

REVIEW ESSAY

Herbert Marcuse's *Heideggerian Marxism*, (eds.) Richard Wolin and John Abromeit, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); 224 + xxx pages.

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Between 1928 and 1933 Herbert Marcuse wrote five essays in which he attempted to lay the groundwork for a synthesis of Martin Heidegger's phenomenological existentialism and a renovated Marxism: "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism" (1928), "On Concrete Philosophy" (1929), "On the Problem of the Dialectic" (Part 1, 1930; Part 2, 1931), "New Sources on the Foundations of Historical Materialism" (1932), and "On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labour in Economics" (1933). *Heideggerian Marxism* for the first time collects these essays in English, three of which were available only in old editions of the *Telos* journal; one was in a collection of Marcuse essays and one remained un-translated. The essays have been re-translated or revised for this volume to regularise usage and to bring forward Marcuse's reliance on a Heideggerian conceptual vocabulary that was often obscured in previous versions. A 1934 summary essay on German philosophy between 1871 and 1933 that has never before been published, a late (1977) interview with Marcuse on Heidegger's politics that has seen fairly wide circulation, and a one-page statement published in 1977 on his disillusionment with Heidegger complete the volume. The material is usefully arranged in chronological order.

It is stated in the Preface that the point of collecting this material and making it easily available was not merely antiquarian but that "his efforts to combine these two orientations helped to shed light on the philosophical-political present." (ix)¹ Indeed, the right question to ask is whether these essays do anything more than recall a forgotten moment of 20th

¹ Page references to the book under review are made within brackets in the main text without further details.

century philosophy.² Do they enlighten our philosophical and-or political present?

Marcuse himself was unambiguous on this question. In his own view he changed direction after writing these essays, adopted Hegel as his master thinker instead of Heidegger, joined the Institute for Social Research, and didn't look back. Marcuse had expected a concrete philosophy from phenomenology, a retrieval of active and engaged thinking from false abstractions. What made abstractions false for Marcuse was their failure to capture and carry within themselves the concreteness of human life. Abstractions are always necessary to philosophy and all theoretical conceptualisation but they also contain the danger of losing contact with that which motivated abstraction in the first place and continues to give real abstractions life. The promise of Heidegger's phenomenology was, Marcuse said in the 1977 interview, a false promise because "Heidegger's concreteness was to a great extent a phony, a false concreteness." (166) He gave examples: there are no sex differences in Dasein (167); the concept of historicity neutralises the social and political conditions of real history (168); the realm of social life is entirely relegated to inauthenticity, cutting off the possibility of a critique of actual social relations (169); love is absent from Heidegger's existential categories. (170) While he was unaware of any Nazi sympathies at the time, Marcuse suggests retrospectively that Nazi elements do appear in *Being and Time*, whose attractiveness stems from its portrayal of the phenomenal character of repressive society without understanding its real dynamics. Regarding authenticity, he says that the concreteness of the decisive act is neutralised so that, for Heidegger, "[t]he main thing is to decide and to act according to your decision. Whether the decision is in itself, and in its goals morally and humanly positive or not, is of minor importance." (172) Concreteness, for Marcuse, is not only the crux of Heidegger's failure, it explains why his so-called "mistake" in allying

² The answer proposed by Richard Wolin in his introduction to this volume is thin. He concludes only that Marcuse's later writings "bore a distinct resemblance to the mode of ontological questioning that Heidegger had developed in *Being and Time*" and that "[i]f Marcuse's writings still speak to us today—and on this score there can be little doubt—it is because of his talents as an *unorthodox* Marxist." (xxix–xxx) In short, these early essays are the launching pad for what later became distinctively 'Marcusian.' But getting Marcuse going is one thing. Our philosophical-political present is another.

himself with the Nazis is not just a mistake but is “the betrayal of philosophy as such.” (170)

Marcuse’s self-interpretation has been seconded by numerous scholars who see Marcuse’s interest in Heidegger as a recovery of the “subjective dimension” of Marxism.³ One can sense the evident enthusiasm in his review of Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts* (when they appeared publicly in 1932) in “New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism” when Marcuse discovered that the early Marx had a conception of human-sensuous activity in which objects are primarily appropriated through need (not perception) and that the concept of labour in Marx is an ontological category of dialectical historicity. Marcuse, it is argued, could allow his reservations about Heidegger to further distance him, since this active, sensuous, subjectivity could now be found within Marxism itself. Indeed, it must have been stunning for Marcuse to discover that Marx had read Hegel just as Marcuse was himself reading him. “Marx expresses this insight in the sentence that Hegel has found ‘speculative expression for the movement of history’—a sentence that ... must be understood positively as well as negatively.” (120) Marcuse added the reservation that “we cannot go into the question if and how the “mistakes” with which Marx charges Hegel can really be attributed to him.” (121) If we put this alongside Marcuse’s analysis of Hegel in the earlier essay “On the Problem of the Dialectic,” where Marcuse argued—prior to the appearance of the *Manuscripts!*—that Marx “rediscovered the dialectical motility of historical life that Hegel had discovered but then cov-

³ Especially influential for the view that there is an utter incompatibility between phenomenology and Marxism was the essay by Alfred Schmidt entitled “Existential Ontology and Historical Materialism in the Work of Herbert Marcuse.” This essay was first published in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968) and represents one of the two significant strains of New Left interpretation of Marcuse’s early work. It is translated in Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg, and Charles P. Webel (eds.) *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia* (South Hadley: Bergin and Harvey, 1988). The editors of this volume share this view. See John Abromeit’s argument that the interest in Heidegger merely “supplements” Marcuse’s Marxism in “Herbert Marcuse’s Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger” in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader* (Routledge: New York and London, 2004). This interpretation allows Abromeit to play down Marcuse’s insistence that Heidegger’s embrace of Nazism was a happening for philosophy. Richard Wolin takes the same view in the Introduction to the volume under review. (xxiv)

ered up again” (84), the distance between Marx and Marcuse’s Hegel seems very small. For Marcuse’s Hegel, the later works such as *Philosophy of Right* or *Philosophy of History* were subject to “a curtailment and transformation of the original concept of history” (84) that was to be found in *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Science of Logic*. Marcuse thus suggests that Marx’s critique of Hegel “starts at exactly the point where Hegel began falling away from the original and full concept of history.” (84) One suspects that the point of the critique is in Marcuse’s view to recover the original motivation behind Hegel’s early work—but he doesn’t go quite far enough to say this, perhaps because he was writing in a Marxist journal, but in any case such a suggestion would have been enough to put him entirely outside the prevailing positivist Marxism.

It is to the merit of this collection that it includes the survey article “German Philosophy, 1871–1933” which makes it clear that Marcuse’s verdict on Heidegger’s philosophy was present in its essential form in 1934.⁴ “The characteristics of authentic existence...are severed from all relations to the real misery and the real happiness of mankind and from all relations to the reasonable ends of humanity” such that “the original inclination toward historicity is paralyzed.” (161) If decision is separated from the content of the decision, then the result is a false abstraction which contains the possibility of turning against the essential task of philosophy. This seems to imply that there can be no truly concrete phenomenology of decision as such. Rather, there must be a phenomenology of the making of a decision in which the content of the decision made is part of the phenomenological description. This is not an argument against abstraction as such but an observation that the unit of description can be mis-identified and that such mis-identification can have important implications. Decision is not a phenomenological identity and, thus, can-

⁴ Another essay from 1934 similarly treated Heidegger’s philosophy as both an opening and a closing. “The meaning of existentialism lay in regaining the full concreteness of the historical subject ... At this point concreteness stopped, and philosophy remained content to talk of the nation’s ‘link with destiny,’ of the ‘heritage’ that each individual has to adopt, and of the community of the ‘generation,’ while the other dimensions of facticity were treated as ‘they’ (*das Man*), or ‘idle talk’ (*das Gerede*), and relegated in this way to ‘inauthentic’ existence” such that the charge of false concreteness was synthesized with the claim that ‘destiny’ has become “the doctrine of the total state.” Herbert Marcuse, “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State” in *Negations*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 32, 35.

not become a theme of description. In this sense, it seems that Marcuse's discovery of Heidegger's Nazi alliance, which prompted him to analyse it as a betrayal of philosophy, allowed him to identify such betrayal as false concreteness. This verdict depends upon Marcuse's conception of philosophy that remains existential in the sense that it is immersed in the daily and momentous issues of human life that are deeper than any identification with Heideggerian themes. It also entails the claim that 1933 was a decisive year not only for world history but also for philosophy. (161–4)

However, neither in philosophical nor political matters are we obliged to take a person's own view of himself as gospel. Jürgen Habermas is likely the leader of the revisionists who see Marcuse's later contributions as impossible without a lingering dose of Heideggerian existentialism.⁵ But a dose is not a philosophy. If we want to take *Heideggerian Marxism* as the occasion for looking at these matters again, we will first have to read these essays to see if a path opened up there may or may not have been followed adequately by Marcuse later. The core of the question of whether there is in the early Marcuse a Heideggerian Marxism of significance for our contemporary philosophical and political situation thus comes down to whether, in the four remaining essays written between 1928 and 1931, there is an existentialist component that allowed Marcuse to anticipate a new sort of Marxism in solidarity with the

⁵ The essay by Jürgen Habermas entitled "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" in (tr.) Jeremy J. Shapiro, *Toward a Rational Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1970), especially page 85, was very influential in this regard but see also his "Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity" in (eds.) Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg, Charles P. Webel, *Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia* (Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey, 1988). The account in this latter essay is, however, ambiguous. While it asserts the continuing influence of Heidegger on Marcuse's work, it does not actually show this influence in its discussions of Marcuse's later writing. Habermas' assessment that Heideggerian categories persist in Marcuse's later *Eros and Civilization* is quoted in the Introduction to the volume under review. (xi) Other representatives of the view that Marcuse's later work remained deeply influenced by his Heideggerian period include Paul Piccone and Alexander Delfini, "Herbert Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism" in *Telos*, n. 6, Fall 1970 and Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse* (New York: Routledge, 2005). As the latter two sources indicate, agreement on a continuing Heideggerian influence in Marcuse's work may contain a radical disagreement on the viability or utility of that influence.

work of the early Marx and/or a Marxist component that allowed him to lay the groundwork for a social, revolutionary phenomenology.

II

Only the first essay, “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism,” explicitly addresses Marx and Heidegger with equal weight. After the introduction, the next two sections deal with the fundamental situation of Marxism and the historicity of Dasein in *Being and Time* in an attempt to show how these philosophies converge on a fundamental issue. The review of Marxism begins from the claim that the central concern of the Marxist fundamental situation is “with the historical possibility of the radical act.” (3)⁶ The revolutionary deed is necessary in the sense that it opposes the essence of capitalism, which is defined through the alienation of human action where one’s “own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him.” (Marcuse quoting Marx, 4)⁷ Revolutionary activity thus defines the doer as much as the done through a radical grasping of the human essence in which the doing itself is primary. From the radical act Marcuse spins out the other Marxist concepts—the immanence of history, social being, nature, reproduction of material life, the grounding of spirit on material reality, class, the universal class (proletariat), world market, science, and the class consciousness in which the historical act finds its social carrier.

Marcuse begins his summary of Heidegger’s contribution from the category of historicity. Summarising the categories of being-in-the-world, care, authenticity, fate and destiny, Marcuse admits valid objections to Heidegger’s work and rejects his methodology in order to define his fundamental contribution as the return to the foundation of philoso-

⁶ Thus, the revolutionary situation is the basis for Marcuse’s interpretation of Marxism. We should note that this is by no means an uncontroversial interpretation of Marxism: it provisionally sets aside all other issues—knowledge, class consciousness, the theory of history, etc.—with the view that all these other issues in Marxism take on meaning only within the fundamental situation of the radical act in which “the act is grasped as the decisive realization of the human essence.” (4)

⁷ Marcuse quotes Marx from *The German Ideology* (written 1845–6) at this point and at others relies on *The Holy Family* (1845). His familiarity with those of Marx’s texts from this period that were available, combined with his study of their Hegelian background, mitigates somewhat the shock of recognition of a notion of sensuous praxis in the *1844 Manuscripts* parallel to his own ‘Heideggerian’ one.

phy of concrete Dasein whose appropriate form is “dialectical motility” and which contains the possibility of a return to authentic, true existence. (14) The key contribution is then pinpointed as “the moment of decision—resoluteness” (15), which is only possible as a “disavowal” of the present. (13) It is thus the concept of the radical act which is the basis for the attempted synthesis of Marx and Heidegger. He pauses to criticise Heidegger’s referral of authenticity to an isolated Dasein, but presses forward to suggest that “[t]he radical act is not just a ‘modification’ of existence as it has been—it is the shaping anew of all spheres of public life.” (16) This suggests that the radical act as he understands it is not counter-posed to phenomenology as such but is seen as a more complete and concrete phenomenology.

In the next section Marcuse brings together these Marxian and Heideggerian threads. Dialectic is proposed, not as a schema of understanding, but as the form of historical movement itself. The world to come is already in the present as its immanent negativity that moves Dasein into the future. Such immanent negativity is the core of Marcuse’s synthesis. It is neither merely a human act nor an external movement of the world. It is a self-movement, or motility, of being-in-the-world. A proper conception of such immanent negativity requires the mutual correction and extension of both phenomenology and Marxism and in this sense can genuinely be called a synthesis, a program for Heideggerian Marxism.

If we therefore demand, on the one hand, that the phenomenology of human Dasein initiated by Heidegger forge onward, coming to completion in a phenomenology of concrete Dasein and the concrete historical action demanded by history in each historical situation, we must, on the other hand, demand that the dialectical method of knowing become phenomenological, that it push itself in the opposite direction and thereby learn to incorporate concretion in the full comprehension of the object. (20)

In order to evaluate the adequacy of this synthesis we have to reserve two questions, one for each side of the synthesis: In what does this phenomenology of concrete historical action consist? (Is it already given in Marxism, for example, or is it a new inquiry, or even an ever-to-be-renewed inquiry?) Does the full comprehension of the object required by dialectics simply oppose the formal systematisation into which both He-

gelian and Marxian dialectics had fallen, or does it add to dialectics properly understood? (Can it be satisfied by an adequate, Marcusean, interpretation of Hegel and Marx, or does it contain a necessary reference to phenomenology?) In any case, note that “concretion” is the demand for both threads, and adequate concretion would be the sign of the accomplished synthesis.

The demand for concretion is addressed in the last section, where it is suggested that the phenomenology of care must embrace the “first principle of historical materialism” that “Dasein’s primary care is for itself, for its production and reproduction.” (25) If we may designate Marcuse’s earlier use of “radical act” and “historicity” as bridging concepts insofar as they are found within both Marxism and phenomenology and form the basis for his synthesis, we may call those that he proposes now interpretative concepts insofar as they form the starting point of a conceptual vocabulary for Heideggerian Marxism. There are two main ones. Marcuse states that “[t]o every concrete-historical Dasein there belongs a concrete-historical ‘life-space’ (*Lebensraum*)” which is the space in which Dasein “creates the possibilities of his existence as possibilities of production and reproduction.” (27)⁸ Concrete historical life occurs within a space that it inherits and transforms. Its circle, or circumference, “is no

⁸ The editors flag the term *Lebensraum* at the first opportunity to warn us that “the repeated use of this fraught term illustrates his problematic proximity to the discourse of conservative revolution in Weimar in the late 1920s.” (fn. 57, 199) They wonder why Marcuse would use this term since he would certainly be aware of its right-wing affiliations. While they note that such a life-space in Marcuse’s usage is not monolithic but full of social contradictions, they nevertheless compare his awareness of this issue unfavourably to Horkheimer and note that Marcuse reconsidered the positive aspects of rationalism after 1933. Such a phrasing suggests that this usage was an error on Marcuse’s part and does not refer to a genuine phenomenon requiring an adequate concept. It thus reinforces the view that Marcuse could withdraw from his Heideggerian supplement entirely and base himself on the early Marx without significant loss to his earlier programme of Heideggerian Marxism. This assessment is typical of those reactions which regard philosophy and its terms as reducible to their political-historical usages and, even more dangerously, imply that avoiding a concept is an adequate response—as if philosophical concepts work in the manner of biological contagion. This allergic attitude has allowed Western Marxism to cede discussion of important areas of experience to the political right, a reaction whose consequences should by now be obvious, and which a contemporary “Heideggerian Marxism” would aim to address.

inviolable barrier: it can be blasted open, expanded or contracted—but these...modifications of this particular life-space...are determined by the life-space, such that the life-space enters into the historical movement as an inescapable inheritance.” (27) Even more, “[f]rom life-space as well come the impulses to movement—to every movement that seizes the whole existence of the society for which Dasein makes provision.” (27) Thus, *Lebensraum* is the ground for the radical act of the concrete Dasein to which Heideggerian Marxism is addressed, its “destiny.” One may add the second concept of motility, whose significance lies not only in the direct quotation to *Being and Time* that it enables—in which movement as change of location is distinguished from motility as self-movement—but also in its critique of the positivist Marxist understanding of the “necessity” of social revolution as within the continuum of natural necessity. Its necessity is rather the necessity of an act, not that of a law of nature, such that “the acting being of Dasein happens and constitutes the entire realm of happening.” (31) Thus, the radical act not only re-arranges the conditions of life, it transforms the “world” in the Heideggerian sense, because “the world is no longer given except as a life-space that must be provisioned” so that its happening can “create a new world by means of the transforming act.” (32) The rootedness in a particular world extended in space is the ground for the motility through which the world happens.

Marcuse’s next essay, “On Concrete Philosophy,” takes up the question of the role of philosophy in the world. The present situation of Dasein is one of existential distress in which the role of philosophy is restricted to one of helping to address distress. The situation of humanity and its historical activity have encountered truths which it is the task of philosophy to express. This is because the historical situation of a world has ceased to be a simple unity. In the historical present neither individuals nor a total unified situation are the ultimate constituents of the world. Rather, “higher unities” such as communities and societies—Marcuse does not say “classes” here but he surely must have had it in mind as the *terminus ad quem* of his argument—are the phenomena in which the world is lived.⁹ He draws on this phenomenological thematic to state that

⁹ Marcuse himself puts the phrase “higher unities” in quotation marks (41), probably to mark the established phenomenological lineage of the term. In his prefatory exposition of the analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*, Heidegger referred to the problem of what constitutes the unity of a personality with reference to Dilthey, Husserl and Scheler. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (tr.) Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York

such higher unities are “[w]hat appears under phenomenological scrutiny” and that they appear “in their respective life-spaces.” (41) Philosophy is thus grounded in the elaboration of the various communities in their particular worlds. The crisis of existence in contemporary capitalism, he maintains, is that “[o]n the one hand, existentially binding truths of each society and its specific elements (status groups, classes, peoples) have become more differentiated, in their historical particularity. On the other hand, the “universally valid” truths have dissipated into abstractions.” (43) The unity of theory and praxis demanded by philosophy can only become actual if philosophy becomes concrete, which is to say, if it abandons empty abstractions and enters into the constitution of particular worlds in their life-space. While it is not so in every historical situation, the crisis of existence in capitalism demands that philosophy intervene publicly to “propel existence forward in accordance with its historical possibilities.” (51)

Marcuse’s two-part essay, “On the Problem of the Dialectic,” is ostensibly a review of Siegfried Marck’s *Dialectic in Contemporary Philosophy*, but it goes far beyond that in presenting an account of dialectic in Plato and summarising the results of his *Habilitationsschrift* on Hegel’s dialectic on which he was working at the time. The main point of Marcuse’s account of Plato is that dialectic was not primarily a method of knowledge, but a process of the becoming of being in which the unifying and separating of being occurs through *motility*, which is the passing of every being into non-being or otherness. “Be-ing is only in this motility, change and multiplicity and is only in them as unity, permanence and

Press, 1996), 44. Marcuse remarked that Husserl’s studies have not yet been published and proceeded to show what in the published work points in the right direction. Husserl’s studies appeared soon after in the *Cartesian Meditations*, where he described “higher-order persons” as “spiritual Objectivities of a certain kind” that involve “a surrounding world of culture for each man and each human community.” Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, (tr.) Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 132. Cairns translates *Personalitäten höherer Ordnung* slightly misleadingly as “higher-level personalities” insofar as, in ordinary English, this usage normally emphasises the difference of one personality from another. “Higher-order persons,” which I have used, corresponds more directly to Husserl’s meaning of the ‘person-character’ of such social unities. It does follow, however, from their ‘person-character’ that such characters are different and thus analogous to ‘personalities.’ A more contemporary usage would refer to these as “social identities.”

sameness. Being is inherently dialectical and for that reason can only be comprehended dialectically.” (58) Dialectic thus refers to the motility of being. In Hegel, this motility is determined as historical in a manner that puts together ancient dialectic with the Kantian transcendental synthesis of the “I think” through the problem of “life.” “The primordial basis of the Hegelian dialectic is the being of *life* and its specific motility.” (70) The living unity of ego and world that comprises life occurs historically through a “sublation” (*Aufhebung*) in which its given stage falls into negativity, otherness. “[T]he concrete happening of living ... is always merely a result of a constant “sublation” (“negation”) of the otherness in which life finds itself at the time.” (72) Thus, we return to the *radical act* that rescues life from its otherness and initiates the happening of a new world.

Dialectic is the ontological motility of the ego-world unity—being-in-the-world—through which being returns from its otherness to itself, thereby overcoming reification, alienation and dispersal. Given the existential crisis of capitalism based on the alienation of labour “[o]nly on the basis of the realized proletarian revolution could the question of the possibility of a new dialectic of happening be raised.” (85) The last essay from this period, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics,” proceeds without any direct reference to Heidegger, though it is suffused with Heideggerian language. It attempts to put into place the key component that would unify the previous essays: the radical act that transforms the life-space of a given historical humanity, the plurality of such communities rooted in their life-spaces, the motility of being as the return from otherness, the radical act as the completion of this return. It remains to say that labour is the form of human action and that the alienation of labour under capitalism is the otherness that demands return. “[L]abor is an ontological concept, that is, a concept that grasps the being of human Dasein itself and as such.” (124) Through this ontology of labour Marcuse attempted to reconcile the phenomenologically discovered multiplicity of life-spaces with the universality of the activity of Dasein. Labour is not a specific human activity, but human activity as such, characterised by duration, permanence and its burdensome nature. Labour requires concentration, produces both the things of the world and the labourer, and puts the labourer under the reign of the thing—throws him or her into negativity. Through labour humans become historical because in labouring one has “stepped out of his own

personal sphere in order to occupy a well-determined place in an already organised and differentiated setting that is divided into different corporations, occupations, classes, etc. He has found his specific place as a part in one of these larger settings.” (140) Labour is the activity through which Dasein is incorporated into the motility of being.

III

The core of the proposed synthesis of Marcuse’s “Heideggerian Marxist” essays is the concept of the radical act and its basis in historicity, the terms of which he can legitimately find in both Marx and Heidegger: history and revolutionary action in Marx are connected by Marcuse to Heidegger’s concepts of resoluteness and destiny. He attempts to ground these parallel concepts through the concept of labour, which is clearly central to Marx and Marxism. Even if the concept of labour is not found in Heidegger as such, his analyses of tools in *Being and Time* and his insistence on the existence of Dasein as fundamentally worldly praxis mean that a synthesis is possible—though not a word-by-word correspondence—if a phenomenology of labour can be provided that grounds tool-using praxis. For Marcuse, the key element of such a phenomenology of labour is historicity, not just the history of human activity, but the self-moving in time of human existence itself. Motility is the essence of historical happening grounded on “labor as the specific *praxis* of the human world.” (127) Motility occurs through negativity—the “alienation and estrangement of Dasein, this taking-on-oneself of the law of the thing rather than letting one’s own Dasein happen.” (138) Thus, while labour is the essence of human historicity, all human action is not labour, but only that action which contributes to self-actualisation, to “making Dasein happen.” (143)

Evaluation of the adequacy of Marcuse’s synthesis will thus have to centrally reckon with the role of Hegel in Marcuse’s philosophy. The dialectic in Hegel contained the core of Marcuse’s account of the negativity of motile being that could be realised in the radical act. We have seen that Marcuse rejected the later formalisation of the dialectic in Hegel and interpreted Marx’s critique as a return to its earlier productive formulation. In his essay on the dialectic, he described Hegel’s dialectic of master and slave as the process of reification and transcendence and added that Marx represented this as the “basic law of historical happening.” (82) In the essay on labour the contributions of Hegel and Marx are

treated seamlessly through the insight that only when humans produce beyond what is necessary and immediate does labour become truly itself. (148) This compaction goes so far that he even denies that there is a concept of absolute being in Hegel. (82)

The dialectic is intrinsically related to historicity precisely insofar as it “arises from the ego” and is the dialectic of self-consciousness. For the full essence of self-consciousness is determined by historicity. This does not mean, as Marck thinks, that “the expansion of human existence is carried through to an absolute logos;” on the contrary, such an expansion is totally out of the question. For constituting the *totality* of be-ing in the historical being of human life forbids precisely any statement about “absolute being” and any determination of be-ing from the standpoint of “absolute logos.” Hegel’s dialectic, which was originally based on the concept of life, could only become an absolute dialectic when this original historicity of life came to a standstill within his system. (82)

It is one of the key features of Marcuse’s interpretation of Hegel that it is done through the concept of the motility of “life”—not that of logic or history. This concept, in a certain sense, registers his debt to Heidegger, though not directly, but by returning to and developing the concept of life from Wilhelm Dilthey’s *Lebensphilosophie* from which Heidegger’s analyses of Dasein themselves began. In the conclusion to his *Habilitationsschrift Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, which he had hoped to present to Heidegger, Marcuse pointed to the understanding of life as historicity that united Hegel and Dilthey. He then criticised Dilthey’s reliance on Hegel’s later work, which contained a “secondary and derivative concept of history in Hegel’s work,” in order to suggest that the incorporation of nature into history by the later Hegel also infected Dilthey.¹⁰ The proper and original concept of historicity in Hegel, Marcuse asserted, was “that exceptional mode of the self-relation

¹⁰ Marcuse’s 1932 published version of his *Habilitationsschrift* appeared in English as Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, (tr.) S. Benhabib (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 323.

of self-consciousness to its own motility.”¹¹ The exceptional character of life in this sense requires its ontological distinction from nature (63–4, 34) which, against Dilthey and the late Hegel, was understood by Lukács: “the being of nature—completely ahistorical as an object of physics, historical as the life-space of human Dasein.” (67) Therefore, the concept of an absolute only appears in Hegel when the concept of life as historicity “comes to a standstill,” when it loses its specificity through the absorption of its contrasting category of ahistorical nature. This is why Marcuse criticised Lukács’ attempt to maintain a concept of “correct class consciousness” that requires precisely such an absolute and is impossible within the historicity of life. (67) If “life” is taken in this absolute direction, it cannot be understood as “spirit” since the specificity of spirit is thereby lost.¹² Marcuse is thus committed in his Hegel interpretation to maintaining an ontological distinction between nature and history. But such an interpretation must deny the Lukácsian conception of the universality of proletarian class consciousness in favour of its relativity to specific life-spaces (destiny).

On the ground of an ontological interpretation of the neo-Kantian distinction between nature and history, Marcuse could synthesise the concept of labour with that of historicity in order to define the fundamental ontological character of human Dasein. The act, and the historicity of happening, which is the basis of Marcuse’s synthesis of Heidegger and Marx could only be understood through this specificity of spirit. In this sense, we can understand Marcuse’s philosophical project at this point not only as a synthesis of Heidegger and Marx, but as a return to the problematic of Dilthey’s *Lebensphilosophie* and its search for a ground in Hegel’s concept of historicity, in order to develop an original philosophy of the specificity of life grounded in the early Hegel’s non-absolute concept of life as passing into otherness from which a radical act provokes its return.

But if the historicity of life is not absolute, it encompasses neither nature nor the plurality of life-spaces. Marcuse’s interpretation of Hegel seems to throw him into a relativism of life-spaces from which the phenomenology of labour sought to rescue him. An act can only be performed within a given life-space, where it seeks to return from otherness

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 322.

and reification to the identity of historical Dasein. The problem of relativism, with which Marcuse would in 1934 accuse Dilthey (153, 160), must be addressed by such a philosophy. Following the Marxist thread, Marcuse attempted to address this issue through his phenomenology of labour. Since labour is the ontology of Dasein it characterises not one but all life-spaces, though it takes a different form in each one. In labour, human activity is burdensome because it is under the law of the thing such that “man is always taken away from his self-being and toward something else: he is always with an other and for an other.” (130, 139) Nonetheless, “[a]ll labor, by its very essence, transcends every particular labor process and all ‘otherness,’ through which it passes, on the way to the Dasein of the labourer himself.” (143) Thus, although labour has an ontological character, all human doing is not labour. An activity becomes labour only through its relation to human self-actualisation such that it is only beyond the realm of material production and reproduction that labour becomes really itself. “Labor no longer aims at the formation and fulfilment of Dasein as something that it first has to bring about and secure; instead, it proceeds *from* the form and plenitude of Dasein as its realization.” (144) Thus, Marcuse attempted to justify Marx’s distinction in the third volume of *Capital* between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom through his phenomenology of labour.¹³ Clearly, since all labour involves the transformation of the material world, this distinction relies on Marx’s distinction in the *1844 Manuscripts* between objectification and alienation. Marcuse interpreted this distinction to mean that “objectification always carries within it a tendency toward reification and labor a tendency toward alienation, so that reification and alienation are not merely chance historical facts.” (112) Granting this distinction, it is still another step to suggest, as Marx clearly did, that the tendency to alienation of labour could be definitively and finally overcome in human history through a proletarian revolution. One could argue, for example, that various cycles of alienation and recovery occur within human history and the task of the act of recovery is always to situate itself within a certain alienation in a given life-space in order to aid a specific recovery. Marcuse’s attempt to justify Marx’s further step through a phenomenology of labour depends on his connection of the authentic self to labour

¹³ Karl Marx, “On the Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom” in (ed.) Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), 439–41.

which “discloses the truth and plenitude of its being and maintains itself in this truth and plenitude.” (144) This appears to mean that since labour is ontologically a disclosure of Dasein’s essence, and since this disclosure is denied to certain forms of human activity, then Dasein returns to its essence when labour is performed for its own sake rather than under an external compulsion.

But without the absolute being that Marcuse denied to Hegel and Dilthey, and whose denial was intrinsic to Heidegger, the return from alienation cannot be understood to reach a historical climax that could change the meaning of labour for all human history. Particular returns from the inherent (universal) tendency to alienation of labour would allow particular articulations within specific life-spaces, but there would be no whole-scale rupture in history from the realm of alienated labour to one of free activity. The notion that the crisis of capitalism universalises the process of alienation and return so that it is no longer a process *within* history but becomes a break from the continuum of history (as alienations and returns) to a new stage of freedom (definitive return from the process of alienations and returns) can find support in Marx and Hegel, however, it is undermined by Heidegger and a phenomenology of labour without such a metaphysical presumption. Probably because this was Marcuse’s last essay of this period, it exemplifies the difficulty that drove him forward: he could not ground the large-scale historical transformation that Marxism promised—not only from one historical stage to another, but a break from the continuum of all previous history, a break not only *within* history but *with* history—without assuming a universalisation of negativity, of alienation-return, that could not be phenomenologically grounded.¹⁴ In sum, Marcuse wanted the world-historical task of the proletariat as the universal class embodying and prefiguring the end of all class, but he could not have it phenomenologically. No wonder that it was time to move on.

¹⁴ My point is that, while negativity may take the form of alienation-and-return at times, this is not the only form that negativity takes. It also takes the form of destruction, or even deconstruction, which should also not be universalised. The centrality of negativity to both Hegelian and Heideggerian philosophy has often allowed interpreters to overlook the fundamentally different character of negativity in each. This is the main point of my critique of Andrew Feenberg’s book *Heidegger and Marcuse* in “Walking on Two Legs: On The Very Possibility of a Heideggerian Marxism” in *Human Studies*, Vol. 28, n. 3, 2005.

In moving on to a concept of historicity based in Hegel, Marcuse did not escape the vacillation of both wanting a universal perspective on human history and denying its possibility. It is all very well to situate a return to Hegel's dialectic within the neo-Kantian terms of the late 19th and early 20th century. It is fine to undermine and radicalise Dilthey's return to Hegel by rejecting the late systemisation of the dialectic for a conception based in the motility of life. But unless the dialectic of domination and servitude that grounds the phenomenology of labour can be asserted as a "universal historical condition" (148)—that is to say, the secret of historicity as such—then the radical act becomes relative to a particular life-space and the world-historical class consciousness of the proletariat becomes a more modest fight against forms of domination within particular life-spaces. We may well see Marcuse's later attempt to find the (universal) spark of revolution in various (particular) sources—the Third World, students, women, etc.—as having its source in exactly this dilemma. The continuity in all these attempts is the search for the radical act. When he left "Heideggerian Marxism" behind, Marcuse grasped the universal horn of this dilemma. The Heideggerian concepts of life-space and destiny that grasped the particular form of life of a historical community dropped out altogether, as did the "Heideggerian" possibility of understanding the radical act as a grasping of the destiny of a historical community in its life-space. He came to believe that such concepts were tainted by their Nazi use, a use not only based in Heidegger but whose very particularity lends itself to being used by one community against another. The reference to human universality must drop out, it would seem, when the particular community becomes the reference for radical action.

IV

If we understand Marcuse's "Heideggerian Marxism" as a continuation, radicalisation and transformation of *Lebensphilosophie* comparable to that undertaken by Heidegger himself, it can be placed in tandem with other currents that initiated 20th century philosophy through a focus on the radical act. For example, Mikhail Bakhtin argued that "the contemporary crisis is, fundamentally, a crisis of contemporary action. An abyss has formed between the motive of the actually performed act or deed and its product. But in consequence of this, the product of the deed, severed

from its ontological roots, has withered as well.”¹⁵ The primacy of the deed, Marcuse’s radical act, in the primal establishment of an order was later recognised more clearly by Heidegger in the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.” “Truth happens only by establishing itself in the conflict and sphere opened up by truth itself. Because truth is the opposition of clearing and concealing, there belongs to it what is here to be called establishing.”¹⁶ Husserl also used the term “primal institution” (*Urstiftung*) to refer to the bringing into being of a new form of knowledge such as Galilean science.¹⁷ This concept was extended by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lefort into the instituting of a social and political life-form or *régime*.¹⁸

Whether it is called a radical act, a deed, a happening, a primal institution, or a clearing, it is a common property of 20th century philosophy to have dug down below existing institutions to describe their coming-into-being. It is coming-and-going of form that 20th century philosophy would seek in an adequate concept of negativity. Insofar as this discovery puts a happening before the exercise of reason, it indeed contains a danger. There are those, such as the editors of this volume, who would shy away from such Nietzschean Dionysianism because it can be taken in the direction of Nazism. After 1933, Marcuse’s position was similar in emphasising reason in a comprehensive Hegelian sense and associating the “primacy of the act” with Nazi decisionism.¹⁹ Marcuse described de-

¹⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Philosophy of the Act*, (tr.) V. Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 54.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (tr.) A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 61.

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, (tr.) D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) passim, e.g., 73.

¹⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the College de France 1952–1960*, (tr.) J. O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), chapter five and “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” in *Signs*, (tr.) R. C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), 59. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, (tr.) D. Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 10–12, 217.

¹⁹ Marcuse’s later work in the 1950s recovered some of the ambiguity of his earlier work, however, and distinguishes him from those partisans of the Frankfurt School who place all their hopes on reason to take the place of a pre-rational happening. In *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) he attempted to defend a certain Nietzschean Dionysianism and turn it in a benign direction. In this sense, that book provides a later ontology

cisionism to mean that “[s]overeignty is founded on the factual power to make this decision (decisionism).”²⁰ Thus, if one wants to accept the discovery of happening as a genuine philosophical discovery, it must be admitted that the vocation of reason after this discovery becomes a more precarious enterprise. It seems to me that this is what it means to say that 1933 is an event for philosophy and not only for politics: happening has come into the open and cannot be held subordinate to the control of reason.²¹

One either accepts the uncovering of happening as a fact of 20th century philosophy or denies it. To deny it one must hold to a concept of reason that subtends all happening and implies—in the distance if not quite in one’s hand—a rational kernel to history. To do so, one must characterise the emergence of happening in 20th century philosophy as entirely an irrationalist decisionism. Thus, Hegel has been rediscovered constantly throughout the 20th century in an attempt to make sense of its barbaric happenings—the marvellous ones being less of a problem for most philosophers. Is this Marcuse’s Hegel? Not during the period 1928–

that attempts to fill the absent place of his abandoned “Heideggerian Marxism,” but I cannot go into that work here.

²⁰ Herbert Marcuse, “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State”, 36. The concept of decisionism in this sense is derived from the legal and political theory of Carl Schmitt, but it is used more generally to refer to an irrationalist decline of philosophical reason due to the placing the act as ontologically prior to any exercise of reason, thereby abandoning philosophical universality for a tribalist particularism.

²¹ One part of this is the relation of Heidegger himself to National Socialism, which is, of course, a much-debated issue and too large to get into here. But perhaps the investigation of Johannes Fritsche, which shows that the culture-critical concepts of the far right were already operative in *Being and Time*, especially in its last sections (72–7), might provide a starting-point. If we provisionally grant a relationship between Heidegger’s conceptual vocabulary and the confinement of philosophy to particular life-spaces, what follows from this? The problem is clearly the confinement to a particular life-space that may be asserted against other life-spaces, not the investigation of particular life-spaces themselves. If one holds tight to a conception of human universality, especially a universal conception of human emancipation, should that prevent one from immersing oneself in a particular community? It seems rather more likely that such a universal commitment can only be discovered and actualised within a particular life-space. Johannes Fritsche, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

33 when he interpreted the Hegelian dialectic through the motility of life and argued that all formal dialectics of history were a product of later schematisation. To accept that this feature of 20th century philosophy is indeed a fact, a discovery, is to suggest that it is somehow characteristic of our time. The task of philosophy is neither to deny nor master it, but to live within it and find out what it means. This is the “existentialist” core of contemporary philosophy, which I mentioned at the outset, that cannot be contained by “existentialism,” and which necessarily contains some doubt about systematisations, or what Marcuse called “false abstractions.” It demands that one enter into a particular world and engage its demands without any ultimate guarantee that one’s actions can be sanctioned by a “reason” that subtends all particular worlds. It does not necessarily—as the critics of decisionism suggest—require that one abandon any commitment to universality, but it certainly does require that such universality be discovered in some way within a particular world as its extreme possibility, rather than through values supposedly floating free and above such engagement.

I will make only one critical remark pertinent to the uncovering of happening here. The various different terms for this event cloak an important question that pertains centrally to the basic question of decisionism. Is the happening that clears a life-space a product of human action? Can it be intended, planned, executed? While human action may well be the vehicle for a happening, the happening itself could not be mastered to the extent of being planned and executed. If so, it would not be a happening that uncovers a life-space, but an action within a life-space. So terms like happening, event, motility, and primal institution seem more adequate than deed or radical act. Once a given life-space has been opened up, it seems to follow that action within that life-space has meaning insofar as it carries forward and completes what has been opened. Thus, a term like destiny, or Husserl’s “final/completing institution” (*Endstiftung*) seems to be required to situate the meaning of human action within a life-space.²²

Marcuse’s abandonment of his early project of “Heideggerian Marxism” entailed his abandonment of the concepts of life-space and destiny. Rather than attempting to take them away from their Nazi use, he made

²² Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 72.

the judgment that such terms necessarily tend in a Nazi direction. To this extent, he was drawn to the Hegelian concept of a reason subtending history that has tempted 20th century philosophy away from its radical insight.²³ 20th century philosophy must encounter the origin of all systems in an event of happening that opens a space within which formalisation can occur. Systems can never internalise their origin; a happening articulates itself in systematisation. This undialectical duality describes the fundamental problem from which Marcuse's early work emerged and which it attempted to capture philosophically. Despite the Nazi possibility, which cannot be simply sidestepped but is a political index of our time that reappears in other guises, concepts such as life-space and destiny are essential to capturing the particular worlds within which humans live and act and in which, if its task can be renewed, emancipation occurs. Marcuse's early works certainly do illuminate the philosophical situation of our time. Their task can be renewed, though probably not the same form, and it should be counted as an unavoidable tragedy that Marcuse could not continue in this direction himself—a philosophical tragedy that manifests its entailment with the political catastrophes of our time.

V

What are the aspects of contemporary philosophy that are uncovered by Marcuse's Heideggerianism and then drop out later? Life-space and motility—in general, the inhabitation of a finite, particular world by human Dasein. What are the aspects of these essays that still hold too close to Marxism and don't let the phenomenological opening open fully? The tendency, perhaps desire, to have the radical act that confronts exploitation do so universally and not be contained within the particular life-space in which it occurs. The concept of labour in Marcuse's "Heideggerian Marxism" unsuccessfully attempts to hold these two halves together by functioning both as a universal feature of all particular life-spaces and also as the specific act that negates a given situation within a given life-space. One strategy is to reject the phenomenological move in-

²³ He was, however, to encounter this issue again and address it in another fashion in *Eros and Civilization*. So, one may perhaps say that, when the Nazi menace receded in the 1950s, he could return to the philosophical problematic that had engendered his work—though with different reference points.

side finite life-spaces in the name of the universality of philosophy. This has been the predominant argument by those who would reject the uncovering of happening by 20th century philosophy as a genuine discovery. It amounts to failing to confront the danger represented by decisionism by rejecting out of hand the uncovering of happening—and thereby regressing to some previous stage of philosophical questioning. On the other hand, those who have accepted this discovery as genuine have often themselves agreed that it amounts to an assertion of the ultimacy of particular life-spaces and an abandonment of universality.

I can only assert here, in the face of this unsatisfactory contemporary polarisation, that the task is rather to accept the inhabitation of particular, finite life-spaces by human Dasein and seek to rediscover the opening to universality within the particular. How does infinity manifest itself within finitude? Marcuse moved from Heidegger to Hegel to recover universality and infinity. In so doing, he left aside the opening represented in his early essays where he criticised Lukács' conception of "correct class consciousness" because it attempted to base itself on a standpoint outside historicity. (67) The universality of the emancipation of the proletariat would require some such conception of a standpoint outside history. The phenomenological alternative, set aside by Marcuse, would be to recognise the multiplicity of the concept of emancipation insofar as it must always be expressed as an act within a life-space. There would be no final solution to the problem of exploitation in history. The option is still left open, however, to some unity and universality of "emancipation" as such insofar as it manifests a human possibility that becomes multiple when actualised. How is infinity a possibility that can be glimpsed from within the finitude of a human life-space?

Readers of Hegel will want to remind me that Hegel's whole philosophy depends on his solution to the antinomy of finitude and infinity through the notions of bad infinity and determinate negation. Certainly. But Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel wavers at this key point: he interprets Hegel's historicity as finitude and motility by rejecting the totalisation of history as a later formalisation, but he cannot then explain how historicity can produce more than an act within a life-space. Paraphrasing Hegel in *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, he states that "[i]nfinity is only the most consistent expression for the absolute and universal immanence of motility; it is the 'unrest of self-movement' within the Being of beings...Infinity is thus thoroughly a characteristic of

the Being of finite beings as motility.”²⁴ This interpretation of infinity as the motility of finitude in immanence rules out the self-consciousness of history as such, which Hegel’s philosophy was meant to guarantee. Here, Marcuse has Heidegger’s Hegel, whereas in other places he seems to want to have Hegel’s Heidegger.²⁵ Precisely what was unified for Hegel—form-giving and the forms that are given—has split into two in the 20th century. This was the price for the radical uncovering of happening. Marcuse works within this split and illuminates it for us, but he yearns to heal the split itself.

Rethinking the relation between particularity and universality, finitude and infinity, is the contemporary relevance of Marcuse’s early essays. Their “Heideggerian Marxism” represents a task rather than a finished philosophy, a task that can be taken up despite Marcuse’s abandonment of it. The philosophical project would be to risk the discovery of happening, enter the finitude of particular life-spaces, and re-engage the search for infinity and universality within the existence of human Dasein—that is to say, to re-engage with the task of Socrates that initiated philosophical universality. To be sure, there is a danger here, a danger inextricable from 20th century philosophy and politics, that the spark of such universality cannot be located, but to attempt to avoid this danger absolutely is to shut one’s eyes to the happening that constitutes the 20th century. Marcuse’s concept of the radical act, dangerous as it is for both philosophy and politics in its proximity to decisionism, was one way of registering that opening. Insofar as it conceived of happening as a human act, and thereby elevated human doing to the uncovering of Being, this proximity was indeed too great. As Heidegger later understood, the uncovering of Being requires releasement (*Gelassenheit*). The other side of the danger here appears: that human doing be devalued entirely for a passive undergoing. The supposed alternative between activity and passivity

²⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, 60.

²⁵ I thus agree with Robert B. Pippin that Marcuse’s Hegel in *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* lacks completion (universality, infinity) in “Marcuse on Hegel and Historicity,” *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XVI, n. 3, Spring 1985. Most readers of Hegel would read an insistence on completion even in the early work since Hegel’s work is generated by his claim to synthesise finitude and infinity. It is this claim that is the basis for Marx’s notion of the universality of the proletariat. This lack of completion is clearly of Heideggerian origin.

needs to be rethought along with the antinomy between finitude and infinity.

Marcuse condemned Heidegger for false abstraction and turned to Hegel and Marx for a concrete philosophy. We still seek a philosophy that will be wholeheartedly present with us in the urgency with which we feel, act and think. We still need a philosophy that can illumine the openings to universality and infinity in the particular life-spaces that we inhabit. In this sense, the turn toward existential philosophy (in a non-denominational sense) throughout the 20th century cannot be rescinded. The battle against academic philosophy, against false abstraction, must be waged anew. I suspect, however, that the desire for concreteness cannot be finally fulfilled. If a concrete philosophy were to appear entire, it would obviate the need to philosophise. But philosophy is only actual as philosophising—here our existential philosophy is Socratic—and thus full concreteness would be the end of philosophy. Thus, the struggle for concreteness is not a matter of adherence to ways of doing philosophy but an ever-renewed struggle for the end of thought in an utter proximity to life. Yet, such utter proximity can never be achieved. It is a *telos* of thought only. Life itself requires that we feel, act and think without such a guarantee. Thought and being are not identical, not even through the identity of their non-identity.

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