

**Can We Truly Love That Which Is Fleeting?  
The Problem of Time in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*<sup>1</sup>**

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In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud contends that the best way to diagnosis the social ills of civilization—along with the individual therein—is to view both as concrete and historical manifestations of a primeval and irreconcilable conflict between two great, primordial drives: Eros (love) and Thanatos (death). The perpetual struggle between these two drives is visible along two planes of human existence: the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic. Briefly explained, to study the contest between Eros and Thanatos phylogenetically is to study the growth and eventual destruction of various historical civilizations. To study the same contest between Eros and Thanatos ontogenetically is to study how these same drives manifest themselves as different neuroses in the singular individual. According to Freud, we are destined to be “discontent” both as a species and as individuals as a result of this primordial and everlasting clash between love and death.

Turning to Herbert Marcuse's monumental work *Eros and Civilization*, it becomes clear that he has a Herculean task before him: the entire project of the work is to show how we, as members of society and as singular individuals may resolve the conflict between these two drives. In short, Marcuse holds that a reconciliation of sorts can be accomplished. Indeed, I argue that Marcuse seems to reconcile successfully both love and death in its phylogenetic manifestation in the second to last chapter of *Eros and Civilization*, entitled “Eros and Thanatos.” Contrary to Freud's fundamental analysis of these two drives in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Marcuse demonstrates that it is not necessarily the case that there will always be an “eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death.”<sup>2</sup> He shows that the primeval struggle between these two great forces is contingent and historical. As civilization progresses, in terms of technological advancement, it is possible to achieve a society where “the Pleasure principle and the Nirvana principle then converge.”<sup>3</sup> In short, “Death can become a token of freedom.”<sup>4</sup>

But a problem still remains for Marcuse's project: Can this same solution work on the ontogenetic level? That is to say, can we, as distinct individuals, move beyond our own individual death and the death of others for the sake of participating in Marcuse's “Great Refusal?”<sup>5</sup> Can the individual liberate herself from the anxiety she feels concerning the inevitability of her own death in order to participate in truly utopian possibilities of existence?

In this paper I argue that Marcuse's proposed solution with respect to the problem of death on the ontogenetic level is not warranted because death is not the true problem. According to the argument that Marcuse himself advances, the real enemy of Eros is not death but time: "Time [is the] deadly enemy of Eros."<sup>6</sup> However, this initial distinction between time and death frequently gives way to equivocation and because Marcuse equates time with death he defeats only a straw man leaving the entire project of *Eros and Civilization* incomplete.<sup>7</sup> Time stands undefeated. Clearly, this lapse cannot be passed over lightly for it is time that is responsible for our anxiety and not death; it is time that demonstrates the passing away of all things. So long as Eros cannot be eternalized, so long as Eros remains within time the last major form of repression of modern society shall remain intact.

Or so it would appear. An additional goal of this paper is to demonstrate that even the menace of time—this last impediment to liberation—can be removed too, but only if we reject eternity and instead learn to love that which is fleeting. That is, it is only if we accept a truly "human" solution to time instead of a "divine" one, that we may finally break this last chain of repression: the nagging thoughts each of us have concerning our own death. I show that we may accomplish this aim by returning to Heidegger's profound analysis of Dasein's temporality in *Being and Time*. I demonstrate that Heidegger's investigation of temporality must serve as the starting point, but not necessarily as the "ground," for the way by which we can reject the all too common anxious inflections we give to past, present and possible, future events.<sup>8</sup> Instead, we must learn to inject such moments of time with much needed Marcusean joy.

Finally, a word or two needs to be said regarding the relevance of Marcuse to contemporary discussions revolving around "liberation politics" and what may be called "resistance discourse." While it is true that Marcuse is regarded as a somewhat passé social critic, the reason for Marcuse's perceived obsolescence, or so I argue, has to do with his utopian propensities. Marcuse's task in *Eros and Civilization* does seem quite naïve if one is well-versed in the work of more pessimistic social philosophers like Michel Foucault. But though Foucault's respective genealogical investigations of the prison system and sexuality in the seventies appear to be more "realistic" diagnoses of the ills of modern society, this is because there is already an entrenched resignation to accept, as Marcuse might say, the "facts that are clearly at hand." And what are these facts? That we die; that the system cannot be changed in any totalizing manner (resistance should only be carried out locally as Foucault often suggests); and, finally, that the singular individual is perceived to be insignificant.<sup>9</sup> However, such "clear-cut facts" are the result of Marcuse's inability to respond to the irksome problem of time. By identifying the true problem of our existential angst, as I do in this essay, it is hoped that this may contribute, albeit in a small way, to the current interest in, and resurgence of, Marcuse's philosophy.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud presents a rather depressing and dystopic view of the human condition. The human animal, according to Freud, can never escape his or her “unhappiness” in civilization. For Freud, human beings are merely concrete manifestations of the epic and eternal battle being waged between Eros (the love drive) and Thanatos (the death drive).<sup>10</sup> This battle, as Freud describes it in the last chapter, plays itself out both ontogenetically (on the level of the individual) as well as phylogenetically (on the level of the human species). Ontogenetically the Ego is responsible for fulfilling the demands of the Id through socially accepted norms, codes, and mores. However, the Ego can never satisfy the libidinal wishes of the Id as the Id desires them to be satisfied (i.e., sexually, via the Pleasure Principle). Rather, the Ego must fulfill these desires via the Reality Principle, that is, according to the rules, norms, and laws established within a civilization. However, this is unsatisfactory since there is always a remainder of desire that goes unfulfilled and repressed. As Freud writes: “When an instinctual trend undergoes repression, its libidinal elements are turned into symptoms, and its aggressive components into a sense of guilt.”<sup>11</sup> Eventually the Ego tires of this persistent struggle to accommodate the wishes of the Id with an appropriate, socially acceptable substitute and seeks death—a tensionless, eternal state of peace.<sup>12</sup>

Turning to the phylogenetic level, this same pattern can be seen in the course of human evolution and civilization. The Performance Principle, like the Reality Principle, simply denotes the re-direction of libidinal energy into work and the satisfaction of need now for the sake of gratification later. This sacrifice of pleasure to satisfy need, combined with the renunciation of a polygamous and polymorphous sexual life for a monogamous one, are two of the most important factors that allow civilization to grow and flourish.

But, here too, there remains something repressed. Eros seeks to “combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind.”<sup>13</sup> Once again, however, the Performance Principle, on the phylogenetic level, re-directs this instinct towards work because of *Ananke* (need) much like the Reality Principle forces the Ego to re-direct the erotic desires of the Id towards socially accepted outlets on the ontogenetic level. As a result, the same frustration and tension between fulfilling the Id, preserving the Ego, and satisfying the demands of the Super-ego (all pressing psychological demands which the individual experiences in his or her daily life) is writ large onto the fabric of civilization itself producing the drive towards death (Thanatos) and destruction: a return to nothingness, a return to peace.<sup>14</sup>

The first step toward true liberation according to Marcuse is to “refuse” to accept Freud’s very pessimistic (or perhaps what some would call “realistic”) interpretation as to the true goals and origins of civilization. In a very illuminating passage in the chapter of *Eros and Civilization* entitled “Eros and Thanatos,” Marcuse convincingly argues that Thanatos and Eros are not anti-podal to one another, but indeed may be reconciled. Marcuse demonstrates that since the death instinct

strives towards a tensionless state (i.e., the Nirvana Principle) its destructive manifestations would continually be minimized as this state became closer and closer. Therefore, “the instinct’s basic objective is not the termination of life but of pain—the absence of tension.”<sup>15</sup> As a civilization’s technological capabilities advance, the once divergent goals of Eros and Thanatos can now be reconciled because as “the conflict between life and death is the more reduced, the closer life approximates the state of gratification.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, as our technological mastery of the earth continues unabated, less energy and time are required to fulfill basic needs with the result that more energy could be used to fulfill the desires of Eros. Eros, consequently, would be further strengthened. What’s more, with “full automation [the] immediate producer,” Marcuse writes, increasingly becomes “dissociated from the material processes of production.” In this sense he “becomes a free Subject because he can play with, experiment with the technical material, with the possibilities of the machine and the things produced and transformed by machines.”<sup>17</sup> That is to say, Marcuse also objects to the division between “labor time” on the one hand and “free time” on the other that is often taken to be firm and absolute. This “division” is just another oppressive structure. What Marcuse suggests is that with greater productive capacity and efficiency, a worker (in a free society) would have more control over the product being produced and, thus, more opportunity (and time) to explore his or her creative capacities in the workplace. Moreover, Douglas Kellner has shown that this “revelation” regarding this false dichotomy between “labor activity” and “creative activity,” was one that was already present in Marx’s *Grundrisse*.<sup>18</sup> Marcuse simply shows—in a much more concrete fashion than Marx ever did—how we may reinvigorate this “concept” which seems to have been strangely neglected by traditional Marxists.

With all of this stated, it is clear that the death instinct, as an instinct toward a tensionless state, would thereby lose its biological rationale because the tension between satisfying our desires and conforming to the Reality Principle no longer applies. Thus, civilization as a whole would no longer be regulated to the Performance Principle nor would the Ego be subject to the Reality Principle. Rather, the long forgotten self-regulating structures contained in the Id itself would be revitalized, allowing for society to place renewed importance on aesthetic creativity, play, and sexual experimentation. According to Marcuse, the Id possesses its own self-regulating structures which, once reactivated with the removal of the now superfluous Reality Principle, would rediscover the lost erogenous zones of the body. Moreover, with the reservoirs of a complete and evolved Eros released from the shackles of genitalia and from work, the individual would be free of boredom, anxiety, and guilt. In essence, we would be free, as it were, from our own “inhumanity” toward humanity.<sup>19</sup>

But despite all of the great technological advancements in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries it is clear that we are still living repressed lives; we are very far from being truly free. This leads to a

series of questions which seem to challenge Marcuse's diagnosis: Why hasn't this Utopian like state come about? Why do we continue to work the same number of hours per week as our ancestors? Why do we still have a sense of alienation? Indeed even in the year 1955, the year *Eros and Civilization* was first published, humankind had the technological capabilities to wipe out hunger and most diseases on a worldwide scale. There is no need to expend eight hours of the working day to fulfill basic needs. In short, the Performance Principle, as the basic law of human survival which entails sacrificing our desires to satisfy needs, no longer need apply to the human animal.

Marcuse explains this seeming incongruity between his theory and the above facts, which most if not all of us are only too fully aware, by claiming that we are operating under a new form of repression. Most individuals, at least in Western democracies, no longer work in order to fulfill basic needs such as for food, shelter, and clothing. Rather, we work in order to fulfill needs which are not basic. These new needs are not ones which are necessary for survival. They belong to a new form of repression which is of our own making. Marcuse calls this new form "surplus repression."

As Marcuse defines the term, surplus repression consists of "the restrictions necessitated by social domination. This is distinguished from (basic) *repression*: the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization."<sup>20</sup> Thus, surplus repression is a new historical form of basic repression that, simply put, creates "needs" that are not truly needed (hence "surplus"), yet which demand fulfillment at great expense to the happiness of the individual in question. Such a form of repression, however, prevents liberation since it deludes us into believing that what is merely "extra," and indeed superfluous, is actually a basic need of life. There are many different aspects and forms of surplus repression ranging from the self-imposed, those imposed by culture and, as Marcuse investigates in *One Dimensional Man*, those imposed by the advertising industry. But, far and away the most important form of surplus repression and the one that prevents us from "Refusing" pessimistic interpretations of the human condition is that of death.<sup>21</sup>

"The brute fact of death denies once and for all the reality of a non-repressive existence."<sup>22</sup> Marcuse continues, "He [the individual] is resigned before society forces him to practice resignation methodically."<sup>23</sup> As those whom Marcuse calls the "purveyors of death"<sup>24</sup> argue, to be human is to acknowledge that I, as a distinct individual, will die and that my death "is in every case mine" and mine alone.<sup>25</sup> As Marcuse realizes in *Eros and Civilization*, death acts as the most powerful repressive condition in modern civilization because it "colludes" with those who have a vested interest in the established order of society. Marcuse writes: "In a repressive civilization, death itself becomes an instrument of repression. Whether death is feared as constant threat, or glorified as supreme sacrifice, or accepted as fate, the education for consent to death introduces an element of surrender into life from the beginning—surrender and submission."<sup>26</sup> Death in the phylogenetic form of Thanatos manifests itself in destructiveness while death in its ontogenetic form tends to manifest

itself as a general malaise, a feeling of apathy and, most damaging to all of those concerned with the “Great Refusal,” an acceptance of the pre-established economic and social regime.

Clearly what is needed for this new “Great Refusal” that Marcuse calls for, this new revolt and liberation of the individual and of humanity, is *risk*. We must be willing to risk our security, our “happiness,” manufactured though it may be, and perhaps even our lives in order to emancipate ourselves and others from perhaps the strongest bond of oppression: the acceptance of our own death. Philosophy and theology today, according to Marcuse, are in collusion with the powers that be. They both “compete with each other in celebrating death as an existential category: perverting a biological fact into ontological essence, they bestow transcendental blessing on the guilt of mankind which they help to perpetuate—they betray the promise of Utopia.”<sup>27</sup> Only in a philosophy that teaches (as Marcuse’s does) that we must refuse to fear death is true liberation to be found. So what then is Marcuse’s solution? How exactly does Marcuse unravel the great Gordian knot of human existence: the problem of death?

Before tackling this question directly, I think it is important to look at other possible solutions to this problem. In a rather succinct and penetrating analysis of Nietzsche in the chapter, “Philosophical Interlude,” Marcuse acknowledges that many philosophers, but especially Nietzsche, had already realized that unless the problem of the individual’s relation to death is resolved, no liberation for the individual is possible. Marcuse writes: “Man learns that it cannot last anyway that every pleasure is short, that for all finite things the hour of their birth is the hour of their death—that it couldn’t be otherwise.”<sup>28</sup> As both Nietzsche and Marcuse clearly understood, even the will is powerless against death. All willing, all choice making, all affirmation is meaningless, if we, or the choices we have made in our lives, will be erased from all memory when we, and those we love, die. Realizing this, Nietzsche tried to resolve this problem with the idea of the eternal return, the recurrence of all sacred things, *amor fati* (the love of fate).<sup>29</sup>

To love our fate is not only to understand, but to *accept* that our choices along with the consequences of our choices will return an infinite number of times in the future, just exactly as they have already taken place an infinite number of times in the past. Thus, the secret to conquering the problem of death and the nihilism associated with the realization that one will die, according to Nietzsche, was to conquer the problem of time. Time, as Nietzsche well understood, is the accomplice of the religiously minded and the resentful. Since the will can only will forwards but never backwards, and time inevitably “flows on” against our will, our future, our hope, is either directed towards the promise of an eternal state of bliss that freezes time or else our hope is focused on avenging past wrongs and injustices (Apocalyptic time, the Day of Judgment). Both of these alternatives though are modes of reactive and repressive forms of life because by either looking forward to the future or holding onto the past we devalue the present. However, by demonstrating

that time is circular, that is, that our choices, and we with them, will always and forever be chosen again and again, Nietzsche demonstrates that we can truly live a joyful existence *now*. We would not fall into either an illusory and naïve belief that we will find happiness in another world, nor would we become nihilistic or resentful of the “here and now.” Rather, we would be able to affirm the body, pleasure and desire, as well as our earthly existence with all that this may entail. We can affirm all of these things because of the Eternal Return. We can affirm that our choices are important and meaningful in the “here and now” because the here and now will recur and has recurred an infinite number of times. All things, therefore, are continually renewed liberating the individual from the chains of time. We affirm the present because we refuse the “hereafter.”

Despite the obvious affinities between himself and Nietzsche, Marcuse does not adopt Nietzsche’s “way out” of the problem of time. Indeed this is perhaps all the more perplexing because it does seem as though Marcuse sees a great deal of merit in Nietzsche’s solution. For example, when discussing Nietzsche’s doctrine of the Eternal Return Marcuse approvingly writes: “Eternity, long since the ultimate consolation of an alienated existence, had been made into an instrument of repression by its relegation to a transcendental world—unreal reward for real suffering.” What’s more, Marcuse remarks that Nietzsche’s Eternal Return allows “Eternity [to be] reclaimed for the fair earth.”<sup>30</sup> It would seem that both Nietzsche and Marcuse at least share the following truth, namely, that the belief in some afterworld is a further instrument of repression and alienation. Both Nietzsche and Marcuse agree that “the here and now” can and must be joyful, that it can be sensuous, that we can be meaningfully complete and fulfilled. True emancipation, both claim, is possible for the individual if the individual desires to be emancipated.

Furthermore, Marcuse also realizes that Nietzsche’s notion of the Eternal Return is the will and vision of an *erotic* attitude toward Being in which necessity and fulfillment coincide. To elaborate such a vision, as I have already mentioned, seems to be the very project of *Eros and Civilization*. It is Marcuse’s fundamental thesis that Eros can be regulated in such a way that it satisfies both need and fulfillment; that Eros can be liberated from the shackles of monogamic genitalia and instead reign over new regions of both body and society, strengthening and reinforcing erotic bonds in both. With the abolition of the Performance Principle it becomes possible, once again, for the self-regulating structures of the Id to take over. Again, the visions of both Nietzsche and Marcuse are the same in this regard too: that joy and fulfillment are experiences of “this earth” and that we can achieve these goals by throwing off the yoke of the external repressive morality of religion and of Nietzsche’s “last man.”

There is, however, one obstacle in Marcuse’s way for a complete acceptance of Nietzsche’s eternal return, and this obstacle of course is the *Übermensch*. For Nietzsche, only the *Übermensch* can appreciate this new understanding of time and the affirmative, active, joyful life that follows

from it. Marcuse, however, could not follow Nietzsche on this path. Marcuse cannot turn his back on the rest of humanity because he is committed to finding a way out for *all* human beings.<sup>31</sup> There can be no reconciliation between Marcuse's egalitarianism and the Nietzschean doctrine of the *Übermensch*.<sup>32</sup>

But now, given that Marcuse must discover a path for all human beings to follow, what solution can Marcuse possibly produce? Can Marcuse give hope and reason for all of those individuals—and not just the elite, the *Übermenschen*—who seek to participate in this Great Refusal of erotic liberation? Can death become an aspect of liberation?

Toward the end of the chapter “Eros and Thanatos,” Marcuse most certainly thinks that death can become a token of freedom. “The necessity of death,” Marcuse writes, “does not refute the possibility of final liberation. Like the other necessities it can be made rational—painless. Men can die without anxiety if they know that what they love is protected from misery and oblivion.”<sup>33</sup> Marcuse's argument, in brief, is that death is not something that needs to be feared. Death, rather, can be a blessing for those who participate in the “Great Refusal”; those who have tried to educate their fellow human beings in understanding the oppressive controls and forms of domination at work in society while also trying to overcome the internalized controls and structures of domination that they find in themselves. Those who have harnessed their libidinal energies for the sake of human liberation may come to a point in their lives, in old age, completely satisfied by what they have tried to do or have actually accomplished and seek, without feeling guilty, release from life. They would anticipate entering into a blissful, joyful, and tensionless Nirvana-like state of equilibrium: death.

However, does this solution to the problem of death succeed? Clearly not. For if we understand the problem correctly, as understood by Nietzsche and the other philosophers that Marcuse briefly mentions in the chapter “Philosophical Interlude” of *Eros and Civilization*, even if death can become a token freedom, we still have the problem of time. To repeat Marcuse's thesis: “Men can die without anxiety if they know that *what they love is protected from misery and oblivion*.”<sup>34</sup> But, if we reflect upon this condition we know immediately that the opposite is the case. If there is one thing that is certain, it is not death, but rather that all things change and all things become other with the passing of time. It is the certainty, for example, that our loved ones will always be in jeopardy; that governments may become corrupt; immoral individuals may gain power; and that liberation can be both won and lost which fills us with anxiety and dread. Beyond the physiological, beyond the cultural, beyond the historical and instinctual there lies the ontological, the ground of human beings in their very being. It is our innate understanding of the ontological, what Heidegger calls our “pre-ontological understanding,” that assures us of the temporality and impermanence of all earthly



things. It is a mere tautology to say that no “historical contingency” can overcome this essential impermanence.

Heidegger, in the last sections of his monumental work *Being and Time* (a work incidentally that is never so much as cited in *Eros and Civilization*, despite the well-documented influence of the German philosopher on Marcuse’s intellectual development<sup>35</sup>), demonstrates that time is fundamentally linked with “care.” Care, according to Heidegger, is the essential structure of Dasein (literally “being-there,” the human individual).<sup>36</sup> Heidegger shows this by revealing that such moments of time as the “now-not-yet,” “the making-present,” “the now-no-longer,” and the “passes away” all point to our primordial understanding of the ontological relationship between time and our individual projects as Dasein.<sup>37</sup> Time is important to Dasein precisely because the “now” is always a “now that”; “now” is always linked with a “that is done and now onto that,” or “I must do this now before I can do that,” or “I have now done that and can now expect this,” etc. In other words, significance, meaning, and valuation are always present within any “now that” time, while this “now that” time is always significant, meaningful, and valuable for Dasein. If instead we were to view time merely as an abstract series of “nows,” {t1, t2, t3...},<sup>38</sup> this would fail to capture our primordial feelings toward the significance and meaning that we attach to “our” time insofar as it is given by our pre-ontological understanding that we are finite creatures and that any “now that” time could possibly be our last.

Time is not parasitic on change.<sup>39</sup> We do not have time merely because we witness things coming into being (the sun rising, for example) changing and then passing out of being (the sun setting) which we then measure according to some accepted standard like a sundial or clock, etc.<sup>40</sup> Time is not a mere “fact of the world,” standing over and against the human. Rather, we understand time because human beings in their very humanity are temporal. Temporality is ontologically prior to the time that is merely counted because what temporality shows is that our essential-existential analytic is one of care and concern of the “now that,” the “now in relation to the what was,” “the now in relation to the not yet,” and “the now in relation to the not immediate but soon.”

Thus, according to Heidegger, we will always be with anxiety, with fear, and with dread, precisely because we do not know what will happen to us in the future, to our loved ones, our accomplishments or to civilization as a whole. As Heidegger rightly states in §40 of *Being and Time*, “That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*.”<sup>41</sup> Our being is thus anxious toward not only our own death as distinct individuals, but for all of those other individuals who are beings-within-the-world and especially those others who are beings-alongside-us. We are anxious, therefore, because we can be certain of at least one thing and that is that when we die, our loved ones, humanity, and civilization as a whole are all beyond our care. Even if death should die (a battle that Marcuse argues will require all of our available resources

and will be our greatest fight) or even if we fight for a truly liberated and free society beyond the repressive control of death, we still remain anxious because we care and to care is always to care within time.

Therefore, even if we are able to overcome death, though this seems impossible, this still does not liberate humankind from the feeling of dread, boredom, or anxiety. I am anxious precisely because I care about my own most possibilities of being as well as for all of those other beings alongside me in the world. And I know with certainty that unless I take care of my relationships “now,” or in the “not-yet but-soon,” I could lose or damage those things I care about. Marcuse’s project thus remains incomplete as he has not emancipated humankind from the dread of time. Hence, insofar as this last form of repression is still firmly in place we are no closer to accomplishing the project of liberation that Marcuse sets out.

It now becomes abundantly clear why *Eros and Civilization* seems to leave us wanting: it has not met Heidegger’s challenge. Heidegger has surely revealed all too real, and, thereby, distressing aspects of Dasein’s very being such as our propensity to feel anxiety, fear, boredom, and dread. To be sure, Marcuse is correct when he suggests in an interview with Fredrick Olafson in 1977, that *Being and Time* is a work that is derogatory towards joy and sensuous fulfillment because it seems to focus on what he calls “repressive and oppressive elements of human existence.”<sup>42</sup> But, such claims, even if true, do not entail that Heidegger’s previous analysis is falsified in any way. In fact, they only seem to provide further support for the results of his investigation. We are anxious. We are bored. We are, sometimes, lost in the world of the “They” (das Man). And we do seem, at times, to be overly preoccupied with how and when we may eventually meet our ultimate demise. We are thrown into the world with no control over the source of this “thrownness” (our “facticity”) and no way to know with certainty where and when we will eventually land. And, although we do have some control over the direction of our projects, we know only too well that where one “crisis” is averted another is already looming and ready to take its place. This new crisis will also await our “care.” The proper question then is not “How may we overcome our fear of death?” as Marcuse believes, because it is clear that sometimes death may be a relief for those human beings who may only hope to expect one crisis after another. Such a human being may welcome the release of death. Nor is the proper question: How may we live joyously between crises? Rather, the goal is one of living joyfully and sensuously with others from moment to moment at every moment, and from situation to situation in every situation. Yet, given Heidegger’s profound and rather compelling ontological investigation, this goal seems to be one of pure fantasy.

We now turn to our final question: Can Marcuse’s project be recovered? Can we move beyond our own individual deaths, and more specifically our temporal ekstatic horizon which always seems to project both our care and possible anxiety in any project of what Heidegger calls Dasein

(being-there)? Yes, provided that we understand that just as there are structures internal to Eros, structures and laws which regulate its “flows,” so too time is internal as well. When we speak of what Heidegger calls “care” we are speaking not only of the mundane activity of “taking care of things,” but of an essential structure of Eros itself, a structure which Freud spoke of as *investment* (*cathexis*). When reading Heidegger’s existential descriptions of the structure of care we cannot fail to recognize the same processes by which the Freudian libido invests its world with values, purposes and meanings.<sup>43</sup> Time is internal to Eros inasmuch as Eros is inseparable from care, a structure whose intimacy with time Heidegger has already demonstrated.

Care is a manifestation of love, understood as Eros. It is an expression of Eros for those people and objects in which we have invested our libidinal, hence temporal energies. Thus, liberation is possible, provided that we “*learn to love that which is fleeting*,” to acknowledge that although Eros strives to eternalize itself, this can never be. Rather, we can liberate ourselves as well as those beings-alongside-us, if we understand that liberation may be both won and lost. In other words, without care that which we love may pass out of existence—and this passing out of existence should be understood in a double sense: our care withdrawn, they will suffer like an unwatered houseplant for want of the acts to which care drives us—such is the empirical reality that care supports. But furthermore, as Freud has shown, that which we care for, as phenomenal concretenesses of meaning and purpose, will wither away once the energies which sustain them are withdrawn, as we can see in the apocalyptic tragedy suffered by Judge Schreber in the early stages of his crisis.<sup>44</sup> With this realization, it may be possible to both resolve our anxiety over time and death and truly fight and care for the establishment of a new society that would allow for our personal fulfillment as well as those who are beings-alongside-us.

By way of conclusion, such an “investment,” it is clear, must be both total and unequivocal, for it is the only means by which we may collectively and individually defeat the last standard bearer for the forces of dread, anxiety, and misery, namely, time. We must invest all of our time and energy into each and every joyous moment we are allotted to political and social advancement for the sake of the present and future care of others. In sum, if we expend all of our energies into such projects then there will be nothing left to be anxious about. To be sure this investment may still not give us “the returns,” as it were, that we desire and, perhaps, deserve. But this is to place investment under the categories of “usefulness” or “result.” They are categories that Marcuse would surely label as dehumanizing and repressive.

But I am not speaking of “investment” in this way. Rather, I am using “investment” to refer to the endowment of a property in some object in the way that we might invest someone or something with a power or attribute and thereby create an *investiture*. This investiture also connotes the idea that this “investment,” which has been made in the object, has also been made public; those

who are invested with special powers, for example, are usually conferred their new found abilities via a ceremony of some kind. By way of analogy, to invest in every moment of time with love and joy is to create an investiture that must be expressed outwardly. It is, in a way, to adopt an ethos, a way of life, that is by no means held privately and merely reflected upon inwardly, but on the contrary, is presented as an exemplar of how one ought to live. Having had the pleasure and opportunity to discuss the “life” of this great German philosopher with many of his former students, this ethos that I speak of here is clearly one that Marcuse exemplified and shared with all whom he met, taught, and mentored.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express a heartfelt thank you to my friend and fine philosopher, Luke Fraser, for his many helpful comments, criticisms, insights, and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. James Strachey (Chicago: The Great Books Foundation, 1967) 86.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Beacon P, 1966) 235. The “Nirvana Principle” is one of the names that Freud gives to the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He defines it as “the dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general [...] to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli.” Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachey (New York: Liverright, 1961) 49.

<sup>4</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the clearest definition of Marcuse’s sometimes ambiguous and poetical usage of the term “Great Refusal” is found in Douglas Kellner’s “Marcuse and the Quest for Radical Subjectivity” in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, eds. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004) 90. Kellner writes: “Radical subjectivity for Marcuse practices the Great Refusal, valorized in both *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*. In *Eros and Civilization*, [Marcuse states that the] “Great Refusal is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom—to live without anxiety.” In *One-Dimensional Man*, however, the Great Refusal is fundamentally political, a refusal of repression and injustice, a saying no, an elemental oppositional to a system of oppression, a noncompliance with the rules of a rigged game, a form of radical resistance and struggle.”

<sup>6</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 233.

<sup>7</sup> Marcuse writes: “Man learns that it cannot last anyway that every pleasure is short, that for all finite things the hour of their birth is the hour of their death” (*Eros and Civilization*, 231). This quotation

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(along with others on the same page), supports my contention, namely, that Marcuse merely equates time with death.

<sup>8</sup> I fully realize that using Heidegger to “advance,” in some way, Marcuse’s philosophy may appear to be deeply problematic. Though early on in Marcuse’s intellectual career he tried to perform a synthesis of sorts between Heidegger’s phenomenological-existential insights with Marxist thought (see his essay “Contribution to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism” in 1928) all hope for this project was abandoned with Heidegger’s infamous Rector address given at the University of Freiburg in May of 1933. Yet, Marcuse does mention in the Olafson interview of 1977 that such a project may be salvageable after all. Marcuse says: “The entire dimension that has been neglected in Marxian theory, for example, how social institutions reproduce themselves in the individuals, and how the individuals, by virtue of their reproducing their own society act on it. There is room for what may be called an existential analysis, but only within this framework.” See Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenburg, and Charles Webbel, *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia* (Mass: Bergin and Garvey, 1988) 95-104. To be sure, Heidegger’s “neutralizing” and oppressive intonations of temporality would have to be eliminated in order for such a reconciliation to proceed, but, the important point to note is that Marcuse does recognize (even in 1977!) that such a project is possible. Difficult to be sure (even Sartre, as Marcuse notes, fails in this regard), but not impossible.

<sup>9</sup> There are many places in Foucault’s rich oeuvre where he advocates a “local” type of resistance to regimes of power. Foucault seems to advocate these “strategies of resistance,” as he calls them, primarily because he was always wary of replacing one political superstructure with that of another. I will mention only a few works here that discuss these themes. See especially his debate with Noam Chomsky in 1971 in Arnold Davidson, ed., *Foucault and his Interlocutors* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997). His conversation with Gilles Deleuze entitled “Intellectuals and Power” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Discourse* (Cornell UP, 1977) 205-18. And, finally, his seminal “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Freud writes: “The meaning of evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species.” See Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 94.

<sup>12</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes: “The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the Nirvana Principle to borrow a term from Barbara Low)—a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts.” Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 49-50.

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<sup>13</sup> Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 234-35.

<sup>16</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 235.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Marcuse, "The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity: A Reconsideration," *Praxis* 5.1-2 (Zagreb: 1969): 20-25. Originally found in Douglas Kellner's *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (U of California P, 1984) 327.

<sup>18</sup> Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 327.

<sup>19</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> I capitalize "Refusing" to indicate I mean Marcuse's notion of the Great Refusal. See note 5 above.

<sup>22</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 231.

<sup>23</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 231.

<sup>24</sup> Marcuse, "Political Preface" to *Eros and Civilization*, xi.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962) 284/H240.

<sup>26</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236.

<sup>27</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236.

<sup>28</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 231.

<sup>29</sup> In section 341 of *The Gay Science*, we see, for the first time, Nietzsche's full articulation of the Eternal Return. Nietzsche states: "What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even the spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974) 273. Marcuse, however, does not quote this first formulation and instead quotes the much more poetic and metaphorical version as given in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part III, "The Convalescent": "All things pass, all things return; eternally turns the wheel of Being. All things die all things are joined anew; eternally the house of Being builds itself the same. All things part, all things welcome each other again; eternally the ring of Being abides by itself. In each Now, Being begins; round each. Here turns the sphere of There. The center is everywhere.

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Bent is the path of eternity.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1978) 329-30.

<sup>30</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 123. (This, again, does sound as if it can be correlated to Marcuse’s mytho-poetic vision of Orpheus and Narcissus. See Chapter 8, “The Image of Narcissus and Orpheus,” 159-72, in *Eros and Civilization*.)

<sup>31</sup> This is why it is rather curious that Marcuse quotes the version in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* rather than in *The Gay Science*. For in *The Gay Science* it is quite clear that this thought of the Eternal Return can be either our “Greatest Weight” or perhaps our most liberating thought depending on whether the individual is life-affirming (strong) or life-denying (weak). To see the close connection between the ability to affirm the eternal return and the Übermensch, see Alexander Nehamas, “The Eternal Recurrence,” *Philosophical Review* 8.9 (July 1980): 331-56, esp. 347.

<sup>32</sup> Cf.: “Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other. Without the *pathos of distance* which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata [...] that other, more mysterious pathos could not have grown up either—the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself [...] in brief, simply the enhancement of the type ‘man,’ the continual ‘self-overcoming of man.’” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1966) §257.

<sup>33</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236.

<sup>34</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236. Emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> For an excellent secondary source that examines the influence of Heidegger on Marcuse as well as Marcuse’s criticisms of Heidegger’s philosophy, see John Abromeit, “Herbert Marcuse’s Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger 1927-1933” in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, 131-52.

<sup>36</sup> See §41 “Dasein’s Being as care” of Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.

<sup>37</sup> See especially §81 of *Being and Time*, “Within-time-ness and the Generation of the Ordinary Conception of Time,” esp. 473.

<sup>38</sup> This serial notion of time is what Heidegger refers to as “circumspective time,” the time that is “counted.” See §81 of *Being and Time*, esp. 473-74.

<sup>39</sup> Kant’s arguments in the Transcendental Aesthetic undermine any attempt to assert the contrary. Cf.: “Time is not an empirical concept that has been derived from any experience. For neither coexistence nor succession would ever come within our perception, if the representation of time were not presupposed as underlying them *a priori*. Only on the presupposition of time can we represent to ourselves a number of things as existing at one and the same time (simultaneously) or at

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different times (successively).” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) A30/B46.

<sup>40</sup> This first understanding of time is the understanding of what Heidegger refers to as “primitive” Dasein. See §80 of *Being and Time*, “The Time with Which We Concern Ourselves, and Within-timeness, esp. 468-69.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §40, 231. Emphasis in original.

<sup>42</sup> See Pippin, Feenburg, and Webbel, *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, 95-104.

<sup>43</sup> To take one such example of this homology between care and libidinal investment, we may point to the effects recognized by both Heidegger and Freud of the withdrawal of care from the external world that the subject suffers at the height of anxiety. Compare the following passages, the first from Heidegger’s analysis of death-anxiety, the second from Freud’s analysis of a paranoiac’s apocalyptic libidinal collapse: Heidegger writes, “Here the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand discovered within-the-world is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the character of completely lacking significance. In anxiety one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement” (*Being and Time*, 231/H186). While Freud writes, “The patient [Judge Daniel Schreber] has withdrawn from the persons in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them. Thus, all things have become indifferent and irrelevant to him [...]. The end of the world is the projection of this internal catastrophe; for his subjective world has come to an end since he has withdrawn his love from it” (“Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia [Dementia Paranoides] [1911],” in *Three Case Histories*, ed. and trans. Philip Rieff [New York: Collier, 1963] 173). The congruence of these two passages should not be taken as evidence for Heidegger’s paranoia, of course, but for an essential homology between care and cathexis, between involvement and investment. This connection between care and cathexis no doubt deserves further examination, but such is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. My thanks, once again, to Luke Fraser for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>44</sup> See note 43 above.



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