

ON PHILIP RIEFF

by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The purpose of this thesis is to examine, define and critically evaluate Professor Philip Rieff's central thesis which may be stated in the following way. After the great theoretical works of Freud and his successor-critics, the western world has seen the emergence of a new self-understanding which is the most important symptom of a fundamentally new culture in which therapy replaces religion.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine, define and evaluate Professor Philip Rieff's central thesis which may be stated in the following way. After the great theoretical works of Freud and his successor-critics, the western world has seen the emergence of a new self-understanding which is the most important symptom of a fundamentally new culture. Using the ideal type of Weberian theory, Rieff claims that the ideal type of Christian culture first brought together political man and religious man and later expressed itself in economic man. These types of Christian culture are now being replaced by the emerging ideal type of the new culture.

Psychological man cannot be defined exhaustively because it personifies the essence of Rieff's theory of culture. A definition would entail an elaboration of the theory and all its implications. A list of some qualities must suffice. Psychological man seeks his own well-being regardless of orthodox political and religious sanctions and is variously termed by Rieff a new myth we have about ourselves, a new model of ourselves, a new self-image or self-interpretation and the new ideal type of the current culture. In temporal terms, Rieff divides the era of psychological man into the transitional period of analytic man, exemplified by Freud, and the permanent stable period of therapeutic man heralded by the new elite of

'cultureless' scientists and artists. The battle in which we are presently engaged for Rieff involves transcending the individuality of the analytic stance which was the heritage of conquering the past but is now superfluous, and embracing the unremembering innocence of the therapeutic stance, retaining only the opposition to culture which is the permanent legacy of Freud's moralism. In the earlier analytic stance psychological man may be understood primarily as part of the West's cultural cycle. In the later therapeutic stance the focus on the self which marks the decisive break with culture becomes possible through social technology.

Rieff announces a new freedom in psychological man's triumph over culture, which now follows the triumph over nature. But the therapeutic order will be administered by a system of social control, a kind of human technology. Rieff believes there is no contradiction between social control and the new freedom of the self because the Freudian critical awareness will be programmed into the social technology.

The first three chapters of the thesis describe Rieff's views. The critique is presented in chapter four. It maintains that the new freedom is not tangible and that since this is the case we are left with a tyranny more thorough and invincible than the previous cultural tyranny. Rieff is quite wrong therefore to dismiss quickly political and religious traditions which may protect freedom in the only way possible at present. Recent events show that even in the midst of the

great new technical fact the system is being rocked by tensions which Rieff's cultural theory cannot adequately explain. Although the positive achievements of technology are many, the triumph over nature and culture may leave men in the grip of a technical society which itself poses a greater problem than those it has overcome. The critique opposes Rieff's response to this problem. He lowers the horizon of expectation to a level of banal indifference.

Rieff's analysis is valuable in one important sense, however.. It describes cultural changes which are occurring and their devastating effects on religion and politics in their traditional expressions. But the outcome of this analysis must be to realize the size of the problem, not to acquiesce in the face of it. Only a radical understanding of the spirit behind the traditional forms can lead to new forms which are an adequate response to the new context.

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## CHAPTER 1

### I

Merely to call Philip Rieff a "sociologist" would be misleading. One immediately imagines a creator of heavy text books comprised of innumerable empirical research projects recording "role behaviour" and "interaction" in groups of Americans. Rieff is the head of the University of Pennsylvania's sociology department, but with that role his similarity to most contemporary sociology ends. Rieff is a sociologist because he feels that sociology is the new queen of the sciences. In an earlier age, he would most certainly have been a theologian.

It is not that he disdains empirical research. He shows a monumental analytical skill in his reading and editing of Freud's works. What he rejects is the endless collection of "empirical facts" which are not brought to life by creative theory. And Rieff's special bent is for such theory. He praises and emulates Freud's reassertion of the primacy of theory in any debate about the facts. Rieff's attempt to formulate a theory of culture is best understood in the company of the Promethean theoretical works of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Camus. Rieff is a sociologist of ideas. But it would be wrong to divorce creative theory entirely from the empirical. This paradox of modern theory, that it

must explain the real world while it attempts to transform that world, is exemplified in the current emergence of sociology which perfectly expresses the paradox. The first chapter of Max Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism points to an important relation which is supported by very general "empirical" evidence. The rest of the study deepens our understanding of this relation with artistic selection of special empirical evidence, so that one does not feel a fraud has been perpetrated.<sup>1</sup> The more creative and valuable a theory is, the less arbitrary it seems. We can choose to criticize it, to modify it, and especially to define its limits, but a new dimension of reality becomes clear in its wake.

Rieff wants to describe and bring to clarity the new dimension of reality which he feels engulfing the West. He knows that the act of theorizing will affect the course of the action, but the central thrust of his theory must be to describe what is happening. That new reality, the most important fact of this age, is a fundamental change in our self-interpretation -- what Rieff calls "the emergence of psychological man". In response to the death of old communal symbolism which has given us a sense of ourselves in the past, we modern men are creating a new myth about ourselves which is strictly private and psychological.

What is fundamentally new about psychological man is not always clear. In many ways, the new man is merely the

latest phase of an age-old cycle. But that this self-image is also fundamentally different than all previous self-images, is Rieff's man theme. This theme cannot be set down in easy definitions and comparisons. Rieff's whole second book defines the nature and implications of psychological man with his static and dynamic sociological theory.

Behind Rieff's assertion of the emergence of psychological man is the assumption that the essence of cultures can be found by understanding their ideal characters. Thus, one-half of cultural history consists of mapping the cultural ideals of the stable periods of civilization. The other half of history belongs to the dynamic explanation of cultural change, both revolution and consolidation. In both halves of such history, economic, political and religious factors are subordinated to the more fundamental cultural factor, understood primarily as it animates each individual through his character ideal.

Periods of stability in Western history are exemplified in correspondingly stable cultural ideals. Periods of cultural transition have unstable, hybrid ideals. For example, in this, the era of psychological man, one can distinguish first a transitional analytic man and then a stable self-contented therapeutic man. A similar transitional figure preceded all previous ideal types as well, but Rieff does not concern himself with these. The following diagram places the types he does mention on an approximate time scale.

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500 B.C.    100 B.C.    1700 A.D.    1950 A.D.    2000 A.D.

Political man -----

Religious man -----

Economic man -----

Psychological man as ana-  
lytic

Psychological  
man as thera-  
peutic

---

For the purpose of this static theory, Rieff distinguishes four self-interpretations. But a more important distinction for Rieff's thesis opposes psychological man to all three of his predecessors.

Political man is clearly defined in Rieff's view by Aristotle's political philosophy. Man is first a citizen, and public life is the highest practical virtue. To be a man is to participate in the whole, which truth is evident to both Reason and common sense. Reason is the purveyor of truth about Being, as opposed to Appearance and thus the guide for action in which man seeks to approximate this pure Being. Classical Reason must be distinguished from reason as conceived by modern philosophy, an instrument for obtaining what is desired.

The essential features of Western religious man grew out of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but its stable character resulted from a merging with classical culture. This

religious ideal type dominated the West until challenged by the Enlightenment. For religious man, the public realm becomes a means to a private end. The private end came out of the experience of the public chaos which followed the destruction of the classical world of the polis, and was reinforced by the similar experience in the breakdown of the republican aristocracy in Imperial Rome. It marks both the decisive difference of religious man from political man and the beginning kernel which eventually was to form the essence of psychological man. The ideas of personality and individual salvation came into historical prominence with the establishment of the early church, which combined these Hellenistic strains with the Hebrew idea of history.

But private or personal salvation depends upon the communal life of the church. The emphasis in this world is still on self-sacrifice, although the end is self-salvation in the next world. The religious man no longer depends upon classical reason. His guide for action is individual conscience which convinces him that a life of renunciation will bring the reward of life eternal.

Out of the great revolt against the mediaeval order, there arose a new character ideal which Rieff calls economic man. Once again the strain of privacy is invoked, this time to oppose the stultifying institutional church of religious man. Economic man revolts against old authority but for his personal strength he internalizes the ascetic cast of communal commitment. The commitment now becomes to rationalize

and remake the world according, at first to God's, and then his own, will. As Rieff puts it, economic man's guide for action became the desire to transform the world according to his own dreams.

In the political theory of Hobbes, one can see not only the manifesto of modern man and his aloneness, but also a description of the appropriate political state for such a private man, a state which has assumed all public power. The rise of the centralized state has paralleled the growing domination of economic man, and now in America, which long boasted of pluralist resistance to central efficiency, the goals of political monopoly are being realized. The classical notion of freedom which is essentially political, has been abandoned. The modern conception is freedom from restraint, the prerequisite, as Nietzsche pointed out, of individual (not social) health.

The guiding experience of the emerging psychological man has been the failure and inadequacy of the three former guides to action. The most powerful experience has been the failure of economic man to remake the world. The resurgence of individual concerns once again followed in the wake of the failure to reinstitutionalize civilization. At the height of the great century of "progress", one suddenly finds Nietzsche and Freud turning away in disgust to the individual. Rieff wants to make it clear that psychological man is rejecting an essential feature of all three previous



guides. He must live beyond reason and conscience because they are now irrelevant to his personal therapy, or more accurately, because they complicate his therapeutic problems. And he has learned the harsh lesson that his optimistic dreams can never be fulfilled in the real world. To continue the attempt would not be therapeutic. The fundamental change is that the conscious end of all activity has become the self. Psychological man's cure-all is suspicion of all future cure-alls, and a stoic adjustment to realistic and more modest expectations.

In several ways, according to Rieff, psychological man shows the nervous habits of his parent, economic man. In his attempt at technical self-mastery, he uses an economy which is not unlike that which the conquering puritans turned upon nature. In his early years, psychological man has a cast like the ascetic protestant, a kind of tortured inwardness, a counter-faith to balance the self-denegrating inwardness of the religious and economic man. There has been a transference from Calvin to Freud. In order to rationalize the world, Protestants made themselves functions of the market. Psychological men are making themselves the products of technology in much the same way. They have to sacrifice their lingering illusions of personal identity to achieve technical self-mastery.

But this startling inheritance from economic man's compulsion is less insignificant for Rieff than the autonomy

psychological man has gained. For his final assertion of the primacy of personal therapy, he is more than willing to submit to the external control of social technology. The shift in focus to the self is the most important development.

## II

Rieff's primary concern is to describe cultural change and, in particular, to describe the transition from Christian to therapeutic culture. The four modal characters described above may be considered static theory in order to illustrate the more fundamental dynamic theory of the cultural cycle which follows below. For the purposes of the dynamic theory, the three men, political, religious and economic, are considered in their essential sameness, as they have merged in the Christian culture of the West. For example, following Weber's model, the same ascetic ideal guides both religious and economic man. And the classical culture which a cultural revolution of today must encounter, survives in residual and compromised form in the institutions of the Christian era. Thus, to go to the root of the matter, the change to the therapeutic culture is more thoroughly understood in its opposition to the whole Christian era than merely in its reaction to the foibles of economic man.

The following diagram outlines some of the features of three stages which Rieff wishes to describe:

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CHRISTIAN CULTURE	ANALYTIC CULTURE	THERAPEUTIC CULTURE
stable past	unstable present	stable future
religious and economic man	psychological man	psychological man
interdictory symbolic	counter-interdictory symbolic	neutralist symbolic
normative institution -- church	no normative institution	normative institutions -- hospital, theatre
institutionalized inequality of moral demands and remissions	equality of demands and remissions=confusion=no effective control=revolution of culture	a new institutionalized inequality through social control

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The Christian culture developed a workable system of moral demands and limits with sexual renunciation at the core, along with a parallel system of remissions and participation mystiques. Its cultural achievement was stability, through the sublimation or spiritualization of the instincts, and the consolation of the discontents thereby incurred. Some of the essential features of the Christian cultural system have been these: the church as the institutional dispenser of both control and release, the faith in Objective Truth and a Being in whom it is personified, the merging of the faith with the ideas of classical culture, and the literary canon..

We live in the era of the "melancholy long withdrawing roar" of Christian culture. The whole cultural structure

which guided the Christian period is collapsing, and in its wake, the new culture is struggling (slouches toward Bethlehem<sup>2</sup>) to be born. According to Rieff's cultural theory then, the important crucial times are approximately the year one and the year two thousand. The change that is occurring now is more fundamental, for example, than the change which followed the Mediaeval breakdown. Freud is the epitome of this period, for he exhibits all the conflict between past and future, peculiar mixtures of old traditions and fears together with reactions to immediate crises and leaps to a vision of the future. Freud's analytic attitude has helped give birth to new men and has provided a rationale for understanding and surviving the difficult transition between cultures. But a satisfactory evolution into a new stable culture will have to supersede Freud. In many ways in America this has already happened. It has been necessary for anti-culture to precede the new culture. The old internalities are being fought with Freud's new internalities. Psychoanalysis has had to treat individuals who are still raging to be free of old inherited renunciation. Counter-faith must make way for eventual indifference.

Freud's analytic attitude has been an excellent tool to cure man of his inwardness. He is beginning to see his painful subjective feelings as neuroses which can be mastered if not eliminated. Exaggerated individuality must persist until the new culture develops normative institutions. But

it is very important to see this inwardness as only a necessary reaction to the old authority. The eventual more fundamental change will realize private ends by transcending renunciatory individualism. In the real world which analysands must now inhabit, half the artists and many of the clergy celebrate release, while the dying institutions of the old order administer a faltering control. "The initial cost of the modern cultural revolution has been a feeling of symbolic impoverishment."<sup>3</sup>

When the system of controls and releases has been equalized, instability demands the creation of a new culture. Freud's response to the instability was a kind of neo-stoicism, but in general the heirs of the analytic attitude have not been stoical. Americans seem rather to push the tendencies supporting release, in Freud's work, to the centre of their approach.

The final stable realization of the therapeutic society will have to transcend Freud at one level while retaining his essential insights at another. Or to say this another way, the stance of the analytic reaction contains many drawbacks because it has had to look backward to fight the power of the past, but in spite of this, the essence of the most important change in Western civilization since the inception of Christianity (or perhaps since the beginning of the internalization of culture per se) is evident in that stance.

Riëff feels that psychological men are amoral in a special way following Freud. Freud thought of morals as self-evident. He assumed much of the rational heritage of the West to be "natural", and this assumption is deeply written into his "science". This self-evident morality has been discarded by psychological men insofar as it appears as "values". But Freud moralism lives on in a subtler guise. It is woven into his concept of normal or healthy man, which is the cornerstone of the new self-interpretation. Freud's concept of the normal is not a statistical mean. It is an ethical ideal which champions moral disarmament.

Psychological men, like sociologists, are less concerned with validity than with viability. The age of the objective conceptual pattern with authority over individuals is over. The psychological man uses such patterns only when they are therapeutic to himself. Thus, a political programme which involves self-sacrifice for public goals is unpopular. While political action is limited to programmes like these, the psychological man must be forced into an apolitical inwardness, subject to the accusation of quietism. Eventually it will be possible for therapeutic man to be "political" again when the culture allows social change to occur in a normal therapeutic way. Then institutions will not need to be overthrown: they will be new and animated by the therapeutic individuals who use them for themselves.

But the reassertion of the past in the analytic

transitional period must not be underestimated. There is still the possibility that the emerging culture will be seriously compromised. The myths of the individual, free choice, responsibility -- these linger to agonize men and to prevent them from reaping the fruits which are there.

Here Rieff feels that a kind of battle must occur. Psychological men must encourage the process of their own culmination in the therapeutic culture. After they have contracted their horizon to a Freudian neo-stoic resignation they can gradually pass over into a joyful innocence. The glorious round of consumption only seems banal or impoverished because of mystifications like the nobility of man. The question of nihilism is losing its effect as men cease to fall apart without their illusions of God, soul, quality and tragedy. "We can live freely at last enjoying all our senses -- except the sense of the past -- as unremembering<sup>4</sup> honest and friendly barbarians in a technological Eden." Our sense of history, our "dignity" as responsible individuals, our faith, our community; all these will pass away. Rieff accepts their disappearance as the culmination of modern freedom in our new "innocence".

Psychological man's self-knowledge will gradually be channelled into a new cultural stabilizer, a social control which is guided by Freud's conception of normal man. This process is central in Rieff's prediction of the future. Social control will make the next culture viable and it will

not be mere social adjustment. Here, Rieff, diverges from the neo-Freudians who down-grade Freud's biologism. According to Rieff, Freud's ideal was social integration made possible by self-concern -- a rational reconciliation to social and cultural authority which itself has been made more rational by a critical approach. We shall be set free from ourselves by technology, turned inward toward the self. The inequality of controls and releases will be reinstitutionalized; the West will be set for a period of controlled well-being with the hospital and theatre the normative institutions and the therapeutic as ideal character type.

At the level of the social theory, the cycle still operates; the balance of controls and releases has been restored. Rieff invokes Nietzsche as a defender of the new controls. In the midst of his book, Beyond Good and Evil, which asserts the arbitrariness of all ethical systems, Nietzsche states unequivocally that such systems are essential for a life worth living. "The essential thing!...is... long obedience in the same direction: there thereby results.... something which has made life worth living."<sup>5</sup>

But the return of control does not submerge the essentially new character of the therapeutic culture, which makes it a clear break from the Western cyclical tradition. The newness can be clarified in a comparison of old and new elites,

An elite which exemplifies the aspirations of a new



culture has usually preceded the institution of that culture, and then dominated the life of the early stages. The Christians and the Communists have both seen the exemplary groups of their respective cultures co-opted by establishment. Rieff asks who are the spiritual preceptors of the therapeutic culture, be they militant or withdrawn, celebrators of release or control.

Freud saw the psychoanalysts in the role of secular spiritual guide, but the once critical psychoanalytic movement has become a client-centered profession, reluctant to tamper with the "cultural super ego". The clergy, although they have some fortuitous advantages, would have to make too radical a shift in style to become attuned. Only a few clergy will heed Rieff's advice to embrace the therapeutic stance.

The most serious contenders are scientists and artists. They compare favourably, in their style and attitude rather than in their expressed spiritual perception, to the character ideal of "the therapeutic". The history of modern scientific theory has always revolved around the attempt to establish fact independent of value. In the beginning, with men like Descartes, Kant and Albert Ritschl, the concern was for the purity of ethics as well as of science. But gradually scientists abandoned morals to the theologians. Anxious to keep their "objectivity", scientists have become reluctant preceptors. But this very fact, that

they are in a sense "cultureless", makes them ideal, although unwitting, vanguard figures of the neutral or nihilist society.

Modern artists have experienced the rage to be free from restrictive traditions rather earlier than others. They have for some time been engaged in the process of manufacturing new horizons in quite an impersonal and non-humanist way. Their creatio ex nihilo can become an archetype of the life of therapeutic experiment.

And scientists and artists are just exemplary figures in a trend. The educated rich in general are tending to espouse the therapeutic position. Rieff quotes a British technologist who stands for countless others. He restates Christianity in the terms of the vital energy of personal life. If religion is not clearly understood as symbolic of this personal life, it is merely "paranoid fantasy-obsession".<sup>6</sup> Says Rieff: "The rich are in the process of lowering<sup>7</sup> the pressure of inherited communal purpose upon themselves." These new men will no longer take politics seriously, as it is presently conceived. The therapeutic will not worry about the question of legitimate authority, "as long as the powers<sup>8</sup> that be manage an economy of abundance."

The culture will employ a neutralist symbolic which sanctions for individuals an experimental approach to their own lives. They will be free to use old religions if they seem therapeutic, but these are likely to be superseded by

newer modes. It will be increasingly difficult to find genuinely therapeutic a sense of tragedy or dignity, the submission to a literary canon ("creedal preoccupation") and the consolations of a church community. But even if it were possible it would be in a basically new way.

The essential distinction between the old culture and the new can be expressed as the difference between domination by faith and the use of faith for therapeutic reasons. The therapeutic social order will never prescribe a communal religion. It will merely sanction private experiment in personal religious solutions, recognized as necessary therapy. If we understand this distinction between faith and the use of faith, we understand the difference between Rieff's therapeutics and the devotees of the therapeutic "total institutions" such as California's Synanon. Rieff's point is that we need religion, but we can use it for our own ends; we do not have to succumb to it in the sick way which Freud deplored. And Rieff's opposition to politicized psychiatry is an exact parallel. He is convinced that the citizens of the future will not be susceptible to mass delusions. The institutionalization of the therapeutic society will be beyond the control of individuals in one way. But the autonomy of citizens will be their refusal to be co-opted for any purpose outside their own best interests.

Rieff claims that we can be certain that the old system will not re-establish itself as a new internality. The

cyclical pattern, so familiar from the experience of the religious disestablishment of the seventeenth century, has been broken quite decisively in the present revolution. The new social control will be external; it will end the inner man's tension once and for all. It is "a profound effort to end the tyranny of primary group moral passion (operating first from the family) as the inner dynamic of social order."<sup>9</sup> Since Western technique will have finally conquered nature, it will break the quality of repetition in cultural revolutions. The current revolution will make an end to the sense of history because men will become oblivious to eternity. It is only through retaining a vestige of eternity that men were able to conceive of history as distinct from it. Rieff's "technological Eden" implies a complete victory for history. The society will be actively going nowhere in particular. When means become all, they seem to be ends; when history triumphs, it will seem to disappear.

All the cultural means available will be marshalled to keep things on the go; "the rules of health indicate activity". This is the first movement which is a genuine nihilism. It does not mask a new sophisticated version of the old renunciatory ideals.

In quite different ways both Freud and Nietzsche looked forward to a radical transvaluation of values, the central cultural requirement of this era. Now that the transvaluation is occurring it looks more like Freud's conception than

Nietzsche's, although it must pass and is passing beyond his analytic frame as well. Technological monism has taken the sting out of Freud's retention of the Western dualism of nature and culture, while benefitting from the critical insight which the dualism fostered. The new culture celebrates a polytheism of values, "an infinity of means become ends."<sup>10</sup> A private sense of well-being is now the end in itself "to be generated in the living of life, no longer as a by-product of communal service; a civilization of contents, rather than the consolation of discontents."<sup>11</sup>

### III

The decline of Christian culture in the West seems most vivid in the decline of political concern. For the affluent Westerner, the revolution must be cultural, not political, whether it happens to run with or against the indicated direction of political change. Early Christians concerned themselves more with culture than politics, perhaps in reaction to the Hebrews' disastrous union of culture and politics. They accommodated themselves to Constantine and all the while they quietly changed the structure of people's lives. Rieff wants to describe change of this cultural kind, and he thinks a political revolution, by comparison, may "leave the moral demand system fundamentally unaltered."<sup>12</sup>

One can at one time look at events as unique and later

discover that those events are better understood as part of a larger and different picture. In 1960, young Negroes in the southern United States began a militant series of actions which have reverberated through the political history of this decade. Middle class white students were inspired by these southern Negroes, and they followed suit, at first in support of civil rights in the south and then in political concerns of their own. It has since become commonplace to speak of a political revival among American students in the sixties. In 1961, in a Harper's article on college politics,<sup>13</sup> Rieff dissented from this common opinion. He saw that in the desire for political relevance, white students could never really pass beyond envy of the vitality of the Negro movement. When they moved to their own concerns, white students turned inward to various new forms of self-salvation. They found no compelling support in their own communities. The Negro students had received the blessings and participation of adult Negroes when the latter realized that their battle was the same. But the whites found only a desert, the defeated institutions of the dying culture. They had no choice but to turn inward, to try to start over again at the roots, their own moral lives.

The Negro student movement, Rieff saw, is a striking exception to the American rule of student anti-politics: "This is a rare instance of youth leading age, and in fact it bears comparison with the role of the students in the underdeveloped

countries."<sup>14</sup> Rieff seems almost to have anticipated the strange phenomena which confuse America in 1968: guerilla war in the Negro ghettos, similar to the thrust for liberation in South East Asia and Latin America and, next to this, the strange but definitely cultural (rather than political) search for liberation by the middle class white hippies.

In Rieff's framework, the cultural revolution is more important in the West than the political revolution. The Negro revolt is a peculiar hangover from earlier Western tradition. It is more like the "Eastern revolution" which has finally learned the Western political lesson of communal commitment to engineer political change. But the important revolution in the West is the revolt against communal commitment per se.

Rieff knows that the cultural revolt cannot proceed oblivious to the hot and revengeful upheavals of the East. It is possible that the therapeutic culture will never reach fruition. But Rieff would consider this sort of failure a premature arresting or a regression of culture, rather than a reassertion of the primacy of politics. The reason is, once again, that the crucial change in the modern era is the triumph of the self in its liberation from all communal commitments, religious or political.

## CHAPTER 1

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The question of the validity of Weber's thesis is not discussed here. His thesis is introduced in order to illustrate the type of general theoretical point that Rieff wants to make.

<sup>2</sup>Rieff cites Yeats' "The Second Coming" at the beginning of his introduction to the second book, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 242.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 14, note.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>13</sup>Philip Rieff, "Mirage of College Politics", Harper's Magazine, (October 1961), pp. 156-63.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 160.



## CHAPTER 2

### I

No one could follow Ernest Jones with a biography. Rieff introduces another Freud: "Not the man or the movement he founded, but the mind of Freud, as it derives lessons on the right conduct of life from the misery of living it."<sup>1</sup> Rieff is interested in the Freud whose moral genius shaped a new culture.

When he read Freud's early letters, Rieff saw that Freud's greatness of character was in his person, long before his achievement set it at large. When still young, Freud carried a "burden of knowingness" about life, a kind of wisdom which made him unwilling to accept religious synthesis. His own stable cultural traditions supported him; they supplied his synthesis and freed him to produce the analytic masterwork of the century. One of his letters concludes with final accuracy: "In short, I am evidently an analyst."<sup>2</sup>

Freud never looked for a religious solution; he never asked the "sickest of all questions". He faced the absurdities of existence without flinching because he was sustained by his marriage, his membership in the Jewish community and his acceptance of the rational-ethical tradition of the West. From this bridgehead, the theoretician

could invade the family, religion and morality without cutting himself off from devout practice in that tradition. "Freud needed no synthesis, because it was already there, built into his character."<sup>3</sup> It is much more his exemplary cast of mind and character which is animating cultural change than his ideas which are already greatly modified.

"Psychoanalysis was the perfect vehicle for Freud's intellectual character."<sup>4</sup> He remained a neutralist all his life in the conflict between instincts and civilization, and psychoanalysis perfectly represents the neutralism of his character. He created the method for his own analysis, and when the method became an adaptable discipline, it retained the stamp of the founder. When it became a transferable art, it became at the same time a uniquely Freudian cultural force. "In Psychoanalysis, Freud found a way of being the philosopher he desired to be, and of applying his philosophy to himself, humanity, the cosmos -- everything."<sup>5</sup>

Freud's paradoxical character is written into the psychoanalytic method. Although the central aim of analysis is to release the hidden grip of parental authority, the process must occur within the authoritarian relationship of analyst and patient. And similarly, although analysis seeks to free the patient from the repressive ascetic mode which is appropriate to the religious consciousness, the analysis itself is a most lengthy and meticulous procedure, requiring submission and dedication. These paradoxical qualities of

psychoanalysis and Freud's character are also appropriate for a transition from Christian to therapeutic culture. They are as much or more a reaction to the old as an anticipation of the new.

It would be wrong to confine Freud's influence to the now affluent psychoanalytic profession. In American today, Freud's intellectual influence is greater than

that of any other modern thinker. He presides over the mass media, the college classroom, the chatter at parties, the playgrounds of the middle class where child-rearing is a prominent and somewhat anxious topic of conversation: he has bequeathed to many couples a new self-consciousness about their marriages and the temperature of their social enthusiasms... . ...[H]e is being treated as a culture hero.<sup>6</sup>

Rieff believes that Freud's great psychological canon has changed the course of Western intellectual history, and his influence has touched the moral roots of twentieth century life. Freud was engaged in a great pacifying cultural mission, the moral disarmament of Western man. He has systematized our unbelief.

## II

Rieff organizes his portrait in Freud; The Mind of a Moralist according to several predominant themes. In each, it is possible to trace the beginning in Freud's character and intellect to the end in the cultural transformation of this century. At every step, Rieff is describing the cultural realization of Freud's character, and the precise point at

which it breaks down and must be supplemented by religion as therapy.

# A

All Freud's works are guided by the same philosophical man. Rieff opposes the frequent separation of the canon into the early clinical works and the later speculative ones. Freud's concern was always to deal with the fundamental human problems. "All the issues which psychoanalysis treats -- the health and sickness of the will, the emotions, the responsibilities of private living, the coercions of culture -- belong to the moral life."<sup>7</sup> Freud was a moralist who capitalized on the authority of science as a cultural ideal at the turn of the century. His scientific theory was created to function in place of religion.

Freud's early experience with physiology and medicine taught him a great respect for empirical rigour, and gave him some of his most fruitful analogies. But he read widely in literature and anthropology as well, and even his early works show this catholicity of interest. One of Freud's most important achievements was to take psychology beyond the artificial limits of empiricism. He felt deeply the limitations of materialism, "a dead theory", and he opposed the control of psychoanalysis by the materialistic medical profession for this reason. Rieff calls Freud the Bentham of the Unconscious; he legitimized the practice of psychology by careful scien-

tific observation of phenomena, phenomena which demanded psychological rather than materialistic theory. By thus expanding the scope of his science, Freud brought the whole process of the internalizing of culture which takes place in the Unconscious under scientific analysis.

In Freud's psychology, there is an integration of the authentic humanist and authentic scientist, a wonderful merging of strict medical judgment with a sweeping criticism of the moral climate. The age which received this psychology was reeling under the obvious failure of a whole tradition dedicated to institutional reform. The tendency was to turn from public failure back to the private self. As Nietzsche prophesied, the problems are once again personal, intimate, individual. Freud produced the needed new discipline, the new Queen of the Sciences for private man.

## B

Freud felt deeply that the first task was to expose the warped machinations of the old culture within himself. His own analysis revealed a hidden self far more powerful and complex than even he expected. The inevitable resistance of the patient to the cure he counteracted with the absolute authority of the analyst. Only the analyst could successfully fight against the resistance to the cure. This danger was tempered, however, by the elaborate tactics of interpretation which were intended to remain long after the personal

authority of the analyst had faded.

Tactics of interpretation were gradually created by Freud and his followers in their hermeneutic approach to their own and others' behaviour. Dreams, the psychopathology of everyday life and works of art -- all were eventually seen to reveal the past of the creator or perpetrator operating in his present. The therapeutic goal was to recover and explain the past in order to maximize the present activity freed from compulsion. Out of this hermeneutic experience, there evolved the interpretative distinctions of manifest and latent, conscious and unconscious, distorted and authentic behaviour.

Such distinctions point to a concealed meaning but they do not demand that that meaning be sexual. Freud's classification of the hidden meaning as sexuality (expanded to include all natural impulses) owes more to his penchant for ethical naturalism than to careful observation. The naturalism was not new; the unique and creative contribution is the union of naturalism with Freudian interpretative techniques. Freud diagnosed his patients, and the West in general, as suffering from an overdose of rationality. His theory of sexuality was in part an ironical humiliation of the spurious piety which pervaded the late nineteenth century.

Freud mercilessly unmasked the sacred images surrounding love and sexuality. All love is self-oriented, follow-

ing the pattern of the child. Monogamy was shown to be unnatural and unsatisfactory although, Freud felt, irreplaceable. Exaggerated mother-love was linked with lovers' romantic overvaluation of each other. At the core of the analysis of sexuality is a very important judgment: "the primal form of love -- that of child for parent -- is the model instance of an authority relation and Freud advanced an ideal of love purged of parental influences, an exchange of equals. Thus, the goal of psychoanalysis is to abrogate the power of the prototype, to cut the umbilical cord of authority."<sup>8</sup>

Analysis should reclaim personal subjective history, de-mystify it and weaken its compulsive control. As much sexual (or natural) activity as is possible in the present can then be enjoyed for itself, freed from endless repetition of the prototypal act.

Freud relied heavily upon his analogy between psychopathology and the historical phenomena of religion. Using some scattered evidence from the anthropology of his day, he projected the origin of religion into an historical Oedipal murder. In order to understand his intellectual influence upon this culture, it is relevant to note the reduction of history to psychology which is implied in such an analogy. Manifest public events are translated into latent private motives, a complete reversal of the Hegelian and Marxist systems in which the private is submerged in the

public.

Freud's approach to the past reveals two strains in his character. Both pervade his work and both have become the heritage of psychological man. The pessimistic, stoical side of Freud reminds us of the permanent power of the past, always reasserting itself in the present. At best, we can understand it and maintain some identity in the midst of crisis. The other side of Freud contends that, by remembering tradition, we can outwit it. Analysis can emancipate psychological man from his commitment to the prototypes of the past.

### C

Considering the current trends in social technology and social psychiatry, Freud may be remembered primarily as the champion of the individual against the tyranny of culture. "No small part of Freud's impact upon the contemporary moral imagination derives from his idea of the self in conflict."<sup>9</sup> The conflict between instincts and civilization is a permanent fact for every individual, and thus the tension between individual and society can never be resolved. The process of the sublimation of the natural instincts into cultural achievement is only an uneasy truce at the best of times.

At first glance one might consider Freud's view deterministic, pessimistic and, therefore, anti-individualis-



tic; this has been the reaction of some neo-Freudians. All Americans claim to champion the individual. The neo-Freudians would use social techniques to free individuals from Freud's "pseudo-metaphysical" chains. But Freudianism, says Rieff, must consider such a neglect of the instincts as social tyranny.

Rieff's own position in this debate between Freud and the neo-Freudians is unique. Although he attacks Fromm and Horney for neglecting the instincts, he predicts a social solution in the therapeutic culture which rests firmly on social control or social technology. Freudian theory must infuse the social sciences. And Rieff shows that Freud's view must be distinguished from that of John Dewey whose conceptual scheme has guided Fromm and Horney in their revision of Freud.

Dewey concedes that beneath culture there is a "real thing striving to liberate itself". He calls it impulse rather than instinct. But his substitution of adaptation for sublimation is less dialectical, less critical. The source of defence against culture has been undermined. Rieff thinks that Dewey's position is even tautological. Impulse is just culture in potential form. "Social organization, not instinct, has become the source of and the limitation upon the perfectability of human nature."<sup>10</sup> Such theory provides the basis for a social science of institutions; Freud's psychology is for persons. Fromm and Horney genuinely wrote

in the spirit of liberation from Freud's "pessimism". They did not see that Freud's instinctualism gave power to the defence of the individual which their social theory inadvertently betrays. The theory of the unconscious retains the quality of the critical at the core of Freud's science; the neo-Freudians contained the critical in their own values. But this is tantamount to rendering them ineffectual. Although Fromm might intend to free the individual, the cast of his theory enables the system to use that theory to submerge the individual.

Freud's individual, although he appears to be determined by his own unconscious, gains a strong independence from external compulsion by the very fact of this conflict within him. In fact, Freud's definition of the individual includes the unconscious as a prior conception or a prerequisite. In order to protect the individual, the concept of conscious person has to be expanded.

#### D

The political implications of Freud's theory of the individual are confusing: (1) Freud is a defender of freedom from social tyranny but (2) he frees men in such a way that they are no longer political or public. He is therefore accused of justifying political tyranny.

For Freud and Rieff, political or public commitment is a tyranny over the individual just as religious commitment is. The problem Rieff poses is how one can institute

a culture of release without a theory of commitment. The authority of psychoanalysts as well as the explanation of political behaviour in psychological terms seems to make Freudianism justify the tyrannical use of psychiatric techniques. But "Freud's insights become sharply falsified when they are forced to translate out into a politicized psychiatry...a technocracy of social psychiatrists."<sup>11</sup>

Under such a system, culture might relax into a condition of submissiveness to power from which it could not recover.

"Freud's value for political science which I believe to be intractably theoretic, is as a critical psychology. The conflict between individual and society, between the instinctual and the repressive is his basic contribution to the social sciences."<sup>12</sup> And to say the same thing in another way: "Freud's revolutionary influence has been toward the re-emergence of the person as the essential conceptual tool of the social sciences."<sup>13</sup>

If Freud's insight is incorrectly used at the practical level, it will aid the efficiency of tyranny. If used theoretically the critical psychology provides a defence against that same tyranny. Freud's disparagement of political life must be seen in this light.

The defence of the individual against the social is also a justification for the withdrawal from harsh public life in the name of individual health. The once independent realm of ethical and political theory, what is right and

wrong in public action, has been redefined in terms of psychopathology. What once was considered truth has been redefined as ideology, which is no longer viable.

Freudianism is the new ideology which "inculcates scepticism about all ideologies except those of the private life."<sup>14</sup>

Freud's political and social prejudices led him to disparage the rule of the masses and to favour a kind of benevolent despotism, exemplified in his portrait of Moses as leader and teacher. The accent on the individual underlies Freud's diverging prejudices -- either against the tyranny of the mob or as exemplified in Moses.

With Freud as with Nietzsche, individual health is the measure. This new starting point undercuts the whole traditional debate about freedom -- which arises out of the classical tradition. All politics are corrupt, not just political tyrannies. Psychoanalysis turns to the inner life and cultivates indifference to politics. Political psychology replaces political philosophy. The only question is how best to organize and constrain individuals in social relation. The fundamental freedom -- the freedom from inner compulsion -- is a private matter. Rieff believes that individuals who are free in this way will not be infinitely malleable. They will demand a society which provides for them as individuals. That is, indifference to politics.

ironically, will make an end to tyranny once and for all.

### E

Freud's critique of religion was very much influenced by his being a Jew in anti-Semitic Vienna, although he was never a believer in Judaism. The religion which Freud attacked was the Christian establishment in Vienna. Freud's stance in opposition to that establishment carried over into the critical pugnacity of the young psychoanalytic movement.

When Freud attacked religion, he began with a thorough understanding of its social function as stabilizer of the system of release and control of instincts. The Christian establishment which surrounded him was collapsing. The shared neurosis of religious belief was no longer an effective sanction of order. Men were growing up, inevitably becoming enlightened and they needed a new system of moral authority for the repression of their instincts. Psychoanalysis would be a start at least for the few. But for the many the alternatives seemed to be reason or a surge of rigorous suppression. In candid moments, Freud predicted the latter.

Rieff embraces Freud's theory of religion as social stabilizer but he claims that Freud was prevented by his circumstances from seeing the other, more creative aspects of religion. At times, Freud's approach to religion deteriorated into name-calling. He conceived of religion in the limited

psychological or psychopathological mode, and then refused to recognize anything but "infantile", "womanly", or "need for authority" symptoms as religious phenomena. Rieff's chief objection to Freud's critique of religion is that it ignores what Weber called the charismatic power of new religions in the genesis of social change. Freud's opposition of progressive science consolatory religion is oversimplified for both science and religion. The wholesale acceptance of uncritical "value neutrality" by most modern scientists makes it the tool of the establishment and a force for conformity. Religion contains at least the remnants of the transcendental and the remembrance of the past which makes possible a critique of the social present. There is a vestige of dialectical thinking or two-dimensional thinking, as Marcuse would say. Rieff feels that the real battle lines should be drawn between the critical elements in both science and religion and the trend to general conformity.

#### F

The lesson on the right conduct of life which Freud learned from the misery of living it is summarized as the ethic of honesty. Rieff considers this ethic a major step forward, although it carries dangerous implications. When moral aspiration is seen as pathological, a better compromise with the instincts is possible through a realistic analysis of one's own potential for balance. Freud's ethic

"regards the disposition of human potentiality as a matter beyond prescription."<sup>15</sup> Freud's only prescription is unflinching honesty in one's self-analysis, the therapy of talk which liberates through lucidity, reticence and a reduction of ethical aspiration. Here the limitations of Freud's own character as cultural ideal become clear; Rieff disagrees at this point. "Still the freedom to choose must end in choice. Here at the critical moment, the Freudian ethic of honesty ceases to be helpful."<sup>16</sup> Freud assumes that the Western ascetic morality will prevail as long as we are open and rational, just as it prevailed in his own character. This ethical assumption is reminiscent of Hume who based ethics on "natural" sympathy. (It is similar also to Descartes' "natural light of reason".) American followers of Freud have chosen to fill this gap left by mere analysis with a championing of release. "The antinomian implications are there in Freud's theory. And those who have interpreted Freud as advocating for reasons of health and sexual freedom promiscuity rather than the strain of fidelity, adultery rather than neuroses have caught the hint if not the intent of his psychoanalysis."<sup>17</sup>

Rieff is certainly not an antinomian. In Freud; The Mind of a Moralist, he worries about the "nihilist implications" of Freud's false ethical assumption. It worked well for Freud, but what about the new psychological men who are not secure in the ascetic cast? Perhaps the successor to

religion will be a primitive barbarism. "The therapy of barbarism is perhaps the most dangerous form of the long-standing resentment of the cultured against themselves."<sup>18</sup> In The Triumph of the Therapeutic, the question of nihilism no longer upsets Rieff, because social control (animated by Freud's critical insight) will keep order. Now Rieff can speak well of "the friendly barbarians...in a Technological Eden".<sup>19</sup> Yet a doubt remains. In both books, Rieff claims that Jung had an insight into man's need to feel chosen, which persists after Freud's purgative analysis. There will still be a use for faith after Freud. But faith will never recover again its position of domination. It must always be used by individuals for their own therapy.

### III

Rieff asks what was missing in Freud that caused Jung, Reich and Lawrence to go so far beyond psychologizing within a Freudian modality. The criminal egoism which Freud demanded from analysts passed into Jung's language of faith, "for reasons that must be called culturally necessary".<sup>20</sup>

Three famous therapists illustrate the gap in Freud's analytic approach, but all three men failed to fill the gap properly, according to Rieff, and the next culture will still gain more from Freud's insights. They were right that something was missing. The analytic way is much too severe. The



uncompromising realism which the stoic Freud espoused is an intolerable burden for others. Once again it was his built-in synthesis or his sentimental attachment to a hierarchy of values which made it possible for him to be merely analytic. Jung, on the other hand, felt more deeply the loss of religion, which he watched destroy his father, and sought to replace it. The final cure at the end of analysis would be a new psychologized religion.

Freud's psychoanalysis was not intended to cure; it was concerned with freeing men from the compulsion and authority of the past. Jung thought that the freedom to choose was not therapeutic enough. What about the "content of the choices that mankind would be freed to make?"<sup>21</sup> Rieff asserts that Freud did not confront this problem and praises Jung's Nietzschean effort "to acquire that passionate (personal) knowledge which will permit us again to be chosen."<sup>22</sup> Men cannot bear the terrible freedom to choose without guidance. Now that the gods have absconded, men are faced with replacing them in the sense that they must develop a myth of themselves which gives them security or a kind of chosen-ness. Freud was so strong in his own tradition that he was never permitted to understand this problem thoroughly. But if he had understood it thoroughly, he might have been a lesser Nietzsche instead of the Freud whose unique intellectual character is so important to the new culture.

Jung, Reich and Lawrence tried to find new symbols to worship, or to rediscover old ones, within the modes of psychoanalysis. All three are more prophets than scientists. They were deeply aware of men's need for religious commitment as well as of the decline of the old culture of renunciation. They sought a new religion and culture of release, but what they got instead were new consolations. They failed because the liberation of private life wrought by psychoanalysis entails communities of individuals who are concerned about their own well-being. The religious quality of chosen-ness just will not work with most psychological men. The positive communities and the public gods cannot be recreated, and without these the therapy of commitment cannot succeed.

#### IV

"Freud's genius is partly a matter of its appropriateness to his time...; it appeals to a highly individualistic and democratic culture...like the American."<sup>23</sup> Freud loathed America perhaps because he felt that it would give the kiss of death to his doctrines by espousing them. While Asia reels under Marxist revolution, America experiences a revolution of the mind. Freud, not Marx, is the guiding thinker in American cultural change.

Freud is the theoretical justifier of psychological

man, but in his own character he was more an enlightened version of economic man. This heritage explains his revulsion for Americans who more thoroughly lived out his theory of the equality of the emotions. He was sentimentally attached to the old hierarchical structuring of human nature into higher and lower categories. The American therapeutic type has outgrown this legacy of both Socrates and Christ, which was embedded in the character structure of all economic men including Freud. "Freud taught lessons which Americans, prepared by their own national experience, learn easily: survive, resign yourself to living within your moral means, suffer no gratuitous failures in a futile search for ethical heights that no longer exist if they ever did. Freud proclaims the superior wisdom of choosing the second best."<sup>24</sup>

## V

Freud offers no ultimate advice and if his analytic method is too severe, where can men turn when the religions of release fail? We cannot break the dialectic of hope and despair by choosing one or the other. Rieff sees a hint of the answer in a letter by Freud to his future wife where he quotes Milton:

Let us consult  
What reinforcement we may gain from hope  
If not, what resolution from despair.

Freud had no use for this mood. A paradise never lost can never be regained. If we can only lower our expectation things may not be so bad. (Once again the stoic.) The point, Rieff maintains, is to keep the essential insight in his attitude while dealing practically with the problem that men have not the synthetic character structure of a Freud to rely on. They need instead a socially engineered synthetic character structure.

To live on the surface prevents deep hurts. With Freud, Western man has learned the technical complexity of externalizing his inwardness and has been able at last to usher out that crowd of shadows urging him to turn inward, so as to live in the bright sober light of the present...., social therapy is liberating, rendering all objects of commitment instrumental to the therapeutic process itself."<sup>25</sup>

Men have been troubled with the two aspirations: to be free to choose and to have faith that they are chosen. Freud freed men from the compulsion of faith and left them with the absurdity of being free to choose nothing or everything. "A marriage between Pavlovian or Behaviourist learning theory and Freud's might lead to that control of the unconscious which would eliminate the residues of religious compulsion on the one hand, and the freedom to choose on the other."<sup>26</sup> Rieff is aware of the evolution of scientific theory which once aspired to increase freedom of choice, and which now has arrived at a technique of power. At times he almost trumpets the trend; at others, he seems more resigned to the inevitable. The freedom or autonomy which thera-

peutic man enjoys will not be anything like freedom of choice. That kind of freedom can only exist in the context of an only choice which is dictated by religion.

Rieff is not always consistent regarding the degree of "freedom" or private responsibility that he thinks will be possible in the therapeutic society. The variations can be explained in part by the differences between his own aspirations for the best possible in the circumstances and the varying degrees of dangerous regressions which are possible and not fatal. The best situation would be a secure institutional system which permitted and sanctioned an experimental approach to private "salvation". The systems of Jung, Reich and Lawrence are examples of what is possible in such a system; they are not The Way. The society would recognize the need of individuals for experimental religion while at the same time it would realize that it could not prescribe public solutions. The less utopian eventuality of the Freud-Behaviourist social control which eliminates the whole syndrome of freedom and faith is much more likely than this majestic vision of a society of Nietzsches.

But regardless of the depth of the dimension of privacy, the new society will involve a permanent break in the continuity of the West. A private sense of well-being becomes the end. Even though he goes beyond the analytic mode, the therapeutic man will retain the essential identity

willed to him by Freud.

## CHAPTER 2

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Philip Rieff, Freud; The Mind of a Moralist, (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), p. xix.

<sup>2</sup>Philip Rieff, "Burden of Knowingness", Saturday Review, (November 26, 1960), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Philip Rieff, Freud; The Mind of a Moralist, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 31 ff.

<sup>11</sup>Philip Rieff, "Psychology and Politics: the Freudian connection", World Politics, (January 1955), p. 305.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Philip Rieff, "History, Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences", Ethics (January 1953), p. 117.

<sup>14</sup>Philip Rieff, Freud; The Mind of a Moralist, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>19</sup>Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic,  
(New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.



## CHAPTER 3

### I

Robert Coles has said that Rieff begins where Nietzsche left off.<sup>1</sup> In the late nineteenth century the ideas of mind, matter and meaning which gave structure and security to Christian culture seemed to have collapsed. Nietzsche wanted to clarify and complete this collapse and at the same time to create a "profound fiction", a perspective within which men could begin to live again. Arthur Dante calls attention to a "twofold truth" corresponding to Nietzsche's twofold metaphysic.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his works there is always the tension between Nietzsche, the critic or nihilist, who emphasizes that the new perspective is interpretation not fact, and Nietzsche, the structural metaphysician, who knew that men need common sense fictions and even religion, art, science and metaphysics. These four were attacked only because they had lost their direct connection through psychology with their appropriate source: life. Nietzsche's culture-shattering 'no' is a necessary prerequisite to the new way to 'yes'.

In the terms of modern philosophy, two types of truth are contained in Nietzsche's perspective: the pragmatic theory of truth, because men need to have a structure in which to live, and the correspondence theory of truth, to the

extent that their perspective is rooted properly in real life and is not an arbitrary imposition.

Nietzsche distinguished between contemptible fictions (which he called "ideologies") masquerading as true in the old conceptual sense, and profound fictions or religions which men create aesthetically out of the power of their own willing psycho-physical being.. We cannot possess until we are possessed, Nietzsche said, meaning 'possessed by our vision of our own potential'. In the same spirit, with perhaps less profundity and more irony, Rieff says that we lose free choice if we give up the ethic that called forth the choice.

If we are to understand Rieff's theory and his definition of the future autonomy, we must first understand his appraisal of Jung. The subtlety of his intention must be seen in the background of his praise of Jung's concern for a real cultural problem as well as his appeal to Freud to condemn Jung's religious solution. We have already seen that Rieff's appraisal of Freud resulted in a reverse reaction. Freud held fast to the great insight into the necessity for deconversion, but he was not able to face the cultural problem of reconstruction which had to follow purgative analysis.

Freud insisted that we abjure all religious cures because of the decline of the old positive communities. Freud knew that for religious therapy to work in the past, men had

committed themselves to the communities of church, city-state or sub-culture. In practice, he himself still benefitted from identifications of this kind. But he saw their inevitable decline and wished to prepare men for the negative, individualistic culture of the future. For the new men, religions would no longer work. Freud therefore concentrated on the development of personal capacity, ego-control, the ability to balance the conflicting demands of instinct and society. The strengthening of the ego meant a systematic attack on authority of all kinds, and thus led to political and religious indifference. Freud looked to the past with no regrets; he wished only to remove its compulsive control, to make life in the present a little bit easier and more natural. Freud's prescription to mankind as the patient is "to use the power of the analytic attitude, to set a limit to the sway of culture over mankind."<sup>3</sup>

Jung pushed the therapeutic beyond this limit set by Freud. He was as fully aware as Freud of the failure of the Christian myth. He saw it fail to save his father from insanity. But, according to Rieff, his answer was to replace the old banal myth with a new creative personal one.<sup>4</sup> If there were no positive communities extant he would create one or exhort individuals to identify with the appropriate collective unconscious for their time and place. Jung was anti-institutional; his faith is a private bulwark against

the omnivorous rational scientific society. But the private quality of Jung's religion should not obscure the fact that it represents a rejection of analytic therapy, and is a return to commitment therapy. "Understood culturally, Jung's psychic truth is commitment."<sup>5</sup> Jung accepts Freudian analysis insofar as it liberates us from the banal, over-intellectualized Christian myth which was inculcated by our parents and the culture. But then, in Rieff's view, he restores our security by burying us in a barrage of archaic religious symbolism from the creative collective unconscious. "The unconscious is Jung's psychologically functional equivalent of communities and in fact derives its content from the culture. It is in the sense of a derivation from and individuation of the cultural community that the unconscious is collective."<sup>6</sup> The rejuvenating power of the current collective unconscious derives from the eternal archetypes which are supra-historical and transcultural. Thus does Jung bridge the gap from ontology to psychology, and in this process, according to Freud and Rieff, he restores the old tyranny. "The object of therapy in the Jungian sense is, therefore, to reconcile the individual to whatever authority he carries within himself."<sup>7</sup>

Before proceeding to Rieff's own theory, it must be shown why he thinks that Jung's attempt was "culturally necessary" after the analytic attitude, even if it did end in

failure. Freud did not provide a new moral demand system for psychological man. After a Freudian analysis, one is freed from the compulsions of religious and political systems, but one is then faced with the absurdity of being able to choose without criteria. The character of our freedom in the Western world has been such that freedom needs an imperative in order to become meaningful. When the imperative representing responsibility was removed by therapy, the freedom became absurd and intolerable. Within the context of such freedom and sincerely seeking results, Jung was forced by cultural necessity to transform psychoanalytic concepts into a compelling language of faith: "Men want to be secured. Moreover, only in a secure symbolic can they bear to know themselves. This is the strong point at which Jungian therapy arrived."<sup>8</sup> Or, to say this in another way, freedom does not exist without responsibility. If one does not live in a compelling and stable culture, perhaps a leap of faith is necessary.

Rieff sets out to solve the cultural problem which Jung addressed, and he is determined not to sacrifice the autonomy from culture which Freud achieved. We need a cure but not a transformative religious one. Instead, we must have informative social control. Our social security will come from a social technology which recognizes its limitations. That is, it does not attempt to prescribe a public religion of commitment to be internalized by family inculca-

tion. It will support people with a neutralist symbolic, a social technique which is based on the analytic experience. "To be thus freed from a tyrannical cultural super-ego is to be properly bedded in the present world."<sup>9</sup>

Rieff's autonomy lies in the primacy of self against social coercion. But the therapeutic man will be a very social creature. He will embrace the technological system confident that it cannot co-opt him for ends other than his own gratification. He will have abandoned the illusion that an inner-directed religious consciousness protects him from social tyranny. This old inner freedom must be left behind. The new society may for a time sanction individual experiment with "salvation", but more and more the salvation will consist in self-oriented cultural immersion -- a ritual of behaviour understood as therapy. Social control which combines the insights of Behaviourist learning theory with the analytic attitude will destroy not only the vestiges of religious compulsion but also the freedom to choose as well. The tension between inner and outer man will at last be resolved.

The freedom which is achieved in the therapeutic society is, according to Rieff, freedom for gratification without restraint. This freedom reaches its zenith when all human and non-human nature has been conquered by technology. Psychological men will triumph in such a system because of

their myth of themselves as autonomous. Their sense of themselves will guide their future conception and prevent their dissolution into hollow sheep.

Rieff often refers to his interest in viability rather than validity. He asserts the primacy of the pragmatic theory of truth. But the nature of things demands that a truly pragmatic theory will have to root itself in things as they are. Rieff wants to preserve the reality of the life of the self with a theory which describes the structure of things as it really is. He must try to that extent to meet the requirements of correspondence as well as the requirements of pragmatism, in full awareness that objective description is from the beginning interpretation rather than fact. "I, too, aspire to see clearly, like a rifleman with one eye shut: I, too, aspire to think without assent. This is the ultimate violence to which the modern intellectual is committed."<sup>10</sup>

Rieff's creative theorizing gained enormously from the example of Freud. In the restoration of the primacy of theory, Rieff applauds the right of the creative individual to define his own reality -- in Freud's case by changing his basic self-interpretation. Rieff magnificently describes Freud's superiority to Breuer who obstinately holds to the safe, scientific and dead materialistic theories, attempting to explain hysteria. Freud "dared to transform reality into a truer shape",<sup>11</sup> by imagining the repressions and bringing

the facts to life.

The doctrine of creation which presided over the conception of modern science in the seventeenth century, combines the doctrine of creation ex nihilo with the Greek notion that creation took place with the guidance of theoria. The fact that physical objects were voluntarily created from nothing gave each a contingent reality. And, the fact that they were created theoretically and not arbitrarily made measurement and thus all science possible. Modern men are confronted with a world which was created in this particular way -- but the creator has absconded. They have had to assume the role of this type of creator with all the attendant confusion in the realm of theory.

Says Rieff: "Before theorizing was distinguished from theologizing, to theorize was considered a way of seeing God. Now it is considered merely a necessity, something men are compelled to do if they are to become god-like."<sup>12</sup>

Rieff distinguishes conformative and transformative theory, which roughly approximates the distinction between ancient and modern philosophy, or as some would say, between philosophy and ideology. According to philosophy, theory is about the eternal and stable order of things: what is, and therefore, that to which it is meet and right for all to conform. According to ideology, theory "arms us with the weapons for transforming reality instead of forcing us to conform to it."<sup>13</sup> (Reality is here redefined.) Whereas



philosophy culminates in faith; a good modern theory becomes the creator of power. "And from that creation of power derives man's freedom to choose among the options specified by the reach of potential powers laid down in the theory."<sup>13</sup>

Both Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Marx's historical materialism are placed by Rieff in this transformative tradition. Both men sought to increase human power and freedom and both assumed that life could then be conducted in a better way. Rieff thinks that assumption is unjustified. Men still need to cure themselves. They need the safety of a society in which they can experiment with cures without fear of that sickness of religious compulsion that Freud feared. Rieff's new contribution is to understand insights of the ideologists whose task was to shelter the old control, while recognizing that this task forced upon them the limitations of negation. Marx and Freud had to destroy the control of philosophy and faith, to enable theory to become actively concerned with mitigating the daily miseries of living. Rieff needs to find a new source of order as well, to replace the old order so effectively destroyed. And that new order must not be a return to the old compulsion in new disguise. (Rieff, of course, feels that Freud will be more useful than Marx in this current problem, although he too will be superseded.)

## II

Reiff believes that sociology properly conceived -- that is, artistically, historically and psychologically -- can explain completely the phenomenon of religion, ancient and modern. Up until very recently, religion has been the way men have acted culturally to solve the problem of their "dis-ease" as individuals. "Faith is the compulsive dynamic of culture channelling obedience to, trust in, and dependence upon authority."<sup>15</sup> Originally, cult and culture, the sacred and the social were not distinguished. The existence of stable societies depended upon the majority accepting the moral order, the correct form of action, as undebatable because sacredly ordained. The excellence of societies consisted in obedience to an order imposed by the systematic limitations of initiative through divine negative injunctions.

"What is moral becomes and remains self-evident only within a powerful and deeply compelling system of culture."<sup>16</sup> Freud thought that religion was failing in the psychological aspect of its task, so he found a replacement: psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic therapy and religious therapy are very much alike. They are both cultural since they are interested in the transformation of character. Faith was the symbolic mode of the positive religious communities; psychoanalysis became the symbolic mode of a negative community, a group of separate individuals united only in their rejection of all

communal ideals. But psychoanalysis must ultimately be inadequate, says Rieff, because it is a destroyer of old morals and not enough the creator of new ones. "In scorning a synthesis, the analyst is opposing the dynamics of culture."<sup>17</sup> It was inevitable that Freud's followers would use religion's therapeutic aspects to add to Freud's harsh analytic approach; doctrine for control of everyday life and ecstasy for therapeutic respite from control.

But, as we have seen, the answer does not lie with the restoration of the "religious sickness" which Rieff claims finally overtakes the sincere attempts of Jung, Reich, and Lawrence. The answer lies in a sociology which takes Freud's great insights seriously as well as being able to pass beyond him. Sociology has been addressing the problem of symbolic impoverishment for many years. C.H. Cooley, for example, identified social reality with his own analytic device, the primary group, "to alleviate the shortage of symbols that has impoverished American culture since the passing of the age of doctrine."<sup>18</sup> But the conservative religion of culture, couched in a sociological device, fails to protect the individual from the community. The primary group is Cooley's new god which chooses the individual; society makes the man no matter how individual he thinks he is. Familiarity is expanded into sociability. In fact, Cooley used sociology to war against American individualism. Rieff thinks that paying more attention to Freud's theory will

protect the individual from social tyranny. "From the warmth of Cooley's Primary Group, there is a sinister short way to the stifling creed of Togetherness."<sup>19</sup> Rieff's togetherness will be private but impersonal. Personality and the family are inseparable. The enemy, says Rieff, is warm, familial love, sacrificial, democratic and anti-life. The therapeutic man's sense of well-being "operates under the aegis of technology aimed ultimately at his own emotions, so as to destroy the tension between the inner and the outer life."<sup>20</sup>

### III

Rieff's work belongs to the sociology of ideas. He wants to begin to define the outlines of a new theory of culture. His second book describes the dynamics by which Christian culture has been displaced. The problem of creating an adequate theory of culture is "the central one in sociology".<sup>21</sup> Rieff is watching the changing moral configuration of modern culture and deciding whether culture can be reconstructed so that faith no longer rules individuals. He is interested primarily in the social viability of ideas rather than in their validity, although this viability depends on empirical correspondence to a certain extent. What Rieff really means to emphasize is that he will not consider the doctrines of religion as true or untrue. Even if they

are or were true, whether they are or were useful is his concern. Thus do sociologists relegate the questions of validity to limbo when they bypass them.

In an introduction to a recent reprinting of Cooley's Social Organization, Rieff clarifies his sociological stance in praise of Cooley's artistry and in opposition to his attack on the individual. "It is at once a book of analysis and recommendation, as sociology at its best must always be."<sup>22</sup> The sociologist must teach moral lessons as well as analyze the facts. He cannot evade the responsibility of transforming his subject-matter. Because his subject-matter is uniquely moral in its implications, he must be uniquely artistic among scientists. At any rate, the social scientist who must work without doctrinal commitments needs the aesthetic gift in order to enliven the fruits (otherwise trivial) of his analytic powers.

Rieff carries forward the tradition of anti-maternalism shared by Freud and Cooley. Sociological analysis always carries with it a polemical implication. "Who are scientists that they should be, in their particular work, without passion for or against their subject?"<sup>23</sup> Cooley knew that Behaviourism was guided as much by its antagonism toward the mystical as by its objective concerns. To compensate for the necessary polemic quality, Cooley recommended a kind of permanent tentativeness, a general opposition to unifying system quite similar to Freud's. Rieff tends to agree with

such tentativeness, but he also points out Cooley's failure to follow his own advice when convincing himself that the primary group is an analytic device. Rieff's emphasis tends to center in the assertion that sociology is ineluctably normative. Sociological writing "is part of the psycho-historical process engaged as it is in persuasive redefinitions of action that alter the action."<sup>24</sup>

Leading American sociologists are remembering their debt to Marx and, more vocally, their debt to Weber. Rieff reminds them of their debt to Freud. Fourteen years ago, Rieff wrote an article called "History, Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences". At this time he saw the domination of the individual in the social sciences, and warned against too much devaluation of the objective social context, seen only as a secondary elaboration of the psychological. "Private psychological experience may implement the development of publicly relevant themes, but it is history that imposes the connection."<sup>25</sup> The dangerous result of overpsychologizing is political psychiatry. "Too frequently depth psychology has been used by political scientists to mask problems of objective social processes, reducing them to characterological problems."<sup>26</sup> Rieff points out that Freud knew this extreme to be wrong, but he did over-psychologize in his explanations of political, religious and artistic events. The proper psychological approach to the social sciences, Rieff says, uses Freud's insights as a critical theory, while fully

accepting the objective reality of the social context.

Freud's critical theory grew out of a Kantian heritage. In Kant's critical philosophy, the mind's a priori "analogies of experience" make knowledge of nature possible. For science to be possible and not just arbitrary, Kant transcendently deduced that the principles of nature must be congruent with the principles of understanding. And Freud made the same sort of deduction when he explained historical, religious and artistic phenomena with analogies to individual psychopathology.

But Freud's devaluation of history makes, for example, Leonardo's art partly inexplicable. "The deepest part of the individual may be his relation to society, his social self."<sup>27</sup> Freud pushed his psychology too far at this point,, for we need the cultural configuration to complete the portrait of Leonardo.

In sharp contrast, Hegel and Marx submerged psychology in history. As such they are antonyms of Freud. However, all three thinkers agreed that history could proceed outside the consciousness of its actors. In effect, Freud expanded psychology and the individual to include the unconscious process.

Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils owe more to Freud and less to Weber than they acknowledge. According to Rieff, the most popular concept in American sociology now is interaction.<sup>28</sup> That society is said to be interactive sufficiently

guarantees for Rieff the effective re-emergence of the person, the switch from historical to psychological materials. This concept of interaction rests on a transcendental deduction just like its predecessors in Kant and Freud.<sup>29</sup>

In 1953, Rieff felt the need to oppose the psychological trend because it was ignoring the social context. In 1958, his emphasis remained on the concomitant danger of politicized psychiatry. In 1966, the tone has shifted to an acceptance of the psychological insight as the only critical defence against an over-emphasized social context. Politicized psychiatry is still the enemy, but now these techniques are used by forces which would bury the self in a social death grip.

Rieff would say that actual historical experience has been the deconversion to the psychological therapeutic. Men now think of themselves as psychological: this will protect them from communal tyranny. But they are still confronted with the social reality that they need a new form of social control to stabilize the therapeutic individual life. And this is where sociology comes in, a sociology which describes men as they now are (psychological) while it prescribes the theory of culture appropriate for such men. Rieff describes the contemporary moral revolution, but in the same breath he can say this: "What has been attempted here in The Triumph of the Therapeutic is a tentative prospect for the revolution."<sup>30</sup>



## IV

The current cultural revolution is explained in part by Rieff as it obeys a traditional revolutionary cycle.

To speak of a moral culture would be redundant. Every culture has two main functions: (1) to organize the moral demands men make upon themselves into a system of symbols that make men intelligible and trustworthy to each other, thus rendering also the world intelligible and trustworthy; (2) to organize the expressive remissions by which men release themselves in some degree from the strain of conforming to the controlling symbolic, internalized variant readings of culture that constitute individualized character. The process by which a culture changes at its profoundest level may be traced in the shifting balance of controls and releases which constitute a system of moral demands.<sup>31</sup>

A stable culture must have an unequal balance of controls and releases, with controls superordinate. All previous cultures depended upon positive deprivations in a character ideal so that the individual committed himself to the group. The particular balance of control and remission of each culture is demonstrated in the character of its elite, and cultural revolution appears first among them. The balance is equalized; the releasing symbolic becomes as compelling as the controlling one. The cultural elite no longer internalizes the ideals of order pushed by the normative institutions. Decay has seemed unavoidable up to and including the passing Christian culture.

But while one culture is dying, another is being born. A new elite with a new language of faith, exhibit a new balance, usually with control more internalized or spiritua-

lized than in the previous culture. New normative institutions are built in the ruins of the old, with the attendant compromises. Gradually a stable culture emerges again with its own special brand of the unequal balance of control and release. Eventually, the stage is set for another revolution.

The current revolution is occurring for the same reasons that all previous ones have occurred; and the next stable culture must meet some of the usual requirements: "(1) a new institutionalized inequality of demand and remission, (2) an ideal character type designated in these studies as the therapeutic".<sup>32</sup> But the way in which control and thus stability is restored will mark the therapeutic culture as unique and indicate a decisive break in the cycle of cultural repetition.

## V

That a sense of well-being has become the end rather than a by-product of striving after some superior communal end announces a fundamental change in the entire cast of our culture -- toward a human condition about which there will be nothing further to say in terms of the old style of despair and hope."<sup>36</sup>

To opt for either extreme of despair or hope is to seek religious cure, which Freud saw as a kind of sick regression. In Freud's therapy there is hope for self-mastery; in the pessimism of his social theory there is despair. Rieff asserts that we do wrong to bring out either one and neglect

the other. Freud held the two in delicate tension and sought to transcend the sickness of both. In a similar way, therapeutic men are communal drop-outs, to be understood chiefly by their immunity to the impotent cultural super-ego. Men are expressing not so much a new potency as a kind of therapeutic nihilism toward all old communal ideals.

Rieff opposes all the post-Freudians who have tended to choose one aspect of Freud's work and to lose the truly valuable insight of the delicate balance. He sees in the tension of hope and despair which espouses neither; the key to understanding psychological man as well as the proper theoretical attitude toward the future. The therapeutic man will take this balance from Freud, but he will no longer need the stoic resignation to accompany it.

The unique anti-cultural quality of the current revolution demands not only a new elite but a new type of elite. Traditional elites expressed a new language of faith which promised to re-establish control through a more spiritualized order. For the advance guard of the therapeutic elite one must look to those padres whose style offers "a powerful rationale of abandonment of the disintegrating cultural super-ego".<sup>34</sup> One must look to the artists and the scientists in particular.

"This may well be the closing time of ascetic culture in the West."<sup>35</sup> If the long struggle of culture against nature is won, then the cyclical implications of nature can be

transcended. Urban technological culture has made possible a culture in which internal control through commitment and compassionate communities based on erotic illusions are archaic. The culture seems to have moved from evaluative symbolism through a transitional ethical despair to an expressive-impulsive symbolism. The inherited evaluative culture was structured by internalized love and externalized hatred. The new expressive culture must have a thoroughly new organization which "builds upon the obsolescence of both love and hatred as organizing modes of personality."<sup>36</sup>

Rieff feels it is an adjustment to the death of cultural social organization that is needed. "The strange new lesson we have begun to learn in our time is how not to pay the high personal costs of social organization."<sup>37</sup> And the positive community will pass away along with the old mode of organization. The negative community of tomorrow is a vast suburbia of divided twosomes, for whom the public is one vast stranger, external and amoral. The desacralization of the community began with Calvin's methodical economic men who have created the appropriate organizational mode for the future: emotionless, indifferent, intelligent administration.

Anticipating inevitable jibes, Rieff suggests that we should think twice before ridiculing his seeming apocalypse. No egos will be hurt in the therapeutic society, and the end will be contents rather than the soothing of discontents.

"The dialectic of perfection based on the deprivational mode is being succeeded by a dialectic of fulfillment based on the appetitive mode."<sup>38</sup> Weber's worst fear, total disenchantment, does not seem so unbearable to Rieff. The present swing is not toward total social co-operation but toward ever increasing remission or release. And this trend could be fairly permanent since technology can create and meet needs with ease.

But there are some important implications of the changes which must be accepted. The problem which psychoanalysis avoided must be faced: release must somehow be made purposive without our succumbing to a remissive religiosity. The deconversion of psychological man must be completed until the only purpose in life is greater amplitude and richness of living. Ascetic discipline can be abandoned only if the releasing motifs become the new modes of control "with patterns of consumption as our popular discipline".<sup>39</sup>

We are being made free but we must sacrifice the old freedom of the inner individual ("the brief historic fling of the individual would be over") for the freedom of the self, "the original innocence". We will be totally socialized without a symbolic of communal purpose, a stable culture of selves seeking their own well-being, no longer private or public, no longer inner or outer.

"Human autonomy from the compulsions of culture may follow the freedoms already won from the compulsion of

nature."<sup>40</sup> Rieff is confident that we will have won freedom from corporate identities and from particular organizations of personality. Because it has been preceded by the analytic era, when men turned inward and developed a sense of independence and selfhood, the new culture will emerge not opposing the self but expressing its varieties.

A great deal of re-ritualization must occur, especially since therapeutic man descended from frenetic economic man. Learning how to keep "on the go" for his own therapy will chiefly occupy the therapeutic. Culture and faith will be used consciously insofar as they are therapeutic. No particular "imperative" can possibly gain the upper hand because none will be backed by a deeply ingrained system of inner ordinances.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Coles, "Freud, the First and the Last", New York Times Book Review, (February 6, 1966), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher, (New York: McMillan, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>18</sup>Charles H. Cooley, Social Organization, (New York: 1962). The passage is quoted from the introduction by Philip Rieff, p. xii.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. xvii.

258. <sup>20</sup>Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, p.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. ix.
- <sup>22</sup>Charles Cooley, op.cit., p. vii.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. ix.
- <sup>24</sup>Philip Rieff, op cit., p. 25.
- <sup>25</sup>Philip Rieff, "History, Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences", Ethics, (January 1953), p. 110.
- <sup>26</sup>Philip Rieff, "Psychology and Politics: the Freudian connection", World Politics, (January 1955), p. 304.
- <sup>27</sup>Philip Rieff, "History, Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences", p. 113.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid.
242. <sup>30</sup>Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, p.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-3.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 236.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 261.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 249.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 251.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 246.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 239.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



## CHAPTER 4

### I

The critique of Rieff will employ a distinction which Rieff claims repeatedly is now outmoded. The opposition between inner consciousness and external reality, he says, will be dissolved by human technology. Therefore, the use of this distinction in the critique implies a fundamental rejection of Rieff's projected technological monism. The critique maintains that Rieff's projection does not warrant the abandonment of religious and political consciousness. At the same time, it maintains that there is profound diagnostic truth in his projection which religious and political consciousness must take into account. Religion and politics have not been eclipsed by Rieff's analysis but, if they are to continue to be relevant to modern people, they cannot ignore the radical changes which are being engineered particularly in institutions and in self-interpretation. Rieff's diagnosis is a brilliant description of one aspect of advancing technology; the psychological atomization created by social control or the way in which men must think of themselves in a technically organized society.

No appeals to antiquarian religious and political

forms can operate on the same level with the overwhelming monolithic fact of technology and its effects on all levels. Thus, accepting the power in Rieff's analysis forces us to the very roots out of which religious and political expressions have come. Rieff is right to allude to the Second Coming. A new culture is being instituted. However, because we witness the apparent absurdity and irrelevance of humanity among overpowering new forces we cannot be led either reluctantly or willingly to endorse the swing into the future. It is necessary to go to the roots out of which humanity was created. Forms may be antique and therefore enslaving in the new circumstances, but if we understand the spirit which brought them to be we can provisionally give them their due respect as profound life-giving expressions until a substitute worthy of replacing them has emerged.

Rieff's method demands that a similar method be used for a critique of his work. A rigid empirical approach would make most of his theory irrelevant. His thesis can be called "non-falsifiable" because it is based on or unified by general theoretical assertions which are not scientifically verifiable. But he does claim that his theory brings the facts to life, as did Freud's and Weber's. He feels that the new dimension of facts needs a new creative theory to organize and explain it. Part of the job of a critique therefore will be to decide where his factual conclusions are valid, and where they are not really tangible.

But the critique is made more difficult because it must contend with Rieff's response to the facts brought to life. In order to seriously engage his theory and response, one must make a counter-assertion, also non-falsifiable, which seems to take into account more of the facts of our experience both inner and external and at the same time enables a better response to those facts and circumstances.

Briefly stated, the critique counter-asserts that a living society must base itself on a tension between the ideal and the existent. History gives examples of great periods of culture which were based on an opposition of this kind.<sup>1</sup> The form or expression of this tension invariably deteriorated to a point where its effects were opposite to its original intentions. When this became the case a new expression of the tension was necessary.

Rieff confuses the form of culture which in part he is correct to condemn, with the spirit which created the form. He is then led to oppose tension per se as if it were culture which we have conquered. (Rieff does defend the conflicting dualism of instinct and civilization in Freud and claims that the self will be autonomous in the therapeutic society. The critique maintains that this self is not tangible, and proceeds to engage Rieff's general thesis of technological monism.)

It is asserted on the one hand that much of our current reality still may be understood by means of the

traditional forms of religion and politics. And Rieff is wrong to try to explain this reality in terms of the new dimension which is his primary concern. On the other hand the critique agrees with Rieff that a new dimension of reality is engulfing us. And in that dimension old political and religious forms are debilitating if not irrelevant. Within this new dimension, however, it is asserted against Rieff that the spirit of creative tension can and must respond with greater vision than his portrait of banal, restless consumption.

The critique will answer questions formulated in three modes, each of which contains the distinction between inner and outer reality. The three modes are these: the sociological-psychological, the religious, the political. Questions of external reality in all three modes (I(1), II(1) and III(1)) will be answered first in section II after all the questions have been posed and discussed. Questions about inner reality in all three modes (I(2), II(2) and III(2)) are answered in section III.

I(1) Has Rieff described what is happening in North American society?

I(2) Is Rieff's analysis helpful to an individual's response to modernity?

In terms of religious study, these two questions may be phrased as follows:

II(1) In describing the collapse of communal reli-

gion and the emergence of psychological man, does Rieff describe the basic facts of this era?

II(2) Is belief in oneself or 'self-reverance' an adequate response in the technological society? A corollary of this question is as follows: Is community now impossible?

Freud and Rieff identify religious and political questions under the cultural umbrella of 'commitment'. Thus, the questions when phrased politically read as follows:

III(1) Are conventional political approaches now irrelevant?

III(2) Will psychological men be free to effect their own ends?

If men escape political tyranny will they acquiesce in a social control which is tyrannical in a new and worse way? How do the aims of the self remain operative rather than engulfed? If that which is individual in men is destroyed by technology as Rieff says it must be, how can a life-giving dialectical quality be maintained? If men become functions of a system, how can one speak of their ends being met? Maybe the submission to technique will end in the suicide of man. Marx and Freud wove a view of human nature into their scientific systems. But the possibility of a genuine twoness in modern progress is becoming harder to countenance. Somehow Rieff retains the intent of Freud's dialectic without the flesh and blood individual which was its metaphysical

root. It is as if Rieff hopes that in the same process technology will make us functions of its system and lose control over our motives (or rather, will be forced to programme motives for us which are agreeable to us). Only the completely self-focussed can be brought to the pinnacle of organization. Absolute technique in the public realm requires absolute privacy or the triumph of the self over the communal identity. "If the social order moves in a parallel line toward wider distribution of plenitude, then the general condition of detachment which prevents religious outburst and political revolution may be established. Finally even world government may come -- with universal indifference as its cultural predicate."<sup>2</sup> The eventual outcome will be the merging of private and public, inner and outer, so that both have been transcended. One aspect of the question to be answered is whether there is tangible evidence for such a merger.

Rieff claims that future society will see that no one is hurt. The technological paradise may be spiritually empty but perhaps Rieff is right in that the best we can do is adjust to rather than lament this fact. If it be true that no one will be hurt then we cannot treasure our dignity above such an achievement. But if it be not true we must protest in the name of both spirit and bread. Rieff's work is punctuated with irony born of his peculiar attempt to look ahead to a world which will no longer understand or

respect his own achievements. He is a powerful individual who sees the writing on the wall and thinks that the future will not be so bad for those post-individuals born directly into it. It seems an intolerable tyranny to a die-hard individual that stability will be engineered by social technology rather than by family and religion, but from the view of the self as the focus of all activity, Rieff's new stability at last proclaims freedom from the tyranny of culture.

The ambivalence may be only apparent. We have been engaged so long in the struggle for the eschaton that its arrival is bound to offend the character of those moulded to struggle. There was no knowledge, tragedy or individuality in Eden. Perhaps a society that sees that no one is hurt precludes individual autonomy. And perhaps the loss of individuality carries with it the possibility of less repression. At any rate, since it seems a fact that individual autonomy is disappearing, perhaps the only important political question concerns the last freedom, the choice between impotent acceptance and impotent rejection. In effect, this is the judgment whether our new environment is in any sense good. Various ways of speaking, such as the ethical and the political, seem antique in new circumstances. But to dismiss them out of hand without regard for the spiritual centre which called them forth would be quite wrong.

A political critique of Rieff's educated guesses has

two moments. In addition to the evaluation of the future eventualities, one has to consider the relevance of this vision of the future to current problems. Exactly how should such a vision influence our action in the complex transitional present? Does it make sense to protest against the determinants in the short-run when in the long-run one nurtures a vision of complete adaptation to those determinants?

## II

The critique will begin by answering the questions about external reality in the three modes. Rieff's presentation of facts is excellent. His scholarship on Freud is unchallenged. There is no doubt about his sincerity in searching for a genuine empirical base.

Rieff's analysis relies heavily on psychological materials. His pages bristle with insightful facts liberated by a theory of culture which is animated by Freud. Can one achieve an all-encompassing analysis with such a bias? Arguments can be marshalled in defence of the political, economic and social spheres of reality, but such objections must be investigated in the light of the following clarification. Rieff does not ignore the historical or objective reality. There is evidence throughout his work that he is conscious of the monolithic force of encroaching technology



which has tended to merge the above three spheres into a monistic fact. When objective analysis shows through one sees a remarkable similarity to Jacques Ellul's diagnosis of technique,<sup>3</sup> although Ellul specifies that he will not be concerned with individual responses but with social facts. Rieff's direct concern as a moralist or theoretician of culture is with the new response to a new control and release system. Hence the psychological emphasis.

The accusation of reductionism must be directed by politics and economics not at psychology but directly at technique. But since the triumph of technique is more assumed than argued by Rieff, one would be forced to guess at his views in order to answer the accusation. It is sufficient to point out that his view assumes a parallel development of technology and the emergence of psychological man and that his first concern is to describe the latter. Thus, insofar as it can be proven that the easy triumph of technology will not obtain, one might have a good case for the reassertion of the importance of the political and economic spheres. This very difficult question cannot be answered with reference to Rieff's work. One has rather to look directly at his psychological analysis, the theory of culture. To use Rieff's terms, the theory brings the facts to life. And the basic facts which concern him are the emergence and the nature of psychological man.

How would Rieff answer the accusation that Freud's

analytic mode was suitable only for the educated few and thus will be supplanted eventually by the control techniques of the physiological behaviourists which are more suitable for the masses? Rieff's answer would reflect his own aristocratic bias and begin with the new elite of scientists, artists and the affluent in general. However, he would concentrate on the eventual necessity, a social control system for all society, elite and mass. The system will institutionalize release following both Freud and the new elite who then become the ideal type, the therapeutic man.

In one of his more ironic passages, Rieff suggests a "final solution to the absurdity of being free to choose and then having no choice worth making."<sup>4</sup> "A marriage between Pavlovian or Behaviourist learning theory and Freud's might lead to that control of the unconscious which would eliminate the residues of religious compulsion on the one hand and the freedom to choose on the other."<sup>5</sup> This is a seminal passage in Rieff's work. It shows the extreme to which he is willing to go, the irony born of his own ambivalence toward the predicted outcome and the essence of his belief that Freud's autonomy can be programmed into Behaviourist conditioning. "The unconscious controlled, compulsion and choice would fuse."<sup>6</sup> Thus, does Rieff sum up the way in which he believes the distinction between inner and outer will disappear.

Rieff is repelled by the gross forms of electrical manipulation in Behaviourism, as he is repelled by the abuses

of politicized psychiatry. Whether he is right that society can proceed to order without resort to the widespread use of these methods we may find out in the next few years in North America. The Vietnamese people are experiencing a certain kind of efficiency from the same authority which engineers and will engineer our new order.

Rieff is describing a change in the moral configuration, a change in the way of inculcation of culture, and his main debt is to Freud. His treatment of the family is, however, incomplete, both in his presentation of Freud's view and in his own claim of the waning of family influence. In Freud: The Mind of a Moralist, Rieff emphasizes Freud's later theory which pits instinct against civilization. He also claims the essential unity of the later theoretical Freud with the earlier more analytical Freud. Jessie MacPherson is right to point out that the war which Freud describes is between parents and children.<sup>7</sup> The parents do not always mirror culture and it is too simple to consider the family only as a civilizing agent. The family in itself is an independent force often or even always conflicting with the culture's demands. The family's influence is of central importance in understanding the genesis of the individual. In Rieff's first book, emphasis was perhaps justifiable but, in the second, a more thorough treatment of the family should have been considered essential.

At certain points, Rieff makes clear that his thesis

implies a major decline in the importance of the family. This explains the decline of what he calls the old style of hope and despair and of love and hate, which are nurtured in the intense warmth of the primary group. Possibly through his thin treatment of the details one is led to assume that he thinks of the family merely as an instrument of traditional culture and that the family will decline in exact proportion to the decline of the old symbolism. Seymour Rubenfeld replies<sup>8</sup> that Erikson's studies have shown that the pattern of the family in itself is to nurture the commitment motif. The family creates human beings who are pre-committed and the family might survive beyond its cultural usefulness. The important social implication of this surviving effect is that pre-committed human beings without positive communities are susceptible to repressive manipulation by social techniques. This sort of manipulation should be precluded in the therapeutic society, but Rieff cannot assume the speedy disappearance of the family and its effects. It is possible that the kind of autonomy which comes from religion and politics is, in the short-run, the only effective defence against such manipulation.

The question of the family takes us to the heart of a crucial dilemma in the present social predicament. The family creates people who need commitment in a society which by its make-up no longer allows the creation of community. Homeless people after a futile search for communities turn all

the more desperately to their negative communities, the desperate twosomes which must protect them in a basically cold world. Thus, the nuclear family, all the more isolated and intense, may survive longer than Rieff thinks. The desperate twosomes may be the only possible enclaves for alien individuals. And, since these negative communities are finally insufficient, they leave a growing majority susceptible to new forms of tyranny.

The criticism of Rieff's analysis of the family is an illustration in miniature of the general critique. Because of the survival of the family the short-run chances of tyranny are quite high. In this light, the quick dismissal of traditional religious and political forms is premature. In any instituted cultural system there is a spectrum of forces which are all interconnected. At their inception the various phases become instituted in a certain order following upon one another. But, once instituted, each phase takes on an independent force of its own. For example, the culturally accepted form of the primary group may survive longer than the symbol system which originally gave it force. A self-interpretation or identity will survive long beyond the circumstances to which it originally was a response. In general, Rieff can be criticized for giving insufficient care to the distinction between the repressive shell of the old culture and the timeless creative life which instituted it and which hopefully will institute the new culture. He is right to

attack the death-like grip of the family in its repressive mode. But must this entail the replacement of all warmth with gray indifference and the sterile security of social control? Rieff sometimes succumbs to the temptation of theoretical consistency when treating an inconsistent and puzzling empirical reality.

Gerhard Lenski's study of Detroit<sup>9</sup> showed the remarkably large influence of the religious factor in the stated response of the majority. Also, church authorities point to rising attendance and church-building in some areas. Rieff would respond that the religion which is evident in these statistics is no longer seen as the unquestioned given and the communal source of identity. Religion will still be used for years as therapy. The status of religion has shifted from positive to defensive; we need beliefs for security but our real self-interpretation comes from the encounter with the post-religious society. Rieff knows about the suburban church boom. He considers the suburban church-goers to be among the therapeutic vanguard. Suburban churches are community centers to be used by people whose primary experience is the negative community of their isolated separateness.

It may also be objected that religion is far from over, that rather it lives on and dominates in new form. Technology, for example, is a legacy of Western Christianity and is often described as secularized religion. Rieff would con-

cede this derivation of technology and he accepts the complete domination of technology. The objection, therefore, points directly to the claim of the shift in focus to the self. If this shift is tangible then Rieff has made a valid point about religion. If it is not tangible then the new autonomy is an illusion and the old autonomy which religion gave needs to be reappraised.

Rieff's understanding of faith is that it ceases to be really sustaining or efficacious when it is understood to be merely functional. The fact that faith is used at present is a sure sign that we are in transition to a new order when faith will be superfluous. For faith to provide order there must be a positive community in which the articles of faith are overwhelmingly given. When faith is seen as functional it can only survive temporarily as a stop-gap measure. Freud realized that religion could no longer be therapeutic without the positive community. Jung tried to create the effect of community with the collective unconscious. Rieff finds Freud incomplete and Jung regressive. Out of this double reaction comes his own solution.

That we are psychological must surely be overwhelmingly given for us. As such, this myth should qualify as a new religion. But, Rieff insists, the new myth carries with it the saving grace of Freud's critical awareness. Negative community is not seen as a cure-all but as a difficulty maintained and delicate balance which protects us from cure-

alls. What is projected is a social system focussed on the needs of selves, not an organized cult of individuals. Whether this separate focus is tangible and desirable is discussed below with the questions of inner reality.

The political implications of Rieff's thesis are discussed below after the theoretical consideration of technology, freedom and human nature.<sup>10</sup> At this point it will suffice to answer briefly the question of the relevance of conventional politics. Within the terms of the new dimension of reality which Rieff describes, he is correct to show the irrelevance of the conventional politics of legitimate authority. Within this new dimension a new politics of administration is emerging.<sup>11</sup> But this new dimension is only part of our reality in 1968. To use only two examples, Rieff says very little if he capsules Black Power or the emergence of the people of South East Asia and Latin America as cultural regression. These are major determinants of our immediate future experience and Rieff can only speak of them negatively from his theoretical stance.

### III

The questions about inner reality were variously posed as follows:

I(2) Is Rieff's analysis helpful in an individual's response to modernity?



II(2) Is a belief in oneself or "self-reverance" an adequate response in the technological society? And the corollary: Is community now impossible?

III(2) Will psychological men be free to effect their own ends? Will the therapeutic society see that no one is hurt? And is there nothing one can do when people are hurt in the short-run?

Rieff's analysis revolves around the distinction between 'individual' and 'self'. Freud's 'individual' emerged from a familial struggle wherein the tension between instinct and culture (and child and parent) evolved a delicate balance of control and release. And after psychoanalysis had peeled away the layers of authority, one still had this same individual, now more spontaneous. Although spontaneity remained, a necessary legacy of the long unconscious struggle and hence the inwardness removed by social technology. One might say that Rieff retains Freud's principle without its biological root. In a similar way, Hume championed the ideas of modern science without the Cartesian metaphysical roots, or the Protestant doctrine of creation. Speculating in the terms of Freudian psychic theory, Freud's super-ego and id have been merged with each other and with the social technology which institutionalizes controlled release. One will have a sense of self but it will be a surface self which deals with external reality as the ego does now, except that the self will not have to contend as the

Freudian ego does with an individualized inward struggle of id and super-ego.

This comparison with Freud is illustrative. The Freudian ego is a secondary development with no substantial motive force of its own. Its task in the adult is to balance the conflicting demands of the super-ego and the id in the business of survival. In Rieff's projection the motivating force has been taken over by social control. The conscious self merely enacts what has been decreed. From the point of view of the conscious self the tyranny of the family has been replaced by the tyranny of social control. Rieff is maintaining that the needs of the id will be met more thoroughly by an automatic social control system which not only replaces the internalized super-ego but also programmes as much gratification for the id as is feasible. Moral order which previously depended on conscience and gratification which previously depended on willful self-indulgence will now both be achieved by the same social control technique. Thus, the self for Rieff clearly includes that which is beyond the control of the conscious self just as Freud's individual was expanded into the unconscious.

Let us suppose that one provisionally rejects along with Rieff the usual lines of opposition against a position such as his, the lines based on individual freedom and the sanctity of the individual. It is still necessary to ask whether the future society will be a better one for gratifi-

cation.. We have suggested that gratification is the meaning of Rieff's "self having its ends met". Is the triumph of the banal in the restless ritual consumption of the middle class really the culmination of our history? And is it really gratifying? Rieff distrusts his own ironic reaction to the society he sees emerging. Perhaps his reaction is more basic than the protesting of a brief, historically created and now anachronistic individual. Perhaps that individual reaction is rooted in a spirit which will always reject a system in which it has become alien.

The analytic attitude is an improvement on religion, but it too is finally unsatisfactory. Freud successfully undercut reverence and salvation for his delicately balanced individual. But such an individual, wanting to choose and with no community to make him feel chosen, can only be desperate in a technologized world. He survives by the chaotic use of his inherited religious and political symbols. The established therapeutic is supposed to gain security not from religious community but social technology. To envision such security is beyond present experience. All one can say is that the creation of security in this way seems logically quite possible, more so than the retention of autonomy seems likely in the process.

At this point one begins to see the ambivalent aspect of the critique. Rieff is describing a powerful process which is occurring and he does not hesitate to face its devas-

tating implications for ethics, politics and religion. For this description he must be commended. The part of his work which is debatable is the claim that some kind of triumph over culture has occurred, a liberation of the self from communal tyranny by the operation of social technology.

That positive community is no longer possible can be evaluated from current experience. Virtually all serious analysts agree that community has declined and almost disappeared in technically advanced areas, to be replaced by a fragmented mass society. It is a characteristic of technology that it destroys community and renders impossible their formation. As Ellul puts it,

Communities break up into their component parts. But no new communities form. The individual in contact with technique loses his social and community sense as the frameworks in which he operated disintegrate under the influence of techniques.<sup>1</sup>

Rieff would concur with this analysis.

But, though all or most agree on the nature of the malaise, there are profound disagreements on the prognosis and treatment. Paul Goodman is an exemplar of those who urge the recreation of community. "A compromised revolution such as the liberal-radical one tends to shatter the community that was, without an adequate substitute."<sup>13</sup> The humanity in the sensitive young leads them to reject socialization into an absurd society. "A man has only one life, and if during it he has no great environment, no community, he has been robbed of a human right."<sup>14</sup> We are thus faced with the task of

creating a community for the young to grow up in. However painfully, we need to finish the liberal-radical revolution. But when the details of this task are spelled out by Goodman they turn out to be restoring patriotism (in America?), a sense of traditional vocation (in Los Angeles?), and the nobility of "man's work" (at General Motors?). We are urged to invest new devices to make the industrial technology important for its workers.

That these ideals are irreparably buried in North America does not detract from the great pertinence of some of Goodman's practical schemes, nor lessen the power of his brilliant diagnostic sociology. Maybe the schemes are not implemented because they are too advanced for the current unsophisticated technology.

The foregoing is all taken from Goodman's Growing Up Absurd, published in 1956. In more recent work, the practical schemes are better than ever, the diagnosis is more and more devastating, and the recommendation of new community is diminishing. In Commentary (July 1961) Goodman proposed an up-dated "conflictfull" community like some kibbutzim as an answer to the pessimism of sociologist Herbert Gans. In "The Psychology of Being Powerless" (more recent) he still states that "some of these historical conditions like technology are not inevitable at all but are the working out of wilful policies that aggrandize certain interests and exclude others, that subsidize certain styles and prohibit others."<sup>15</sup> But no

grandiose hopes for the restoration of community appear.

There is only the remarkably vivid account of the tense paralysis in all quarters of the Great Society.

The critique of Goodman is ambivalent in inverse relation to the critique of Rieff. In the light of Rieff's description of the death of community Goodman's hope for its restoration can only be called nostalgic. Beside Rieff's endorsement of the banal Goodman's encounter with America rings powerfully truer. Goodman does not ignore such facts, for example, as the continuing exploitation of the poor by private interests, technology or not technology. He sees in the profound malaise of Americans something more than culture shock.

Political freedom can be discussed only in the context of general theory of technology, freedom and human nature. It is possible to think of technology historically, as the reverse mirror of religion. Religion has been that which is given or unquestioned but now its symbols are being used for therapy. Technology, on the other hand, was created consciously to be used for human ends, but may now be moving outside human control.<sup>16</sup> One can assume that it is the new unquestioned reality.

The convenience with which technology assumes in part the cultural role of religion is not surprising. Technology follows necessarily out of Western religion. For example, if we take an observed fact about technology, its

invariable tendency to unify on the rational level while fragmenting its subject-matter as much as possible, we can trace it back to a Christian heritage.

The doctrine of nature, which was a necessary pre-supposition of modern science in the seventeenth century,<sup>17</sup> is what Hans Jonas has called "the ontology of absolute necessity and radical contingency."<sup>18</sup> In later centuries, when the doctrine of creation held fewer and fewer scientists and philosophers, "nature" or the world of scientific fact had gained a given quality, a credence of its own. This view of nature, the ontology of absolute necessity (technique) and radical contingency (the functions of technique, the 'selves') is triumphing in our midst.

This ontology raises central problems about freedom. No matter how efficiently the technological state manages to meet the desires of its members, it cannot allow them spontaneity, autonomy or initiative. In an organized situation these qualities can only be characterized as madness.

Freedom in classical political philosophy meant the submission to truth in order to approximate human excellence in action. Christian freedom added the responsibility of each individual for his own acts and their consequences and merged the submission to truth with submission to grace. In both cases, perfect freedom hoped for a different kind of freedom: the freedom from negative compulsion in society, prerequisite for the positive higher freedom. Modern politi-

cal freedom concentrated directly on the latter freedom (freedom from negative compulsion). The modern view is exemplified in the political philosophy of Hobbes which follows the ontology of absolute necessity and radical contingency. In this case the particulars are individuals (private men) fearing death. They submit themselves to an absolute public authority in order to maximize their freedom (from) -- i.e., not to die a violent death, and to operate with as much efficiency as possible (in Hobbes' case, like capitalists). The assumption is that the old freedom of choice still exists but it will be guided by contingent nature, be it Protestant inner light or the passions. What Rieff wants to bring out is the absurdity of retaining the idea of choice without the religious or political truth which chooses. These two notions emerged together and are meaningless when separate. In the twentieth century it has become clear that nature and reason have not succeeded as substitutes for political and religious truth, the older guides for human choice.

Modern technology is the pinnacle of submission for freedom to operate without negative compulsion. And it is bringing out with great clarity the lack of direction which this view of freedom entails. That modern freedom will come from complete service to technology expresses, however, a sense in which the modern world partakes deeply in the ancient. The direction will evidently come from technique it-



self and the only remaining question is what kind of human being can exist under its total control. Will everyone get everything his heart desires, barring a freedom peculiar to a short historical period, as Rieff maintains? Or will technique so change us that system eventually replaces flesh and blood?

The assertion of this critique is that the old submissions to political and religious controls were justified by the great souled vision of those who conceived them. The new submission to technology which Rieff endorses, however ironically, is devoid both of spiritual depth and physical gratification. It is an unwarranted failure of nerve to accept this second best solution.

Questions of human nature have emerged from the discussion of freedom. Human excellence in classical philosophy and Christian religion was based on truth independent of social reality (with Christianity adding the difference of individuality). The creative life-giving quality of the ideas of human nature lay in their opposition to the prevailing order. In the modern period the ideas of nature and freedom were once again invoked, purified and redefined to create a life-giving opposition to the then prevailing order (the entrenched Mediaeval Classical-Christian synthesis). Few if any of the first modern thinkers foresaw the eventual effects of their theories. Their concern was always the creation of new life in the midst of stagnation. Marx and

Freud are similar in this regard. Their approach rests on the same dialectical principle, the attempt to oppose the prevailing order with a notion of human nature however much it may be couched in positivist analysis. Rieff's hope is to adapt this dialectical tradition to the realities of the total triumph of technology. Thus, on the one hand, he says that the collapse of nature is a necessary prerequisite for the triumph of therapy; in this light, humanism is a contemptible last gasp of the religious tyranny. On the other hand, he defends Freud's basic opposition of instinct and civilization against the sociological neo-Freudians, and he demands that this "otherness" be incorporated into the human technology, however monolithic it must be. Rieff, too, has the intent of a moralist. He seems to concede all the characteristics of the one-dimensionality of technique while at the same time insisting on the twoness of the "self" in tension with technique.

The whole approach has a convincing ring (as a long-range possibility) but paralyzing doubts remain, the doubts which spring out of direct experience in this world. One difficulty in the critique of Rieff is that he is talking about the culture of the future. It is hard to criticize from experience while avoiding the accusation that our experience is limited by our anachronistic self-conception. To approve fully of Rieff's conception of the future it seems necessary to abstract oneself from immediate realities such as

the fact that one feels a moral responsibility for evils that exist. A therapeutic man must deal with his own personal "givens". How can one ignore the evident "inhumanity" of technique? It is one thing to accept the death of community but another to accept that life must become a grey, dull and indifferent affair. Rieff tends to speak of the therapeutic society only in negative terms. Therapeutic men are indifferent, freed from culture, loveless and hateless.

And why does technology seem so repressive, like controlled control rather than controlled release? Rieff sometimes seems like an ex-Marxist settling into middle class powerlessness or trying to rationalize suburban lack of conviction. Rieff portrays the middle class as well adjusted to affluence and powerlessness. Goodman's view of the middle class is more accurate:

The most dangerous group of all however is the established but anomic middle class... Exclusive, conformist, squeamish and methodical, it is terribly vulnerable to anxiety. ...Their political resignation is rational; it approves the technically efficient solution that does not notice flesh and blood suffering. ...The identification with power of the powerless middle class is...with the efficient system itself, which is what renders them powerless. ...The anomie of middle class people...appears as their privatism purchased at a terrible price of anxiety, excluding, and pettiness... .19

It seems that we are far enough away from the millenium that the eventual sophistication and release-orientation of technology must remain an article of faith. Philip Rahv expresses his doubts as follows: "Mr. Rieff's downgrading of

political and economic issues is premature to say the least" and "I, for one, am far from convinced that the powers that be -- i.e., government -- can be dismissed with so little fuss."<sup>20</sup> Rieff is claiming that a fundamental change has occurred in our culture such that the vestigial political realities are better understood as anachronistic in a post-political world. He admits that, as he puts it, the East might arrest development by taking revenge on the West. His theory would consider such an event only as cultural regression. He thus ignores a vast area of still existing reality. If the cultural has superseded the political it must account for all the reality which politics handled in the past. Rieff's post-political factor is real and powerful but not yet total.

What can be said about Viet Nam, the riots in the cities, vast poverty, the danger of holocaust, the direct relation between affluence and colossal exploitation and even genocide, as well as the danger of financial collapse even if a sane American policy emerges? These tragedies are real and to call them cultural regression is to say very little about them. But conventional politics seems reduced to abstract refusal to accept what is going on. Political and economic sub-groups which formerly seemed to be effective dialectical forces for change have merged with the mainstream. In short, traditional politics has failed at the active level although it retains its diagnostic value.

Just as religion is forced back to its spiritual roots by Rieff's understanding of modern self-interpretation, so politics must respond to Rieff's theory of culture. Politics cannot engage the new system on the system's own terms. But although impotent on the practical level it must never abandon its basic dialectical insights. The problem requires an adjustment to new realities on the formal or surface level but, at the same time, a rigid retention of the basic insight of necessary tension for life. Insofar as social control does not allow for a tangible tension, insofar as the distinction between self and technique is merely logical, Rieff must be attacked by the superior spiritual depth of politics.

It is a delicate task to bring the insights of politics to bear on the new circumstances without inadvertently succumbing to the rule of those circumstances. Out of the experience of general impotence on the political front, one is led with a sense of inevitability to consider Rieff's theory of culture as an aid to survival and as a basis for a new politics. Can one subvert the technical society for its own eventual good? If one sees the dangerous tendency of technique as ignoring the "human" wishes of its recipients, perhaps the best course is to try to force the system to programme one's needs by whatever means available, such as intransigence or indifference. One must strengthen the re-  
sponse to technique in the only terms in which response will

be possible in the future. Rieff would say, for instance, that the terms must be of the "self" not the "individual" with all that that entails. We have suggested this self is not a genuine response. One of the tasks of the new politics would be to suggest a third alternative, having rejected both individual and self as respectively no longer viable and not genuine.

In general, such a new political approach has little or no immediate relevance to some large political problems. One must be careful to remain open to the re-emergence of formally conventional political alternatives. The vision of the Eschaton cannot obscure the confused realities of the present. Rieff has shown the growing absurdity and impotence of certain kinds of traditional political action. He has pointed to a gradual shifting of politics from questions of legitimate authority to questions of response to organization at the institutional level. He has not proven that the root insights of politics beneath the traditional forms are no longer true. He has not proven that the large sector of reality in which politics still operates at the level of conventional forms has become insignificant or is best understood as cultural regression.

In the short time since Rieff wrote his second book the new evidence against his picture of plenitude and moral adjustment has been overwhelming. There has been a huge resurgence of destruction and a pervasive feeling of decline.

It seems that this era is not being spared the vivid experience of the tragedies which life entails. The new culture, if it is to emerge, will not evolve peacefully out of the old but with great suffering from the ruins of the old. One can only hope that this tragedy keeps alive the vision of a life closer to the heart, spirit and stomach than Rieff's therapeutic society.

## CHAPTER 4

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In the three cultures from which Rieff chose the ideal types of political man, religious man and economic man, one sees the vastly different ways in which the tension between the ideal and the existent has been expressed in the past.

<sup>2</sup>Philip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

<sup>4</sup>Philip Rieff, op cit., p. 93.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Jessie MacPherson, review of Freud: The Mind of a Moralist, Canadian Forum, (August 1959), p. 118.

<sup>8</sup>Seymour Rubenfeld, review of The Triumph of the Therapeutic, New Republic, (March 19, 1966); p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Gerhard Lensky, The Religious Factor, (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

<sup>10</sup>The political questions are considered in the last three pages of the fourth chapter.

<sup>11</sup>Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society, p. 126.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Goodman, Growing Up Absurd, (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 207.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Goodman, "The Psychology of Being Powerless", Like a Conquered Province: the Moral Ambiguity of America, (New York: Random House, 1966).



<sup>16</sup>The most convincing account of this development is contained in Ellul's The Technological Society, op cit.

<sup>17</sup>This point is discussed at greater length on page 45 of chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup>Hans Jonas, The Phenomenon of Life, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>19</sup>Paul Goodman, "The Psychology of Being Powerless", op cit.

<sup>20</sup>Philip Rahv, review of The Triumph of the Therapeutic, Book Week, (February 6, 1966), p. 4.

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