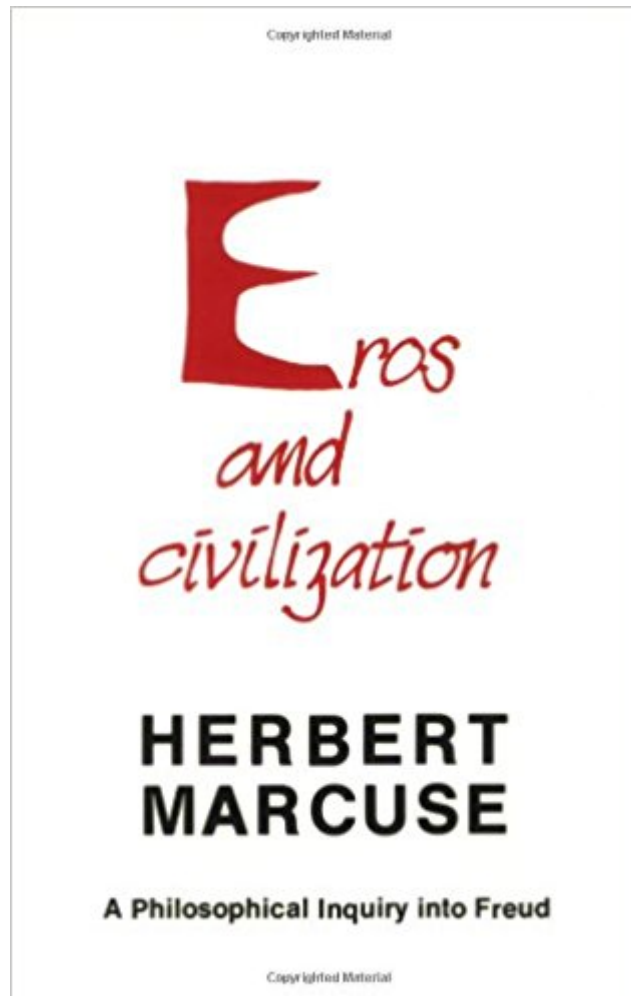




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# Eros And Civilization : A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud



## Synopsis

~ In this classic work, Herbert Marcuse takes as his starting point Freud's statement that civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts, his reconstruction of the prehistory of mankind - to an interpretation of the basic trends of western civilization, stressing the philosophical and sociological implications.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A philosophical critique of psychoanalysis that takes psychoanalysis seriously but not as unchallengeable dogma. . . . The most significant general treatment of psychoanalytic theory since Freud himself ceased publication. --Clyde Kluckhohn, The New York Times

Herbert Marcuse~ (1898-1979) was born in Berlin and educated at the universities of Berlin and Freiburg. He fled Germany in 1933 and arrived in the United States in 1934. Marcuse taught at Columbia, Harvard, Brandeis, and the University of California, San Diego, where he met Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss as graduate students. He is the author of numerous books, including~ One-Dimensional Man~ and~ Eros and Civilization.

I read it 40 years ago and it was time to revisit his vision of a psychological future (our today). He's not far off when he discusses the implications of a decline of privacy and breakdown of family bonds replaced by those of an extended social network. He treats Freud as an author rather than an

ideology. Marcuse uses Freud's terminology, not an explicit model (a point he makes several times) to suggest new ways of looking at society. It's not an easy read and not all his points are clearly stated (or even intelligible) but worth the effort.

Great book. A classic. The packaging and customer service were wonderful.

In our age of "sex positive" this has become a crucial read for anyone who desires social change which will actually improve our situation.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) was a German philosopher, sociologist, and political theorist, associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theory, until he moved to the United States in 1934. He wrote other books, such as *One-Dimensional Man, Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. He wrote in the 1966 "Political Preface" to this 1955 book, "the title expressed an optimistic, euphemistic, even positive thought, namely, that that achievements of advanced industrial society would enable man to ... use the social wealth for shaping man's world in accordance with his Life Instincts, in the concerted struggle against the purveyors of Death. This optimism was based on the assumption that the rationale for the continued acceptance of domination no longer prevailed, that scarcity and the need for toil were only 'artificially' perpetuated--in the interest of preserving the system of domination. I neglected or minimized the fact that this 'obsolescent' rationale had been vastly strengthened (if not replaced) by even more efficient forms of social control." (Pg. xi) He observes, "The very progress of civilization under the performance principle has attained a level of productivity at which the social demands upon instinctual energy to be spent in alienated labor could be considerably reduced. Consequently, the continued repressive organization of the instincts seems to be necessitated less by the 'struggle for existence' than in the interest in prolonging this struggle---by the interest in domination." (Pg. 129-130) He argues, "Even under optimum conditions of a rational organization of society, the gratification of human needs would require labor, and this fact alone would enforce quantitative and qualitative instinctual restraint, and thereby numerous social taboos. No matter how rich, civilization depends on steady and methodical work, and thus an unpleasurable delay in satisfaction. Since the primary instincts rebel 'by nature' against such delay, their repressive modification therefore remains a necessity for all civilization." (Pg. 153-154) He summarizes, "the idea of a non-repressive civilization on the basis of the achievements of the performance principle encountered the argument that instinctual liberation ... would explode civilization itself, since the latter is sustained only ...

through the repressive utilization of instinctual energy... To meet this argument, we recalled certain archetypes of imagination which, in contrast to the culture-heroes of repressive productivity, symbolized creative receptivity." (Pg. 175) He asserts, "It is true that man appears as an individual who 'integrates' a diversity of inherited and acquired qualities into a total personality, and that the latter develops in relating itself to the world (things and people) under manifold and varying conditions. But this personality and its development are PRE-formed down to the deepest instinctual structure ... [which] means that the diversities and the autonomy of individual 'growth' are secondary phenomena. How much reality there is behind individuality depends on the scope, form, and effectiveness of the repressive controls prevalent at the given stage of civilization." (Pg. 252) Marcuse is no longer a "trendy" philosopher (as he briefly was in the 1960s), but this book (along with *One-Dimensional Man*) is one of his books with lasting philosophical and political value.

Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* is emblematic of the aspect of his work that integrates Freudian theory with Marxian doctrine. Although he primarily deals with Freud and the issue of society's use of repression (psychological and political) in the service of production, he deals with Marxist theory also when you read between the lines. The theme of alienation of labor is clearly one of the resounding and recurring notes in the symphony. As a psychotherapist intimately acquainted with developments in psychoanalytic theory in the fifty odd years since Marcuse wrote, this project involves some perils as well as some rich veins of thought. To philosophize on the basis of a theory which is derived primarily from clinical work in which two individuals share in a closed setting is always dangerous. In addition, to take Freud's formulations for granted, and then proceed to apply them to social and political systems is a big stretch. I would say primarily that the main flaw in Marcuse's thesis is his acceptance of Thanatos, or the so-called death principle, which is no longer accepted by any school of psychoanalysis. Unfortunately, Freud's own tendency to speculate both in the fields of anthropology and metaphysics, does not help Marcuse any. If one studies Talcott Parsons and his brilliant work on social systems (*The Social System*) using social theory, one can see a great deal of resonance with Marcuse's analysis of repression as a cultural control mechanism. To balance the equation, I believe Marcuse brings to surface themes which have been abandoned in modern social discourse through sheer inertia and the grinding power of the repressive culture. The description of the role the inner agencies (i.e. the superego) play in integrating an individual into a particular society is a brilliant analysis. If our culture seemed "successful" as a consumer society then, the movement has only expanded to the point the culture

in general has lost sight of how our citizens are enslaved by the very "American dream" we tell ourselves will bring happiness. The concept of an infinitely expanding economy, the measurement of the nation's well being by primarily economic and political indicators, the military displacement of aggression to an outside "evil" enemy, the frenzied pursuit of built-in obsolescence have all metastasized, and Marcuse has put them to the microscope. I would say that at a time when our country is having a resurgence of hope, Marcuse's work offers a very important analytic tool with which think about where we are and where we want to go as a people, and a void re-creating excessively repressive social structures.

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