

Analysis of herbert marcuse's philosophies represented in his book eros and civil...

[Government](#), [Capitalism](#)



Herbert Marcuse, a renowned German-American philosopher, sociologist and political theorist, had produced a multitude of essays and theses that reflect on his perception of the world he's experienced. Marcuse was an avid supporter of the left in politics and he often criticised capitalism in his published works, specifically *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud and One-Dimensional Man*. In this essay, I intend to highlight his philosophies — and, inevitably, his political stance — as well as offer my insight on who he presents himself to be based on his writing.

In his book, *Eros and Civilisation*, published in 1955, Marcuse talks about his visions of a non-repressive society where the people are led by their moral standards and compassion for others, without having to compromise one's own desires. He theorised that if humans allow themselves to be driven by Eros — life force, love, creativity and the will to live — we would build up a self-sufficient environment in which the basic needs of civilians would not need to be sacrificed for someone in a higher position. Marcuse relates his theory to the ideologies of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. Firstly, he vehemently disagreed with Freud's cynical belief that humans are inherently savages who were forced, by the prioritisation of logic over passion, to internalise their primitive urges in order to establish a functioning society. Freud labelled this as the pleasure principle, the idea that we are crazed beings driven by the basic desire for contentment, and he contrasted it to the reality principle, which refers to the social expectation for everyone to act in accordance to society's standards. In addition, Marcuse connects Freud's idea with capitalism, using Freud's principles to support his rejection for an advanced industrial society that promotes affluent private businesses.

To accompany Freud's pleasure and reality principles, Marcuse proposed the performance principle, which states that humans have conditioned themselves to work hard in order for humanity to progress. He links the performance principle to capitalism by drawing parallels to how humans have been led to serve corporations and industries due to the exponential growth of privately-owned companies.

Regarding Marcuse's philosophy in *One-Dimensional Man*, he criticises capitalism all the same; however, the Marxist ideology is more prominent than it had been in *Eros and Civilisation*. Moreover, he warns his readers and followers about the dangers of the rapidly advancing technology industry. To put the situation in perspective, radio and cinematography had just become the new phenomena during this time. He continued on to express disdain towards consumerism. Consumerism is the theory of increasing the market value of an item by producing it in masses and advertising it abundantly, thus tempting consumers to purchase more of the product despite their lack of need for it.

Marcuse was avidly against such practice, claiming that consumerism is a method used by corporations to influence and control society. He asserted that despite the common belief that humans are free, we are ignorant to the fact that our happiness is under the dictation of those in large and successful business industries. His argument was that humans have become dependant on materialistic desires and social acceptance to fuel their satisfaction, which in turn destroys them psychologically, as well as damages our own environment. Consequently, our value of money overrides our moral

standards, and now we have reduced ourselves to becoming a pawn in the chessboard of mass media and private businesses.

The theory of One-Dimensional Man is that humans have sacrificed their freedom to establish a society in which technological advancement has been prioritised over the value of human life. In addition, Marcuse stated that consumerism promotes a totalitarian society in which the people would be dictated by the advertisements we're exposed to, as well as the products we've been persuaded to purchase. The notion of mass media, in which information may reach thousands to millions of people at once, will cause humans to lose their individuality and instead conform to the social norms in order to fit in, therefore shedding all possible dimensions of human existence, and creating a one-dimensional mindset. Before diving into my opinion, it's incredibly crucial to acknowledge that Marcuse lived through the rise of Nazis in Germany. His status as a Jew most likely subjected him to discrimination and setbacks, despite owning a Ph. D.; how he was treated by the government in the late 1920s, and the fact that he was denied in completing his professor's dissertation, led him to flee the country and pursuing a career in a branch of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in Switzerland. It's not far-fetched to assume that the institute had had a significant influence on Marcuse's ideologies for the institute was " Marxist-oriented", according to the Herbert Marcuse Official Homepage. My impression of Marcuse is that he had his best intentions at heart and had been genuine in his attempts to warn the public in what he perceived as a threat to society. While I agree that capitalism isn't the most ideal way to

build up an economy, let alone a civilisation, it does function quite well in practice despite its flaws such as the possibility of overwhelming elitism or the common occurrence that the incredibly wealthy will continue to prosper as the poorest suffer under their power.

On the contrary, socialism — or Marxism in particular — seems like a brilliant idea in theory. It promises a utopian economy in which all workers are given an equal pay and people are less prone to fall into poverty. As Marcuse lived through and experienced firsthand The Civil Rights Movement as well as The Cold War in America during the 1950s, I completely understand his empathy towards Eastern values, like those held by the Soviet Union. However, his proposal for the eradication of capitalism entirely is a far too extreme measure to make, and implementing a socialist government to replace America's current system is, quite obviously, a radical idea. To abolish the notion of owning private property and surrendering it all to the government would cause common-people to become vulnerable to corrupt authorities due to the imbalance of power between government and state. Furthermore, possessing one's own property is a freedom that I personally believe everyone is entitled to have because it provides us with a sense of individuality.

Regarding Eros and Civilisation as a whole, he and Freud seem to have shared a superiority-complex as they both insisted on referring to modern civilisation as mature, in contrast to primitive humanity, which they describe as immature. They both failed to realise that humankind have functioned and developed during either times, and that we have found destructive ways

to ruin ourselves anyway. Freud and Marcuse speak of ancient civilisation as though humans had been backwards and were only corrected during modern times, when really, they should have held primitive and modern lives to different standards as technology and knowledge had not been the same in those time periods.

Though humanity may have improved their sense of morality and ethics over time, the nature of human destruction had not changed much. During primitive life, humans were subjected to being brutally beaten or beheaded by the masses either in war or public lynching; in modern times, we still face the possibility of total annihilation, only now it revolves around nuclear weapons and automatic rifles. Freud and Marcuse, in their early anthropology mindsets, depict modern life as though we have overcome our primitive lifestyles, such as murder and adultery, through enlightenment and both the reality and performance principles.

As for consumerism, I wholeheartedly agree with Marcuse on his viewpoint. Consumerism is one of the unappealing aspects of capitalism; it uses up more resources than we are able to renew, and it paves the way for the rapid progression of global warming as humans to fill up landfills with waste that might have been recycled or reused instead. Moreover, consumerism drives large businesses to advertise their products everywhere, which — if not simply bothersome and intrusive — restricts our freedom of thought and replaces it with corporate propaganda in attempt to lure more people to become loyal consumers.

In conclusion, I believe that Herbert Marcuse had been fighting for the right cause, but he had both a flawed approach and solution to the issue. His philosophy is insightful, and his experiences with national and international politics are prominent in his works, however he seemed to have a limited vision to the potential harm that his ideologies could cause. Marcuse is agreeable on a multitude of topics, such as the dangers of capitalism and consumerism, and his thoughts are rather well-spoken and credible. Despite presenting pessimistic perspectives of the world, Marcuse had given me the impression that he only desires for human suffering to cease — he had hoped for class equality and social justice — which makes him a complex, yet agreeable enough, character to analyse.