Jamaican political socialization that male students from mother-headed families have more authoritarian attitudes than male students from nuclear families. This led him to conclude that high incidence of maternal families in many non-industrialized countries would partially explain the higher propensity of authoritarianism in non-industrial cultures. More relevant is the explanation regarding the educational factor. Education, a prerequisite of industrialization in relation to authoritarianism. (Janowitz & Marvick, 1953; Lipset, 1959a; MacKinnon & Centers, 1959) shows a strong negative relationship to authoritarianism. Moreover, the occurrence of revolutions is associated negatively with the level of educational attainment (Lipset 1959b; Tanter & Midlarsky 1967).

Thus, while there is empirical evidence supporting the theory that revolution is less likely to occur in industrialized society, Marcuse's explanation concerning authoritarianism is contrary to the levels and low authoritarianism are the important factors which explain the counterrevolutionary nature of advanced industrial societies. In addition, Cutright (1965) found in a study of the world's nations that the degree of social security coverage is highly correlated ($r = .90$) with level of industrialization as measured by energy consumption. This finding partially explains the counter-

revolutionary nature of advanced industrial society. In industrialized nations security for basic necessities, including food, shelter, clothing and health care, would decrease revolutionary demands for the basic needs of life.

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WIRTH

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