

September 27, 1964

Dear Bea and Eugene:

Now there is a new combination for philosophy; I thought since our last conversation was on some of the philosophical problems of the new book, and since Eugene had also written me on the 1960 Preface by Marcuse to the paperback edition of his Reason & Revolution, I should reread the Preface and see whether I can pinpoint the philosophic point that separates us. And I found it was bigger than I thought at the time he and I fought since the fighting seemed to be "only" over politics.

Back in the 1940's when J, G & I were discussing R&R among ourselves we did note that he seemed to have slipped on the question of "politics". That time, however, it had nothing to do with a political line on any current situation, not at all. The politics concerned the concept of politics. Concretely it concerned the 1920-21 trade union dispute and Lenin's statement in it that politics took precedence over economics. We felt then that Lenin had used the word, politics, in the Greek sense of everything from methodology to philosophy, as was obvious from Lenin's repeated reference to "dialectics", and not just the narrow question of the political line against Trotsky's "economics" when it really meant telling the workers to go on working when they didn't wish to work "with this act of bureaucrats." In any case, we dropped the question.

Now, suddenly, this jumps at me in the new Preface: (xi-xii) "The negation is determinate if it refers the established state of affairs to the basic factors & forces which make for its destructiveness, as well as for the possible alternatives beyond the status quo. In the human reality, they are historical factors & forces, and the determinate negation is ultimate political negation." [The emphasis is Marcuse's, and, though he tries in the next sentence to warn against also "the entire dimension of politics" becoming an integral part of the status quo, it is clear that not only does that warning apply to "west" rather than "East", and, furthermore, not only did it in the "East" take form of "Soviet Marxism" but in the "west" "One Dimensional Man", but, above all, to say that ultimately a negation is political is utterly fantastic. Or, to put it in philosophical terms, reductionist. A reductionist is one who reduces everything to a "common level", or to a matter of mechanics when human forces are involved, and "historical factors and forces" certainly are human, very specifically the human or class forces that actually destroy the status quo. By comparison with this, Trotsky's belief that "all" that was necessary in Russia was a political, not a social, revolution since state property remained the basic foundation, etc.etc. is positively brilliant, isn't it?

The philosophic question, however, remains. That is to say, Marcuse may thereby show his lack of confidence in the masses and his embrace of "politics" to force a revolution where the proletariat has failed, or, as he puts it: (xiv) "Those social groups which dialectical theory identified as the forces of negation are either defeated or reconciled with the established system."

So once again we must return to the strictly philosophic part of this Preface which he entitles "A Note On Dialectic". And here, on p.xiii, we read: "For reality has become technological reality, and the subject is now joined with the object so closely that the notion of object necessarily includes subject." (My emphasis) I used emphasis in order to stress that what sounds like what

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we say says, instead, the exact opposite. And here is the proof that Marcuse is making the object, the machine, swallow up the subject, the man: (viii) "The objects thus 'contain' subjectivity in their very structure."

"Now what (or who) is this subjectivity that, in a literal sense, constitutes the objective world?" (My emphasis)

It is at this point where Hegel begins to sound as the revolutionary, instead of the materialist Marcuse, for Hegel answers that subjectivity is Thought, Reason, Spirit & HM himself must specify that by spirit he means spirit of an epoch, world history, etc., whereas Marcuse first states that "Since we no longer have that fluent accepted these concepts... I shall try to sketch Hegel's conception in more familiar terms", then (xii) states that "the idea of Reason itself... is the undialectical element in Hegel's philosophy", then brings in politics into the very center of the explanation of Hegel's concept of progress in freedom and in thought by adding "progress in freedom depends on thought becoming political, in the shape of a theory which demonstrates negation as a political alternative implicit in the historical situation" ONLY TO END UP WITH THE TYPE OF ABDICATION OF PHILOSOPHY AS DID J & G:

W. H. R. (circled)  
"Marx's materialistic 'subversion' of Hegel, therefore, was not a shift from one philosophical position to another, nor from philosophy to social theory..." (p. xiii) This "innocent" denial of what his own work has as a subtitle "Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory", is in fact reducing Marxian philosophy not just to social theory which he now denies, but to "politics". In a word, there supposedly, as G put it, "no longer any philosophical answers." It is, in fact, the par. right after that we had the climax, but which in this note, I put at first about reality having become "technological" and thus, where we say subject has absorbed objectivity, he says "the notion of object necessarily includes the subject."

No wonder he suddenly leaves both to go into quotations from avant garde literature to show the "common base" of the language of poetry and the language of "the Great Refusal" which is his interpretation of Hegel's "absolute negativity."

Now the importance, the sad importance of this for us, more specifically for my new book, is that I do not have any one to carry on a philosophic dialogue after all. What appeared as optimism in his latest book--at least he wasn't willing to give up altogether though he has given up the proletariat as the force--may be just that and no more; unwillingness to give up though all of his philosophy (not politics) leaves no basis for seeing new subject. And yet our answer too must not just be political; it must show subject as absorbing objectivity--world, science, technology--coming straight out of the strict logical sequence of the dialectic of thought as Hegel elaborated it in Notion, the Absolute Idea.

Yours,

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